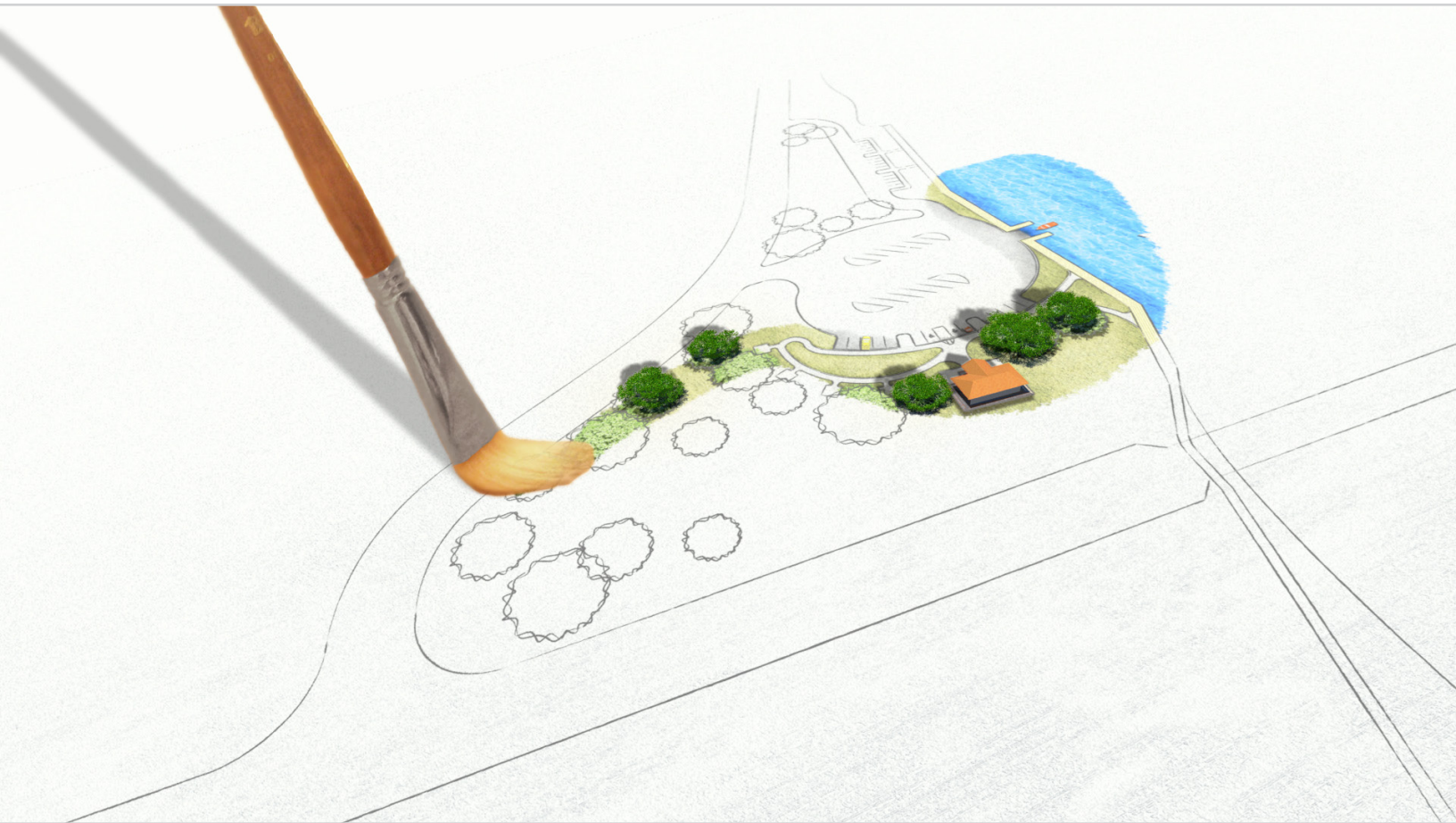


Recreation Fishing and Boating Opportunities

For Coastal Louisiana



Prof. Bruce G. Sharky, FASLA
with Lance S. Fulton

Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture | Louisiana State University

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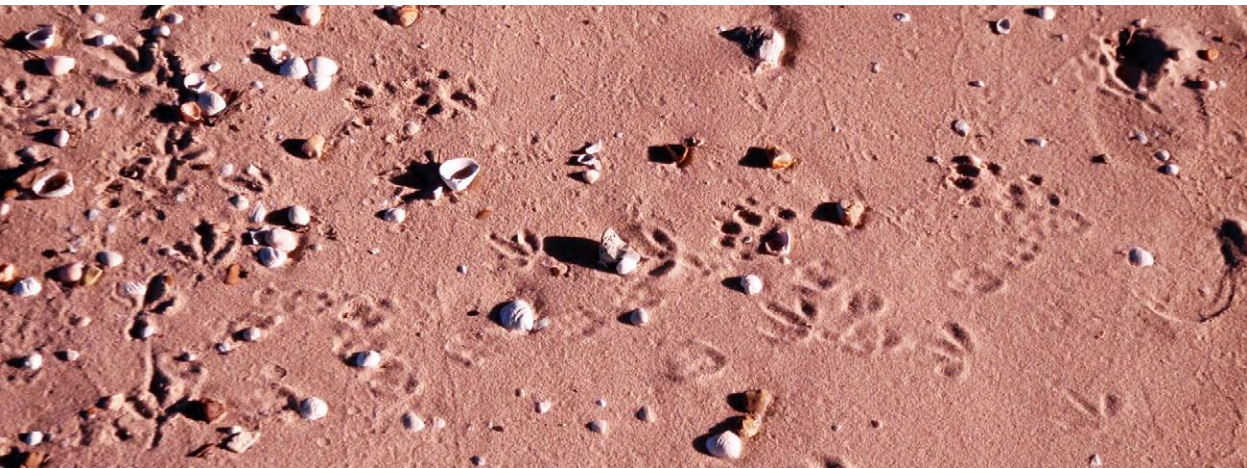
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Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture | Louisiana State University
<http://landscape.lsu.edu/>

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Project Description



In recent years, hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Ike caused significant damage in many southern Louisiana communities. Along with this damage came initial and long-term economic loss.

One approach to spur economic development in these areas is to provide sites and facilities which facilitate access to the communities' diverse and beautiful natural environments.

Through Louisiana State University's AgCenter, area agricultural agents contacted the university's Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture to request the production of several pilot project designs for recreational fishing and boating access.

These designs provide examples of how, with a limited budget, a community can provide tourists and residents with access to local waterways and coastal environments. With a focus on recreational boating and fishing access, the designs aim to draw tourists to the communities, along with money to the local economies.

The designs are to serve as demonstrations; they are not for construction purposes. It is hoped they will inspire the commission of complete, construction-ready designs by professional consultants.

The site locations are as follows:

- 1. Calcasieu Shipping Channel.....Cameron Parish
- 2. Mermentau River.....Cameron Parish
- 3. Lake Maurepas.....St. John the Baptist Parish
- 4. Chef Menteur Pass.....St. Tammany Parish
- 5. Shell Beach.....St. Bernard Parish



Design Approach



All five project sites have histories of use as water access points, whether formal or informal, recreational or industrial. They have all been used as such, because they are places where three key elements come together - the land, the water, and society.

Each site lies in a littoral zone - a place of transition where the aquatic and terrestrial worlds intertwine. Additionally, each is adjacent to a road or highway, providing a crucial connection to society. Occurring in such places, with such unique environments, these sites are used both as gateways and as destinations in themselves.

Each site is unique. They vary in scale, in the size and proximity to nearby populations, and in what has been left behind by previous users. Located on different bodies of water, their natural environments are also unique, along with the recreational opportunities they present.

Each has its own physical condition and recreational potential, and thus each calls for a unique design. Still, the design approach for all of the sites is essentially the same: Enhance and supplement the site's features so as to increase the ease, safety, and enjoyment with which one may access the water and shore environment.

Site Features



Boat access is a primary requirement for each site. Boat access is provided by paved ramps and loading piers. One or two lanes wide, the ramps are minimally invasive to the environment and aesthetics of the shoreline, while still sufficient to handle expected boat traffic.



Railings along the shoreline help guard the safety of children and other guests. Handicapped parking is provided at all sites, with ADA-compliant ramps leading to piers, buildings, picnic areas, and other site features.



Piers run along the water line, providing a place to fish, stroll along the water's edge, or sit and enjoy the view. In some places, covered pavilions provide shade and extend these activities out over the water.



Informational kiosks inform guests of each site's unique history and environmental features.



Ample parking is provided to accomodate visitors during peak usage times. To help ensure both the safety of guests and ease of access, separate areas are designated for vehicles with trailers. Permeable pavement is used to minimize the designs' hydrologic footprint, reducing runoff and erosion.



Picnic areas make use of large trees that may already exist on-site, while more trees are to be planted to increase shaded areas. Benches face the water, providing another place from which to take in the view.



At the larger sites, small public buildings serve the visitors in several ways. They house restrooms, and vending machines stocked with food, beverages, artificial bait, and tackle. Fish cleaning stations are located against the outside walls.

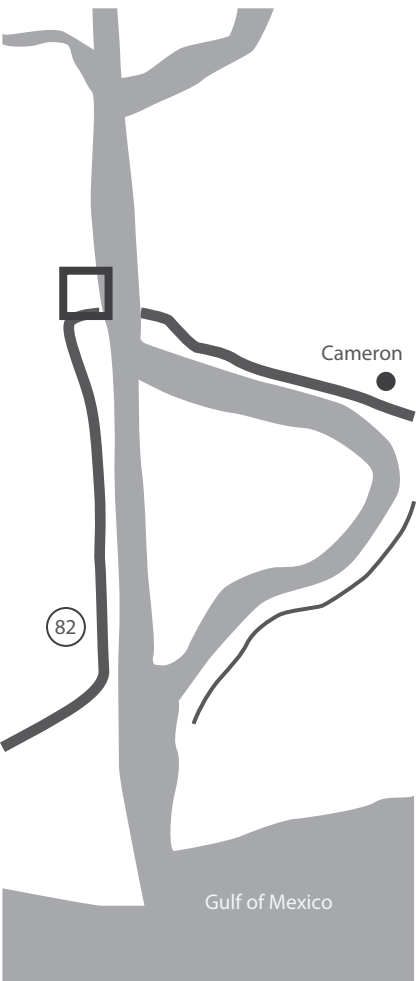


Many unique habitats can be found in coastal environments. Raised boardwalks encourage visitors to explore their surroundings and observe the diverse local flora and fauna. Viewing platforms and informative plaques further enhance the educational experience.

Calcasieu Ship Channel



Calcasieu Ship Channel



Context

First dredged in the 1920's, the Calcasieu Ship Channel connects the Gulf of Mexico to Calcasieu Lake, Calcasieu River, and ultimately the city of Lake Charles, Louisiana. The Port of Lake Charles, one of the largest in the country, sits 34 miles from the gulf, and depends entirely on the ship channel.

The channel is partly natural and partly man-made, as is the unique surrounding environment. Industrial sites dot its banks, while many species of game fish swim its waters. Dolphins and porpoises are often spotted as well, including a rare albino bottlenose dolphin.

The project site lies less than two miles from the town of Cameron, Louisiana, the parish seat of Cameron Parish. In 2005 and 2008, the town was hit by Hurricanes Rita and Ike, causing catastrophic damage. The creation of new recreation opportunities is seen as a means to help bring about an economic recovery in the area.

The project site is on the western bank of the channel, adjacent to the dock for the Highway 82 ferry crossing. This position brings travelers near and offers a prominent view to westbound ferry passengers. Formerly used as a staging and loading area, the site is now an unmaintained gravel lot, left vacant except for those who use it informally as a boating launch.



Existing Conditions

The site consists primarily of an vacant gravel lot.



Between the site and the nearby ferry dock lies the remains of an older dock, from the site's former ferry.



Eastbound ferry passengers gain a prominent view of the site as they draw nearer to the dock.



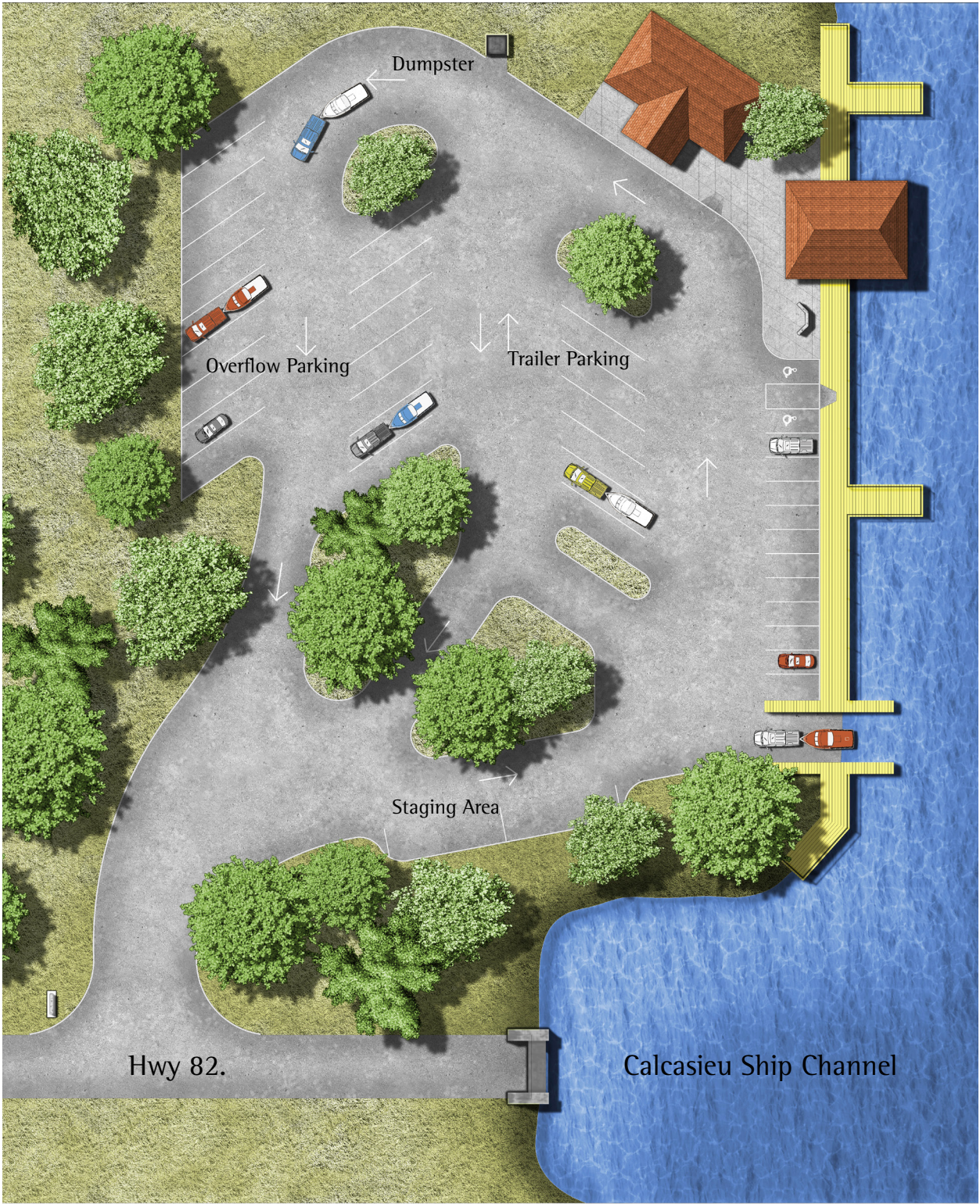
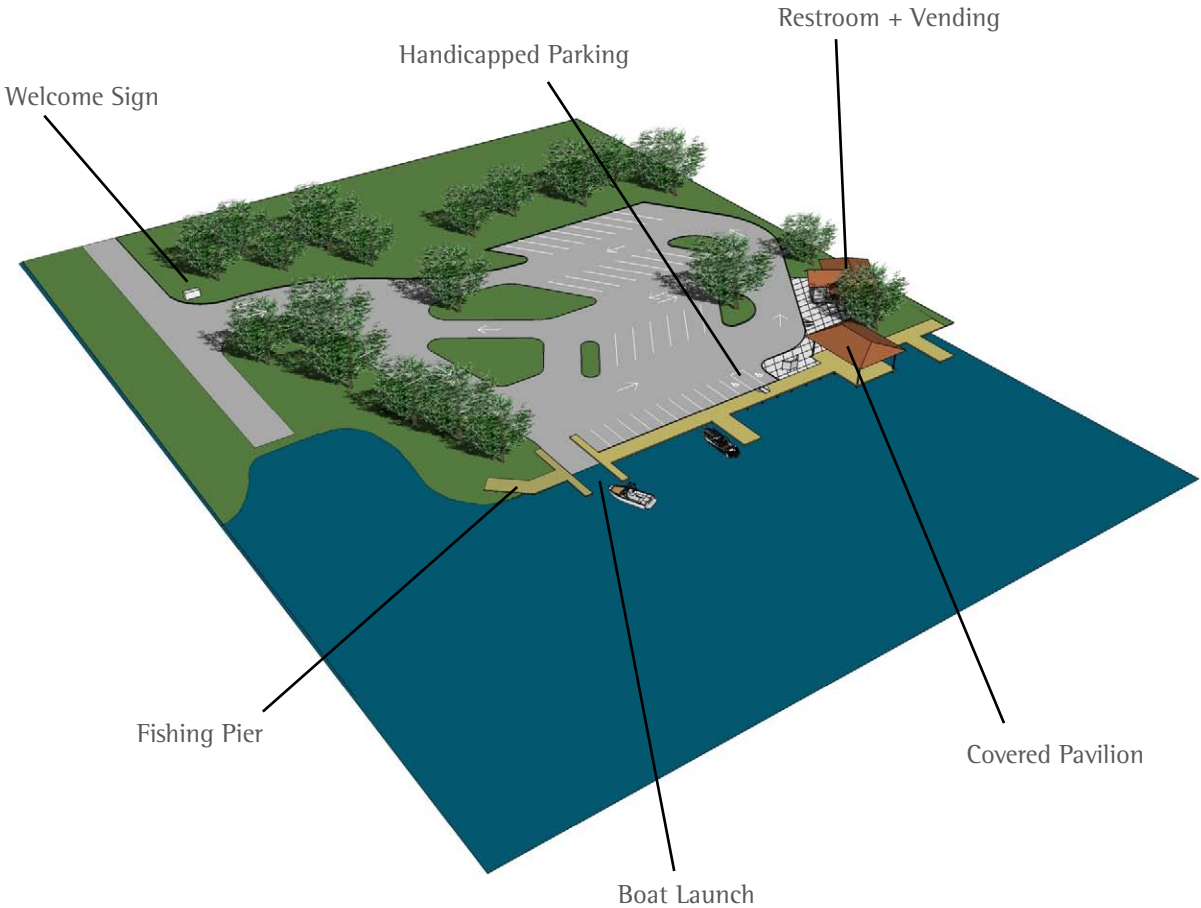
An existing concrete boat ramp ensures that the site is used even in its unmaintained state. The site is a favorite of local recreational fishermen.



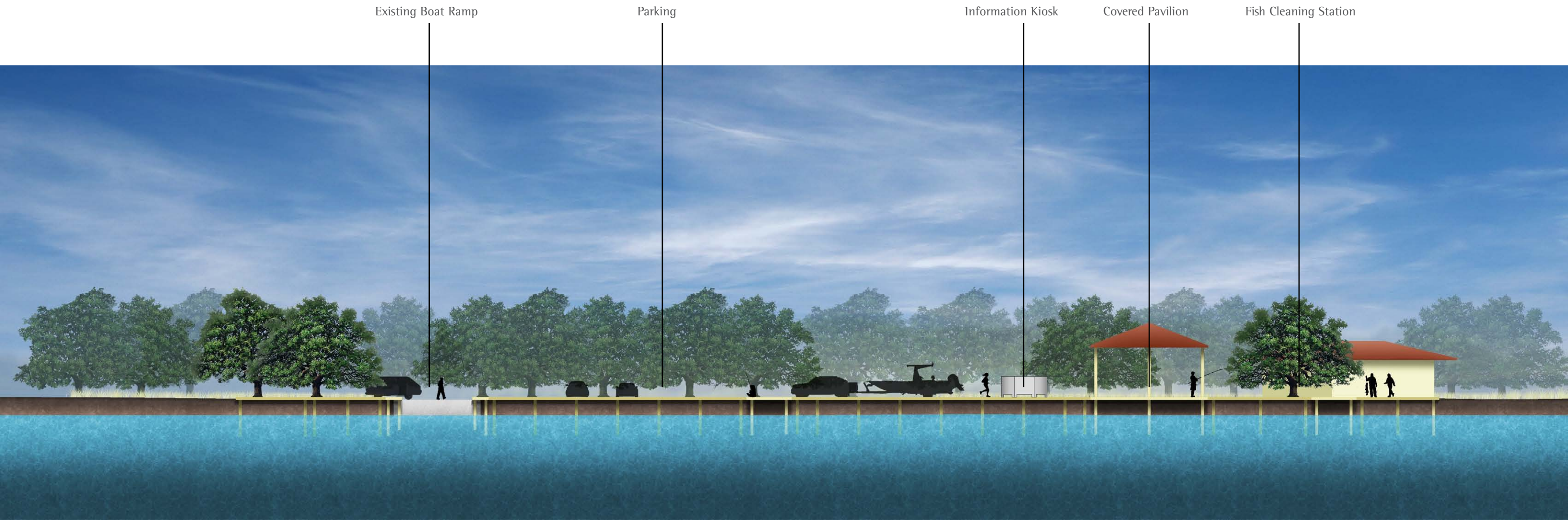
Though the site has been cleared of woody vegetation, a lot on the other side of the highway demonstrates the ability of the landscape to support large trees.



Calcasieu Ship Channel



Calcasieu Ship Channel



The Mermentau River



The Mermentau River



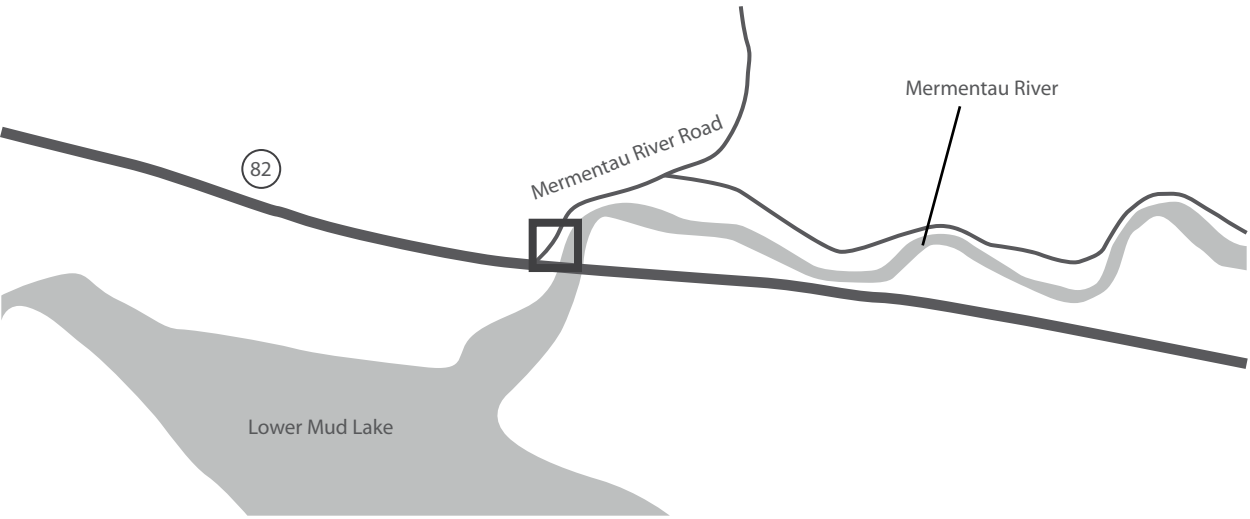
Context

The Mermentau River crosses the eastern part of Cameron Parish, connecting Lake Arthur, Grand Lake, Upper Mud Lake, and Lower Mud Lake to the Gulf of Mexico. It is fed by the Mermentau River Basin, including several tributaries. In pre-colonial times, several Attakapas Native American villages were situated on the river. The word ‘Mermentau’ comes from the Attakapas name for the river, Nementou.

The river has served as an important waterway, for both transportation and commerce, since the area was first settled by Europeans in the 1700’s. It was used by the pirate ships of Jean Lafitte, including the Hotspur, which wrecked at the river’s mouth in 1820. The first steamboat on the Mermentau was the “Cricket,” under Capt. Joe Boudreaux, which carried mail and supplies to Grand Chenier and returned to Lake Arthur with cotton, cattle, hides, and produce.

Though significant wetland loss has occurred over the last century, the river’s basin still contains large swaths of wetlands, and is home to both the Lacassine National Wildlife Refuge and the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge. The basin is home for many species of waterfowl, crustaceans, reptiles, and over fifty species of freshwater fish.

The proposed site is on the west bank of the river, near the intersection of Mermentau River Road and Highway 82, also known as Grand Chenier Highway and Oak Grove Highway.



Existing Conditions

Across Highway 82, a large expanse of native grassland and marsh remains.



Tall grasses grow along the site’s margins, and several large, native Live Oaks provide the site’s only shade.



Broken bulkheads and other wreckage remain from the site’s former use as a loading and storage area for river-bound cargo.



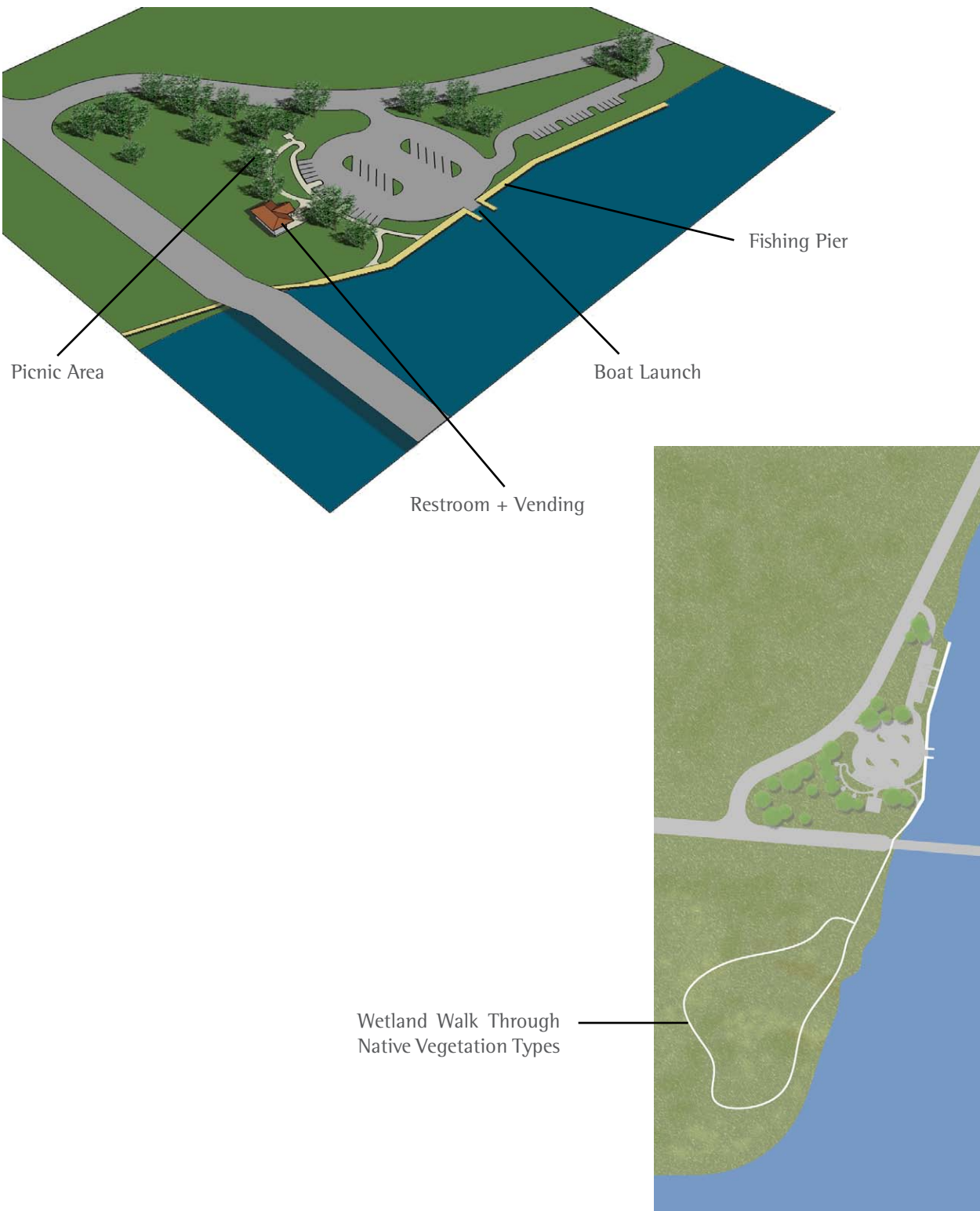
The native plant *Solidago altissima* is often an indication of a site that has been cleared or otherwise disturbed. Given the lot’s former use, the presence of this wildflower, also called goldenrod, is not surprising.



Like the Caclcasieu site, the property on the Mermentau River is mostly an unmaintained gravel lot.



The Mementau River



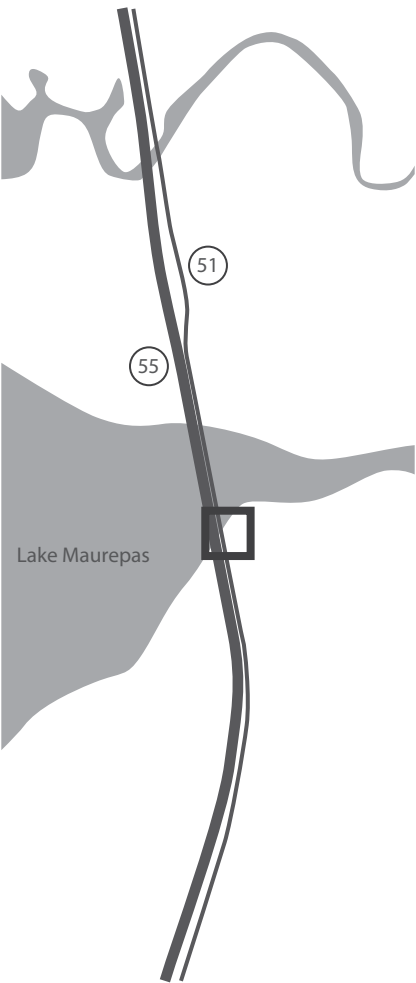
The Mermentau River



Lake Maurepas



Lake Maurepas

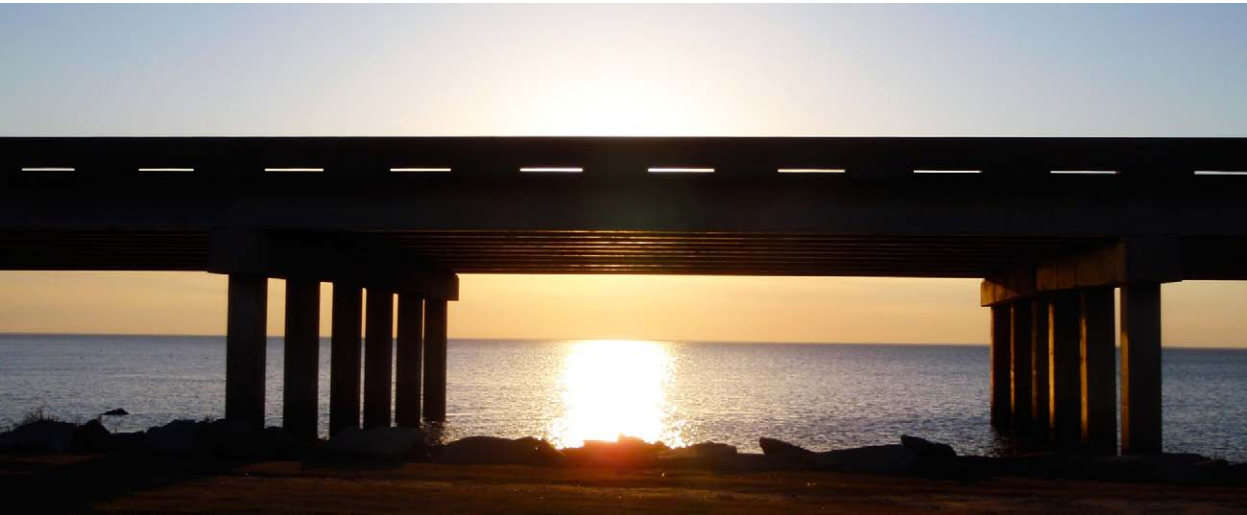


Context

Named for an 18th century French statesman, Lake Maurepas is a large, brackish lake about fifteen miles northwest of New Orleans. It is connected to Lake Ponchartrain, to its east, via Pass Manchac.

The lake is frequented by fishermen, as it is home to trout, catfish, crappie, walleye, and at least five species of bass. It is also popular with recreational boaters and beachgoers.

The site chosen for Lake Maurepas is quite unique. It is sandwiched between the raised Interstate 55 and the older, ground-level Highway 51. The interstate creates a giant shade structure just past the shoreline, which creates a sheltered area in the water for fishing or boat staging. The site is already designated a park, but it lacks the site features and maintenance to attract a significant number of visitors.



Existing Conditions

The site is presently maintained as a park, but its design offers few features to attract visitors.

Current shoreline access is very limited. The shoreline consists of gravel and debris, and in some places is lined with rip-rap to guard against erosion.

Aside from the interstate, small covered shelters provide the only shade. Their placement fails to capitalize on views offered by the unique environment.

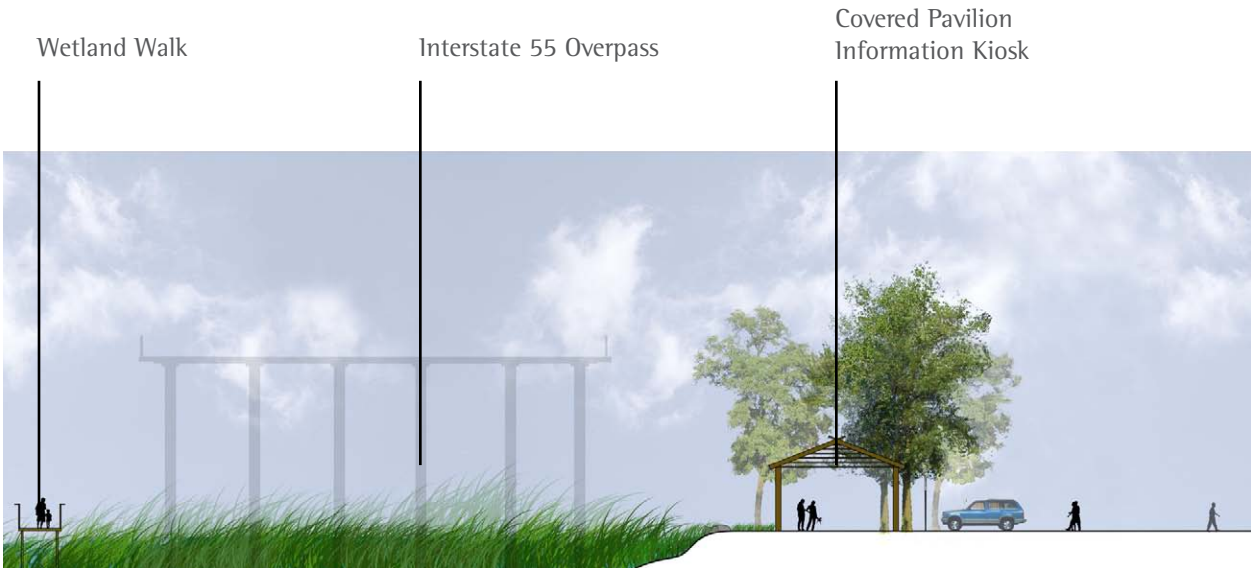
Existing piers, from former boat slips, are spaced along the shore beneath the interstate. They are in severe disrepair and unsafe for use.

The site lacks significant trees and other plants. Planting this area would enhance the enjoyment and utility of the site.



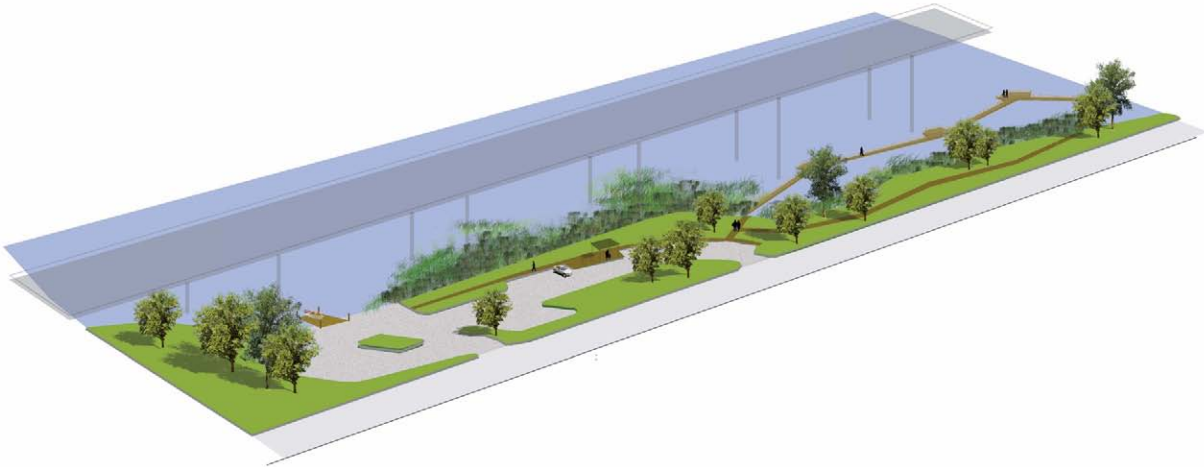


Design Proposal A





Design Proposal B



Chef Menteur Pass



Chef Menteur Pass



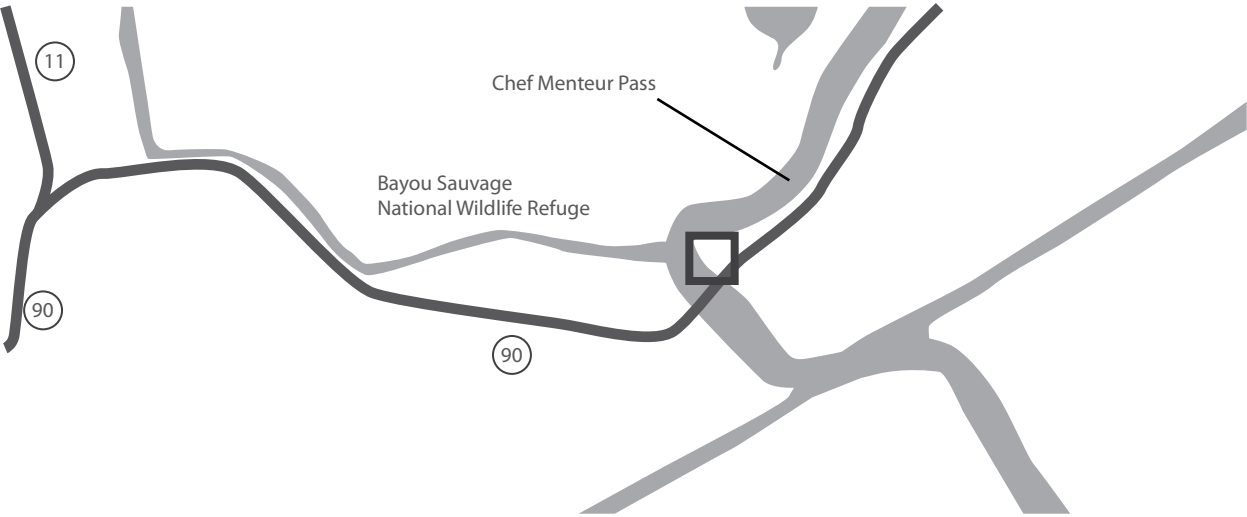
Context

Chef Menteur Pass is one of two waterways which connect Lake Ponchartrain to Lake Borgne and the Gulf of Mexico. Historically, it served as a major trading route.

Today its shores are home to both new suburban neighborhoods and the wreckage of previously developed properties, destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. The majority of its banks, however, are undeveloped, and form a significant area of coastal habitat. At its intersection with Bayou Sauvage, the pass forms the eastern end of the Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge. It is also home to a hunting and fishing club that is believed to be the oldest in the U.S.

The project site is on the eastern shore of the pass, along U.S. Highway 90. Much of the site consists of undeveloped native wetlands. Wreckage of former piers and boatdocks can be found along the site’s southern shoreline, along building foundations and abandoned equipment.

The site is also uniquely positioned across the highway from the University of New Orleans’ Shea Penland Coastal Education and Research Field Station, which capitalizes on the abundant natural habitat of the pass.



Existing Conditions

Wreckage on the shoreline serves witness to the site’s history of boating and fishing use. U.S. Highway 90 provides easy access to the site.



Across the pass, suburban development borders coastal marsh. This condition creates both an ecological challenge, and an educational and recreational opportunity.



The part of the site which was formerly developed is now a group of vacant lots. A few ruins remain from the site’s earlier years.



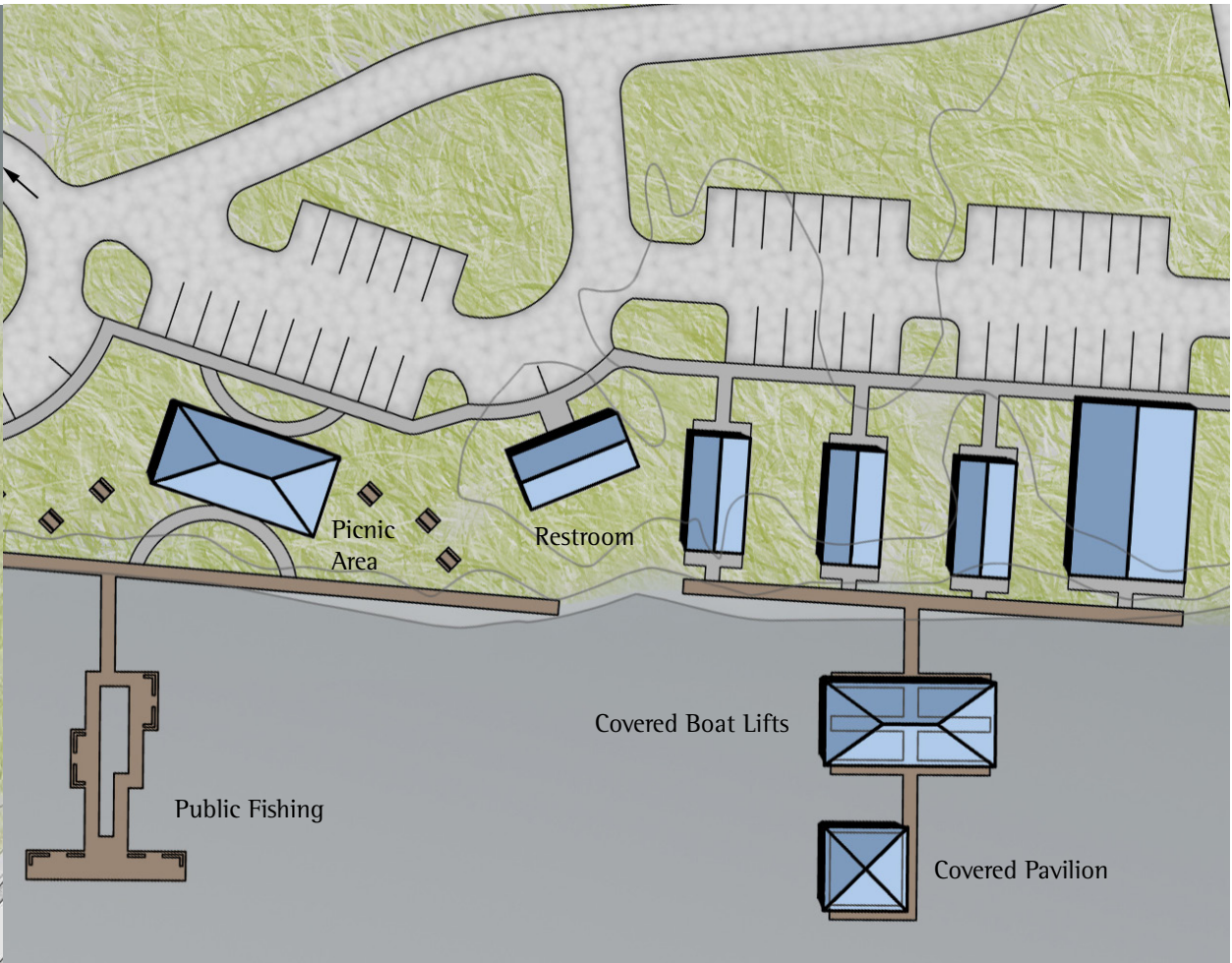
The neighboring Shea Penland Coastal Education and Research Field Station is an asset of the Pontchartrain Institute for Environmental Sciences at the University of New Orleans.



Native marsh vegetation is one part of the intricate estuary ecosystem. Positioned between Lake Pontchartrain and Lake Borgne, the unique environment is home to countless species of flora and fauna, including the American Alligator, white and brown pelicans, and bald eagles.



Chef Menteur Pass



Shell Beach



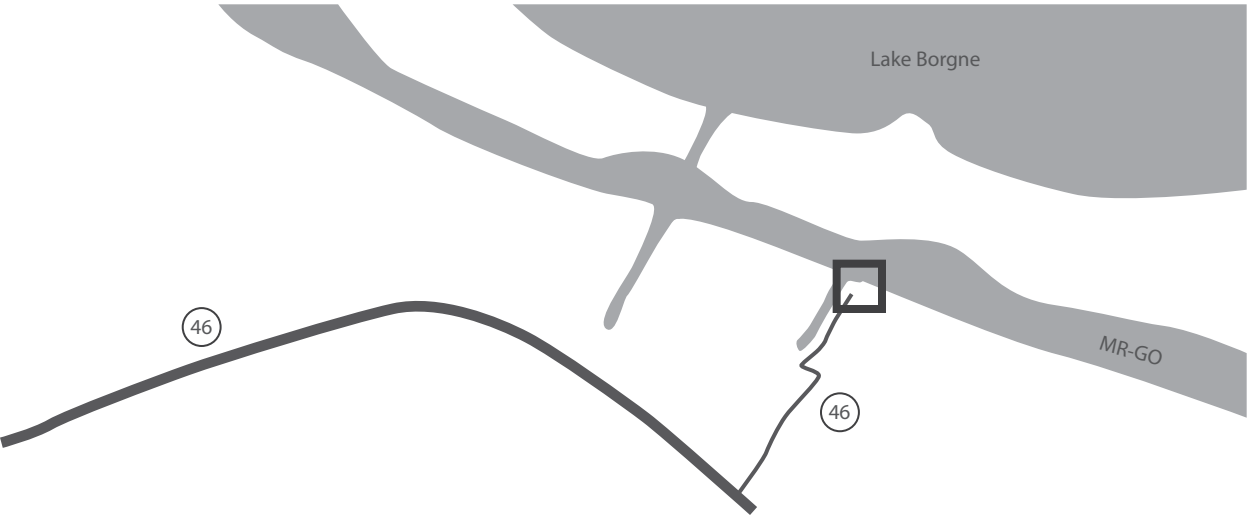


Context

Shell Beach is a small town on the banks of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO), a former shipping channel, now closed to commercial traffic. The town was originally founded on the southern shore of Lake Borgne. Many of the town’s initial settlers were Isleños, from the Canary Islands. In the 1960’s, when the U.S. government carved MRGO from the land, isolating the town, Shell Beach was forced to move to its current location.

Over time, erosion caused the 500’ wide shipping channel to widen to over 2,000’ in places. It also facilitated salt water intrusion which has been responsible for the degradation of large areas of marsh. However, MRGO was closed in 2009, and the US Army Corps of Engineers has prepared an ecosystem restoration plan currently under review. Already popular with fishermen and sightseers, the town and its nearby waters should only increase in popularity as an educational, sport fishing, and recreational resource.

The site, at the end of Highway 46, is already frequently visited by locals and travelers, thanks to its expansive view. Some visitors come to visit a memorial - St. Bernard Parish’s tribute to its victims of Hurricane Katrina. Others use the site as a launching point for their boats utilizing a private boat ramp available to the public.



Existing Conditions

Riprap has been placed along the shore in an effort to slow the shoreline erosion which occurred along the banks of MRGO.



Saltwater spray creates conditions inhospitable to many species of trees, like the bald cypress which would otherwise inhabit the area. A lone cypress survives on the site, along with this single pine.



The site is at the intersection of MRGO and an inlet which serves as the community’s aquatic ‘main street’, paralleling its primary road, Highway 46.



An expansive view of MRGO and its far shores make the site appealing to locals and passersby. The local community has erected a monument on site which serves tribute to the parish’s victims of Hurricane Katrina.



Though the shoreline of MRGO is an entirely man-made landscape, it nonetheless offers impressive views and convenient boating access to surrounding waters.



