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PROJECT IN SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA

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## VALUE OF WILDLIFE AND SELECTED COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH A COASTAL RESTORATION PROJECT IN SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA

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*ABSTRACT*—Although wildlife/fisheries resources are recognized as having value, most of us would probably agree that land is our fundamental and most valued resource. We know that the future of coastal wildlife/fisheries resources depends upon proper stewardship of the land. Lack of the stewardship by landowners and managers results in detrimental effects to these properties and associated natural resources. Thus, improving the quantity and quality of habitat on these lands provide more wildlife for recreational and commercial use, potentially increasing their value. This report includes an assessment of values which could be associated with a restoration plan for an 809 ha marshland area tract in Southwest Louisiana. Utilizing, "real world situation" data from actual observations, values compare what can be achieved through restorative management versus no management.

*Key words:* Coastal fisheries, marsh management.

### INTRODUCTION

The brackish marsh is regarded as one of the most productive natural environments on Earth (Palmisano 1972). O'Neil (1949) and Chabreck et al. (1968) indicated the majority of the Mermentau River Basin in Southwest Louisiana was a brackish marsh composed of wiregrass and three-cornered grass. It was used primarily for fur trapping, waterfowl hunting, cattle grazing, and ranked high in natural wildlife production. This brackish marsh, however, has been degraded to a saline vegetative association in an area adjacent to the Lower Mermentau and Mud Lake. The cutting of an inlet to the Gulf of Mexico from Lower Mud Lake shortened and deepened the route traveled by industrial and fishing vessels. This cut removed the buffering effect of the meandering route of the river resulting in regular inundation of the area below Highway 82 and the Grand Chenier beach ridge by saline tidal surges.

A plan to reverse this degradation was drafted in June 1989 (Hog Bayou Restoration Project #1 Marsh Management Plan, Fig. 1). The plan incorporates flexibility of water level control and allows the implementation of proven marsh management practices, including controlled marine ingress/egress.

We discuss the predicted values of resources associated with the area after implementation of the management plan compared to values from the area if left unmanaged. Because data from actual observations are used, we present what can be achieved through management and recognized by the landowners and lessees. We do not consider the more controversial ecological values based on estuarine support.

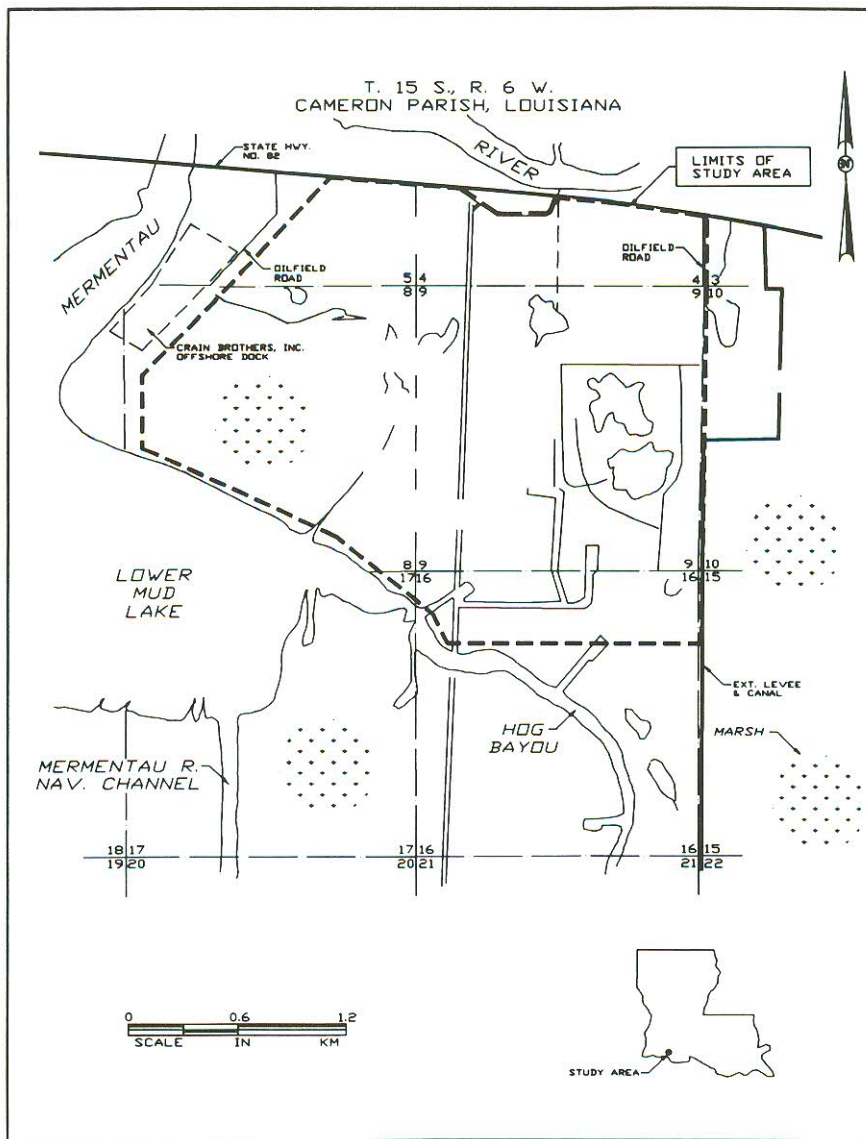


FIGURE 1. Location of the Hog Bayou Restoration Project in Southwest Louisiana.

### WILDLIFE VALUES

Although most wildlife resources are recognized as having value, land is probably our most valued resource. The future of wildlife resources depends on proper stewardship of the land. Most of the land in the United States is privately owned, but its management significantly affects public values. Land stewardship on private lands affects watersheds, wetlands, wildlife habitats,

