



# LA NERR Site Selection Process: Atchafalaya Basin Site

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# Atchafalaya Basin NERR Candidate Site Proposal

## Team Members:

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Simone Maloz (Restore the Mississippi River Coalition)

Bryan Piazza (The Nature Conservancy)

Victoria Sagrera (Restore or Retreat, Inc)

(1) **The site's contribution to the biogeographical and typological balance of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System.** *NOAA will give priority consideration to proposals to establish Reserves in biogeographic regions or subregions or incorporating types that are not represented in the system.*

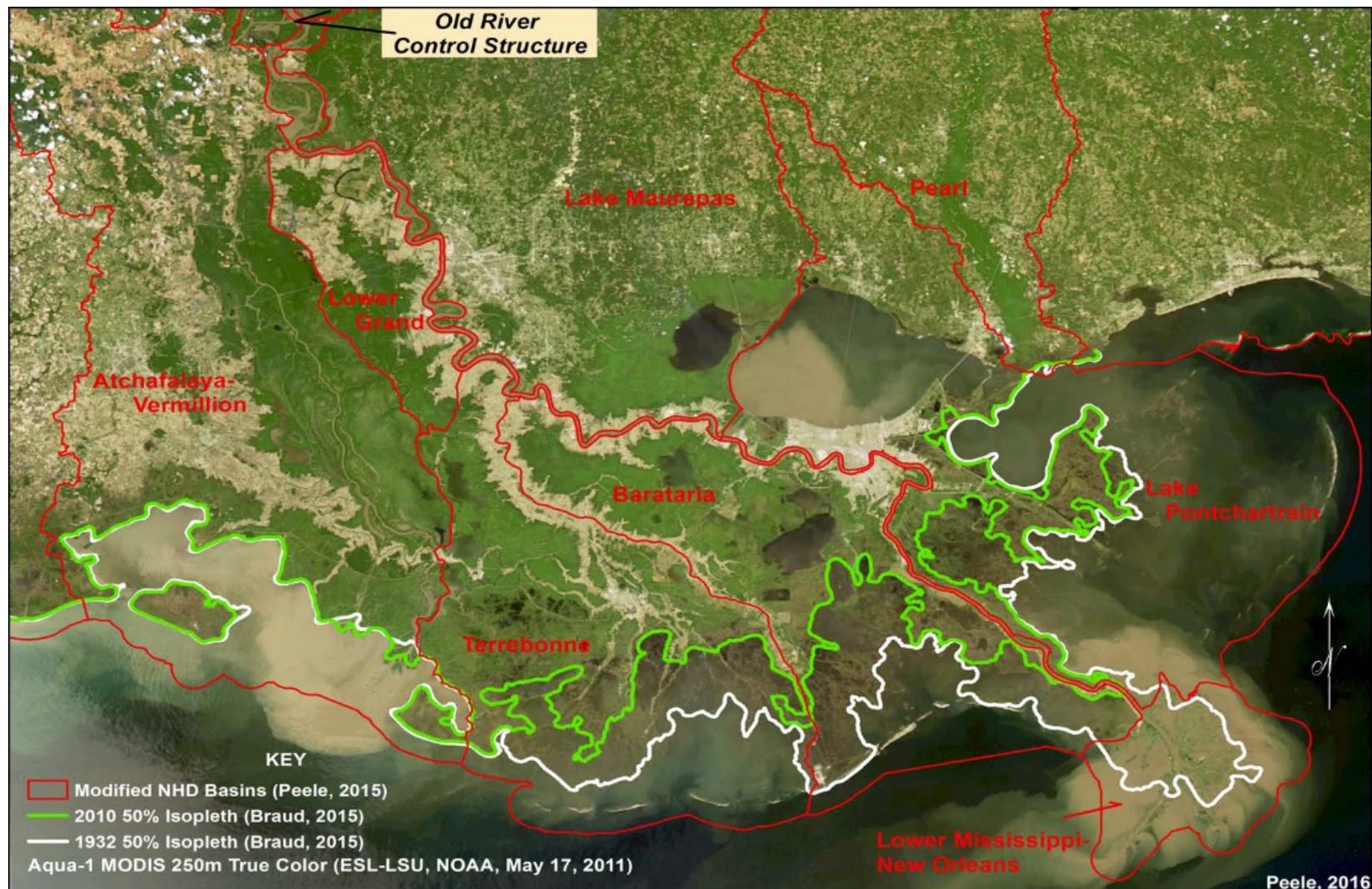
*“Louisiana would like to nominate a site in the **Delta biogeographic region** for inclusion in the NERRS”*  
-Governor John Bel Edwards

## **How do we best design a Delta NERR site?**

*A Delta NERR should include:*

- **River and its alluvial floodplain**
- **River Delta**
- **Estuarine ecosystem**





# **Atchafalaya Basin NERR Proposal Development Plan**

***Overall vision for and approach to the development of the Atchafalaya NERR:***

*Include all of the key habitats/ecosystems looked at in the NERR selection process with the idea being that the Atchafalaya basin provides a unique river delta NERR that encompasses all key relevant habitats found in Louisiana.*

***The Atchafalaya Basin is essentially a small-scale version of Louisiana representing all of the habitats found within the state and is a model for how the state and other deltaic systems are formed.***

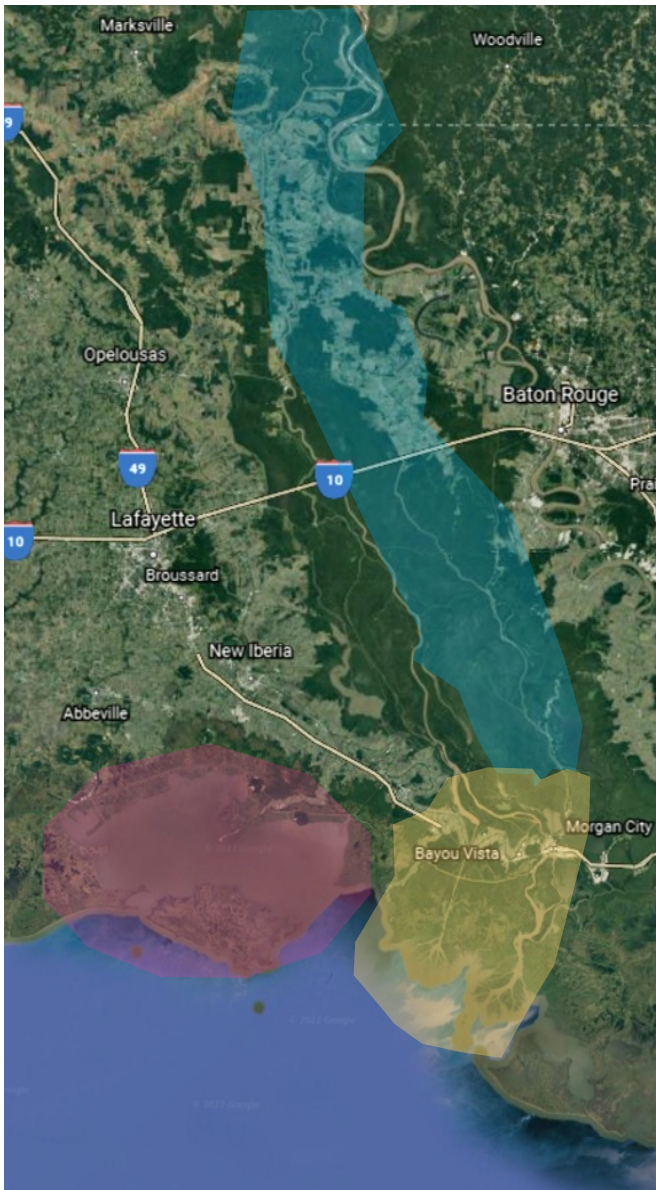


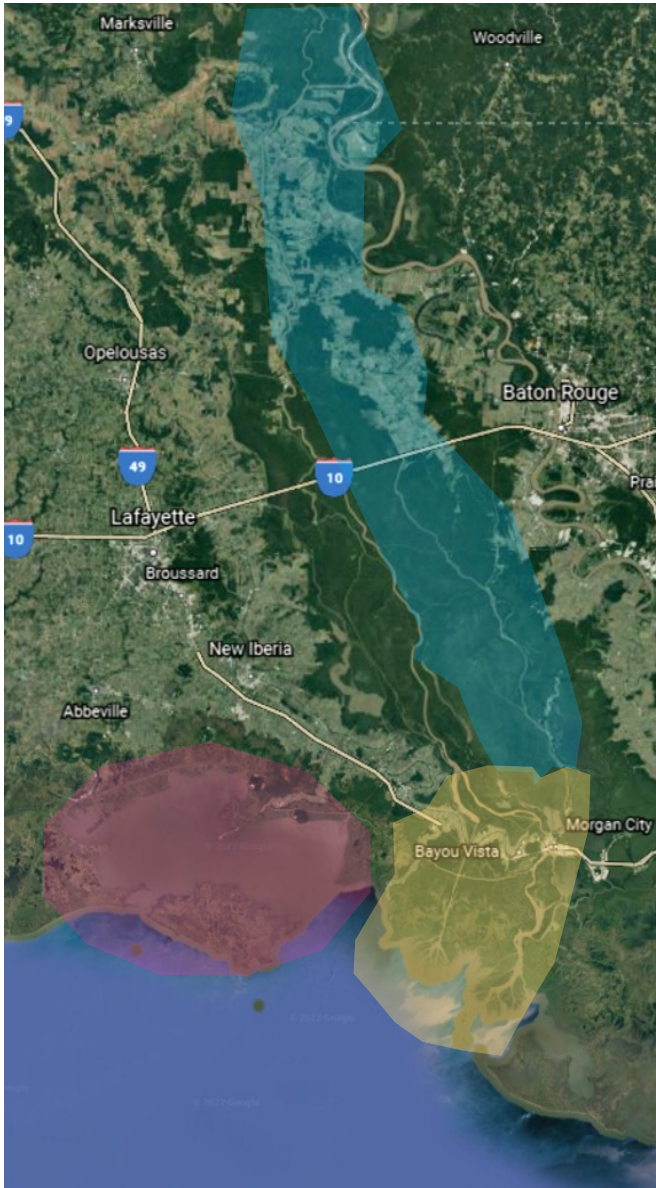
# Zones of the Atchafalaya Basin

**Alluvial Floodplain Zone**

**River Delta and Fresh Marsh Zone**

**Brackish and Salt Marsh Zone**



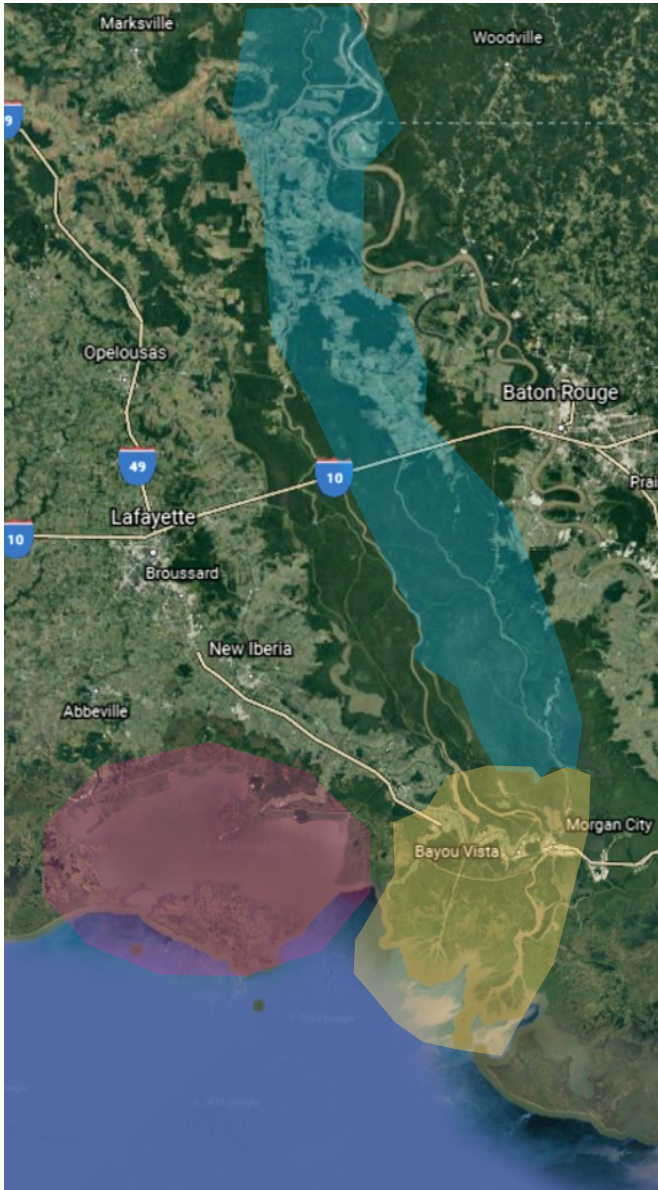


# Alluvial Floodplain Zone

- Upper: Bottomland hardwood forests
  - High sites with low flooding: American sweetgum, water oak, sugarberry
  - Low sites with high flooding: overcup oak, water hickory, green ash
- Lower: Cypress-Tupelo swamps
  - scrub-shrub community in some areas (water elm, swamp privet, buttonbush, scattered cypress)



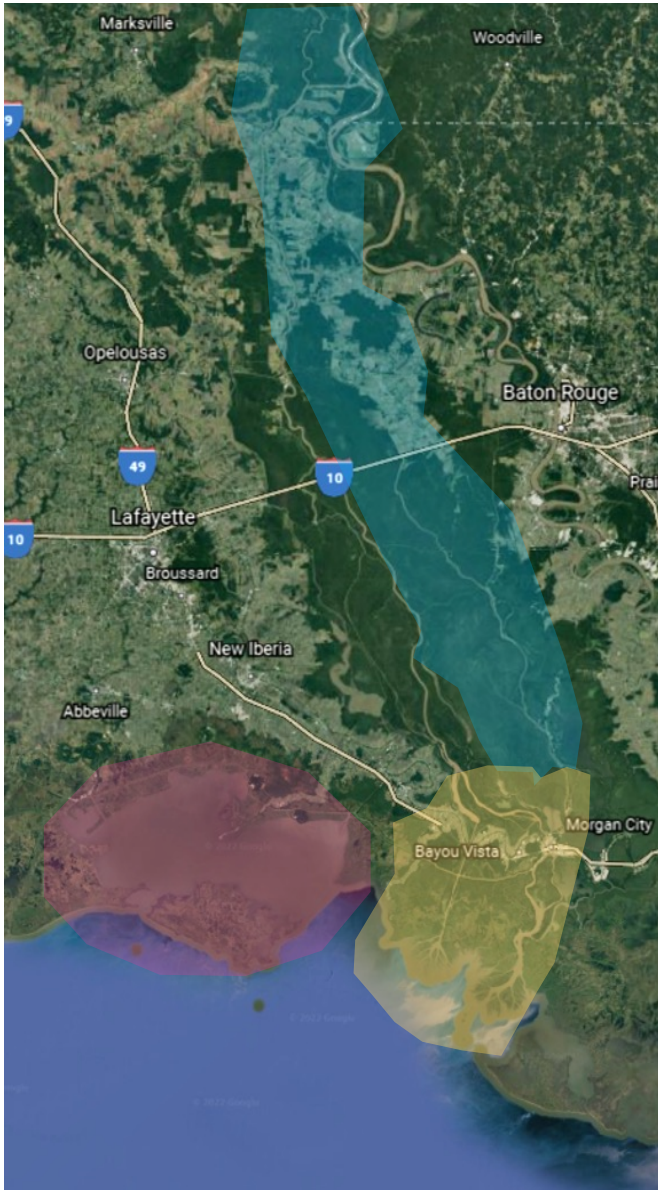




## River Delta and Fresh Marsh Zone

- Upstream tips of islands:
- Black willow with understory of elephant ear, rice cutgrass, climbing hempweed, etc.
- As elevation decreases:
  - Tidal fresh marsh vegetation dominates
- Zone also contains:
  - Extensive SAV low intertidal & subtidal areas





# Brackish and Salt Marsh Zone

- Moving away from river deltas:
- Estuaries are fringed with brackish and salt marshes
- and to a lesser extent black mangrove patches





## Important fauna of ARB:

Critical habitats for Louisiana black bear, neotropical migratory birds, American alligators, and fish and invertebrates

Declared Critical Bird Habitat



More than a dozen threatened or endangered species including piping plover and other birds of concern, west Indian manatee, pallid sturgeon, and at least five species of sea turtles





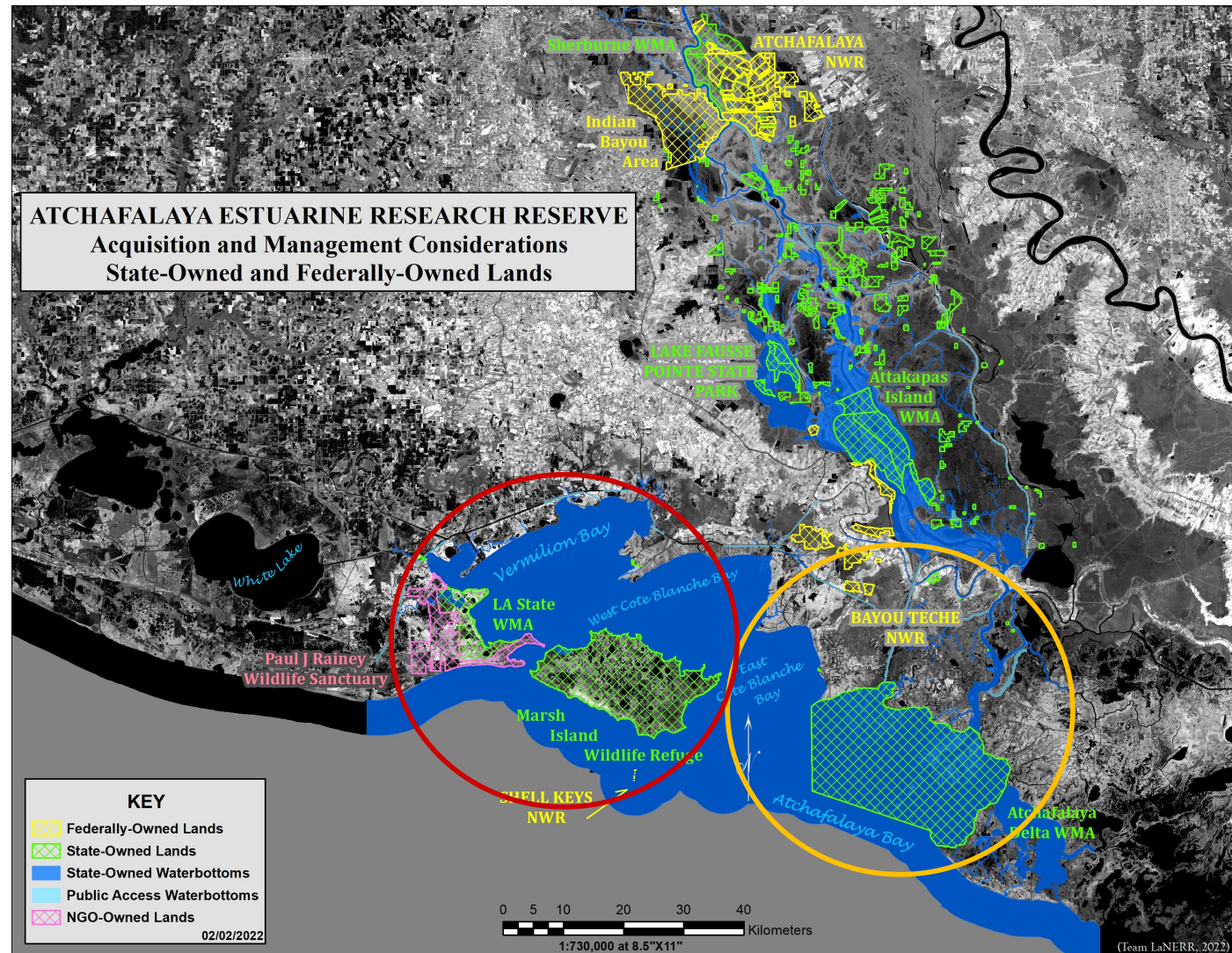
# Proposed Atchafalaya NERR site would only require state lands

Alluvial Floodplain Zone

River Delta and Fresh Marsh Zone

Brackish and Salt Marsh Zone

*Proposed Site also includes state estuarine/offshore water bottoms*

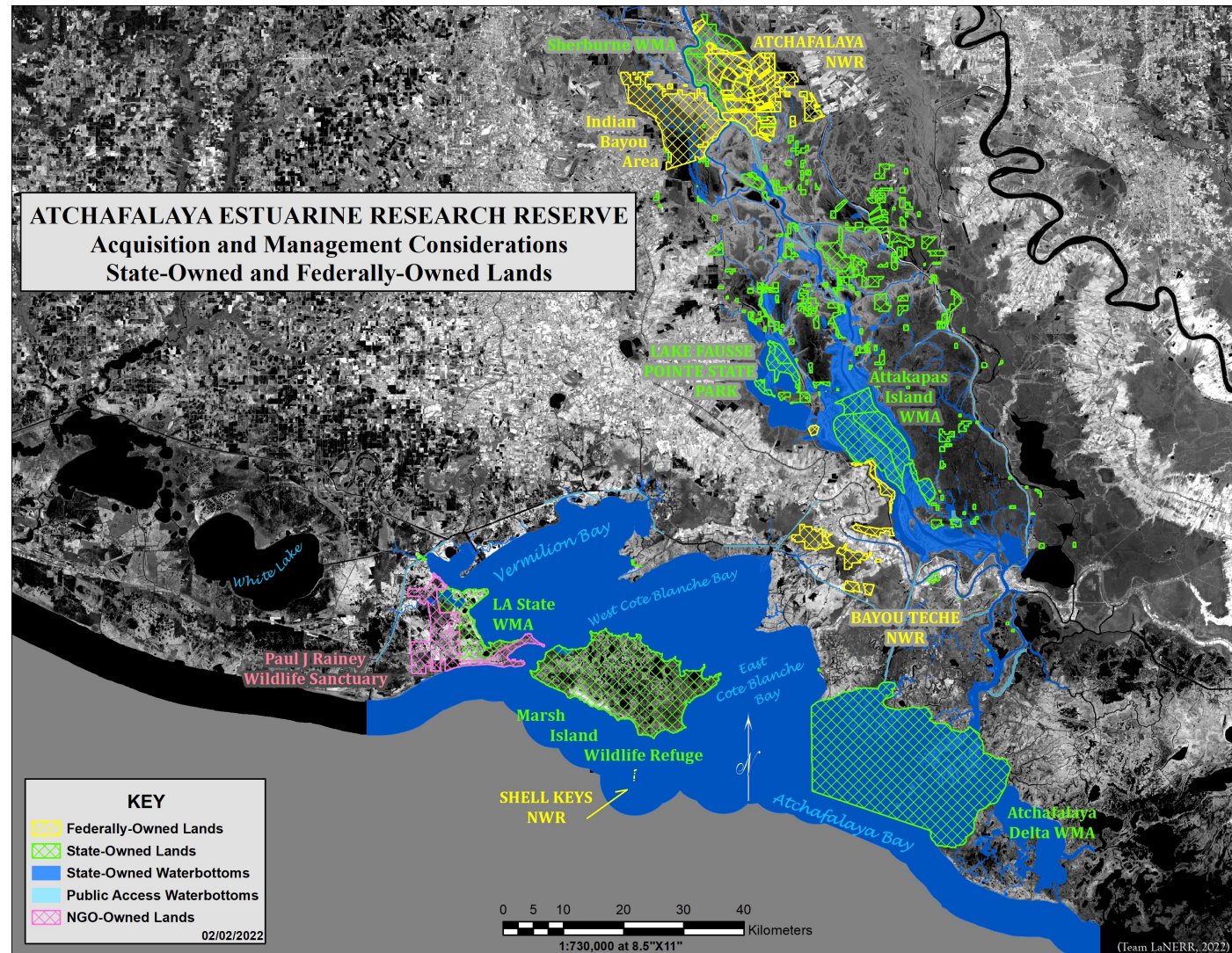


**Long term goal: work with federal (e.g. NWRs), organizational (e.g. TNC, Audubon) and private land-owners to expand NERR**



# Proposed Atchafalaya NERR site would only require state lands

- Of the ~1.6 Million acres designated as the Atchafalaya Estuarine zone there are ~750,000 acres of state-owned lands and ~300,000 acres of state-owned water bodies. **Accounting for more than 65% of the total area.**
- > 10 state or federally designated wildlife areas



# Reserves are established for long-term stewardship, research, education, and training.

## Stewardship



This proposed Atchafalaya reserve would use current monitoring efforts and restoration activities to increase physical and biological monitoring in fresh, floating, brackish, and salt marshes.

## Research



This proposed Atchafalaya reserve would provide vital research opportunities and access. It would be the only active delta estuarine system in the NERR network adding value to the significance of the research conducted at the site.

## Education



The Atchafalaya Basin is perfectly situated to offer a variety of opportunities for learning. Centrally located along the coast, it provides relatively short travel distances from major coastal zone cities and universities.

## Training



This region is an ideal place to discuss the interconnectedness of engineering, ecology, and its impacts on communities.



# Partnerships

*The proposed Atchafalaya NERR is supported by a growing number of partnerships*

- Atchafalaya National Heritage Area
- Atchafalaya River Basin Restoration & Enhancement (ARBE) Task Force
- Louisiana Sea Grant
- Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF)
- Audubon Delta
- The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
- Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium (LUMCON)
- University of Louisiana at Lafayette
- Louisiana State University
- Nicholls State University
- United States Geological Survey
- Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program
- Restore and Retreat, Inc.
- Restore the Mississippi River Coalition
- Boy Scouts of America
- St. Mary Excel
- municipalities within the basin

# How can you help and contribute to the LA NERR selection process?

Reach out to our Atchafalaya NERR proposal team  
(broberts@lumcon.edu)

VISIT US ONLINE:

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# Questions?

**Q: What programs and benefits do research reserves offer?**

A: Reserves apply science and education to improve the management of estuaries. Each reserve brings together local stakeholders, scientists, land management professionals, and educators to understand coastal management issues and generate local, integrated solutions. In addition to collecting and disseminating national and locally relevant data, reserves also provide the trainers and educators needed to bring the reserve-generated data and information to students, local citizens, and decision makers. Reserves further benefit their surrounding community by leveraging existing NOAA resources and bringing in federal funding that is only available to designated sites.

**Q: Will the state have to purchase land for a Louisiana reserve?**

A: No. Louisiana is considering sites from existing publicly owned lands and adjacent public trust waters. Additionally, the Louisiana NERR site could expand with municipal and non-profit property; and with donated or purchased land.

# Questions?

**Q: Will a new reserve involve NOAA taking land from the State?**

A: The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) does not own or manage the land within a reserve, nor does the designation of a reserve add new state or federal regulations. Memoranda of Agreement are used to articulate roles and responsibilities between relevant partners and landowners in the state, and NOAA.

**Q: Will the federal government run the reserve?**

A: The Louisiana NERR will be a partnership between NOAA and the state of Louisiana. The state is responsible for day-to-day management of a reserve. State responsibilities include land ownership and management; reserve staff members; program implementation; and 30% of funding for the reserve operations. NOAA administers the entire reserve system. NOAA responsibilities include establishing standards for designing and operating reserves; national policy and program guidance; technical assistance; program coordination; and 70% of funding reserve operations.



# Questions?

**Q: Does the designation of a reserve bring more rules and regulations?**

A: The designation of a Louisiana NERR will not add any new regulations to state-owned lands. NERR designation also does not impose regulations on privately-owned lands. NOAA will examine whether a proposed site is adequately managed for long-term research and education by existing state authorities. There are no federal regulations imposed as a result of reserve designation. Each reserve develops a management plan which takes into consideration the beneficial consumptive (resource harvesting such as fishing, shell fishing, etc.) and non-consumptive uses (recreational such as hiking, birdwatching, biking etc.) and the compatibility with adjacent land uses. These management plans use existing state laws and regulations on lands proposed for a LaNERR to be used to meet the NOAA criteria for a Reserve.

# Questions?

**Q: Is recreational hunting and fishing as well as commercial fishing allowed on NERR sites?**

A: Designation of a reserve does **not** preclude existing uses and does **not** result in the total preservation of the area. Each reserve develops a management plan which takes into consideration the beneficial consumptive (resource harvesting such as fishing, shell fishing, etc.) and non-consumptive uses (recreational such as hiking, birdwatching, biking etc.) and the compatibility with adjacent land uses. NOAA relies on state regulatory mechanisms to manage those uses within the Reserve boundary.

# Questions?

**Q: Will oil and gas exploration and drilling still be allowed?**

A: The designation of a Reserve will not change any existing uses on that land/water. The site designation process is essential to identifying a proposed site where the goals of the NERR program (providing a stable environment for long-term research, education, and interpretation) do not conflict with existing uses at the site. NOAA relies on the state to identify a core area where existing uses would not have the potential to adversely impact the proposed site. NOAA relies on state regulatory mechanisms to determine how existing uses will be managed within the buffer areas of the Reserve. When considering new activities and uses proposed within the Reserve boundary (combined core and buffer), NOAA will continue to rely on state regulatory mechanisms to ensure that the siting of new activities will not adversely affect the Reserve site. When considering the uses present at a proposed NERR site, those activities should be considered in light of future impacts and how potential changes to the environment could impact the Reserve site once designated.



# Questions?

*More FAQs and Responses  
can be found on the  
website in this document:*

**Designating a National Estuarine Research Reserve in  
Louisiana: Frequently Asked Questions**

*Site Selection Process: Definitions, Criteria, and Nomination  
Process*



## What questions do you have?