

Grand Isle Diaries Transcripts : 05 Coastal Land Loss

1: When I was a kid, I would sit from the beach to the bay, you know, across Grand Isle. Certainly a while there, my grandmother owned from the beach to the bay, her family. Compared to today, I would say that more than half of it's gone.

2: Once it's gone, it's gone. It's all a floating marsh. That's all we have is a floating marsh. You go down far enough, you gone hit water.

3: But Grand Isle will wash away at the sea. It will go back to the sea sooner or later. They may prolong it, but they won't stop it.

4: If Grand Isle washes away totally, becomes an ile denir, Baton Rouge and New Orleans are going to really be beach front property. If it accelerates here, and we disappear, erosion farther inland is going to be that much quicker also. It'll accelerate there, but if suddenly we were just inundated by a great depth of water, Grand Isle would be ile denir. I don't see that we could survive as an island and as a community if suddenly we were no longer five feet above sea level the way we are now. If it came up three feet and we were only two feet above sea level, a normal high tide would be detrimental to us.

5: It's terrible sinking, disappearance. Places where my dad and I used to go duck hunting in the back old years, you'd go through a few (unintelligible) and canals and little bayous. It's just open water now. The marsh is disappearing. It's horrible. Yeah, it's something to worry about. I don't know if Grand Isle can survive much longer. Grand Isle might be hidden, maybe a tiny little strip of land to connect it, but it'll not gonna take much to cut down road, you know. I don't see how this can be viable in 50 years. With erosion, they say the island is sinking. Some people say the sea level is rising cause I'll see little hurricanes now that we wouldn't even bother leaving, you now, and now, I got water almost in my house, and this last one, Gustav or whatever, that was nothing, got water in my rental car, and my house got water in it again. We never had that before. The whole island is sinking, and the whole southeast Louisiana is sinking. They all come (unintelligible). We went and do it and now cut all those canals on the river, you know. They put all the levees and with the sediment, you said, used to come and drift this way. I remember when I was a kid the beach was always full of used logs and stuff that drifted. I used to love to go on the beach. You never knew what the heck you gonna find over there, you know, what kind of bamboo and weird stuff, you know. Now there's nothing that drifts over there anymore. Everything is just channeled straight out and dumps off the continental shelf.

6: I've seen too many things happen. One of the things is that we cannot burn our marsh no more, so when you can't burn your marsh, your animals won't live over here no more. Your marsh, when you burn your marsh, it'll harden your marsh up. When you burn your grass, it hardens your land, and then

within 3 to 4 weeks, you got small grass starting to grow. That small grass, when you want to go when you have constipation, you go to the store. You go to a drugstore and get some medicine. That small grass is constipation medicine for all your animals. Animals are no longer here no more.

7: I used to have a camp, and right now, they got three foot of water there, and there used to be land there, all over, and that's gone, but I can show you on some maps the land that disappeared.

8: Just in the last few years, with the hurricanes knocking down when y'all've been on the island, it's hard to say that I'mma finish, I'd like to finish my life here, but it's, I don't know, it's hard. Like you said you know, the island itself, I mean, it's gone so quick, you know.

9: Your water level is rising, and your land area is shrinking, so it's giving you more water, you know, bringing the water closer and closer to your land.

10: It ain't just the Gulf either, I mean, you got, people don't realize the back side is going. If you got a bad winter with a lot of north winds, that'll eat you up, and then in the summer, you got south winds, so it's eating a little bit on each side, and actually, it's getting smaller.

11: I mean it's eroded that much between the cuts and the hurricanes, yes, quite. In my time, from the time I grew up to now, yeah, a good thirty forty percent, if not more.

12: While we're eating away towards the bottom, it'll lower out, and then, eventually be covered. Daddy used to tell me years ago that one day Grand Isle will be underwater. All they'll have is the houses sticking up like pines.

13: I think Grand Isle would be a good focal point in the area of visitation and history, would be gone completely if erosion keeps going. The country itself would lose area and valuable land but the history most of all, history, Louisiana history, American history.

14: I watch it everyday. The same spots, 30 years ago, it was gone. I keep on moving my duck blinds farther and farther to the north, and when you got more salt water coming, you're not gonna have them ducks coming in.

15: Looking at the, borned and raised on this island and watching the sea level coming over the island and watching these major storms coming over the island, watching, you know, over the years, especially

when like Betsy and major hurricanes coming through, it looks like the storms get more powerful, and it looks like the sea rises. Looking at the water tables, especially in the areas, you know, in the marshes off the coast, I find that, you know, the next 50 years, a hundred years, it probably is the island won't be here. Looking at the, you know, sea levels, and elevations, and you know, it looks like the island itself in some parts is sinking. The water tables is getting higher and higher, and I can remember, you know, looking at land and looking at the marshes where there had no water before, and now, the water is coming closer and closer to LA1. We keep on raising our highways, but the marshes are sinking, and the water table's coming up. I probably won't live long enough to see Grand Isle washed away, but one major hurricane hits anywhere in the middle of Louisiana, it's gonna wash the whole coast, and as the crow flies, it's only 50 miles from New Orleans, so the government needs to come in and really, we should have had this wakeup call and spent the right money to protect all along this Louisiana coast. It's really really getting serious. We can see these islands breaking apart, especially when the weather was severe, especially when your cofunds all went to loan, then you see the islands erode from the north. Then, you'd see bad weather from the south during the summertime, and then, the erosion was so bad, and you can see these islands just going out the pass, out of Barataria and Calumet Pass and just going out in the Gulf, and then, when a storm would come, sometime it would bring parts of the islands maybe from (unintelligible), maybe from Venice, from the east, just floating. You see marsh in the middle of the Gulf.

16: Bird Island was a quarter of a mile. Beautiful birds were tern birds. They had the mangoes, big mango trees for them, the tern birds, the pelicans. Delta Island is right here and, and we gave different names. Tern Island we named, you know, with this and like Old Man Leon's Cut that he dug with a shovel, you know, like to pass with a pirogue. Today, it's over maybe a three quarters of a mile wide. Bay (French word), it's Bay (French word) in French is Pampas Bay. Bay (French) is little Pampas Bay. That's where the pampas used to hang around. They protected each other, and they came in, and they would get behind these little islands, and they was like a little shallow bay. You could see the fins, and they used to, they had just a tellers and orcas where the sharks, where little boys and the sharks were nesting, and Bay Levi was named after Levi Collins. That's all gone. You know, looking at Anna's Bay, which is named after my mother, and father was always shrimping when they were first married in the shrimp boat. Today, that's open water, and the Bay Islet, Bay Islet is just under water. Bayou d'Ours, "d'ours" means Bear Bayou. That's all opened up. Snake bayou, it does have a snake when I was a little boy, and I can remember just 20 years ago going in the marsh and then whatever the hell happened, it looks like somebody passed a lawnmower. Over the half of it was a dead zone where the water, the fresh and salt water had came in and killed the freshwater plants that used to be there. I just find the hurricanes get more powerful, and it look like the land is sinking, and the sea level's rising. I guess the water's gonna take over, one day all over in southeast Louisiana.

17: (speaking French)

18: (singing)