



# SoLa

## LOUISIANA WATER STORIES

When we arrived in Louisiana in July 2008 to make a film about the relationship between man and water, we could never have predicted our reportage would end with the planet's biggest ecological disaster – the ongoing oil spill polluting the Gulf of Mexico.

**E**verywhere you look in Southern Louisiana (*SoLa*) there's water – bayous, swamps, the Mississippi River, the Gulf of Mexico. And everyone in Cajun Country has a water story, or two or three. *SoLa*'s waterways are also home to the biggest economies in Louisiana – a \$70 billion a year oil and gas industry and a \$2.4 billion a year fishing business. Both are in the midst of sizable change.

Southern Louisiana has historically had a legion of insidious polluters. At the same time, *SoLa* has one of America's most vital and unique cultures; if everyone who lives there has a water story they can also most likely play the accordion, dance, cook an *etouffe* and hunt and fish.

Louisiana has long been known as both one of our most original and simultaneously most politically corrupt states. One legacy of that corruption is a handful of

environmental problems that has turned Louisiana into America's toilet bowl:

**A DEAD ZONE** – the size of New Jersey – that grows each year in the Gulf of Mexico thanks to farming fertilizers sent down from 31 states to the north.

**SMALL FISHERMEN** squeezed out of business by a variety of pollutions, high fuel prices and international competition.

**CYPRESS FORESTS** that once stood as a barrier between hurricanes and humans have been clear-cut for garden mulch and profit.

**COASTAL EROSION** Thanks to man's failed attempt to reign the Mississippi River, the state loses 25 square miles of coastline each year.

**CANCER ALLEY** An 85-mile stretch of the Mississippi River has been turned over to the petrochemical industry. The risks are great.

**TOXIC WASTE** Decades of exploration for oil and natural gas has cut 10,000 miles of channels through the wetlands and left a wake of toxic waste in Louisiana's waters.

**OIL SPILLS** have long been business as usual in Louisiana, crowned by the ongoing BP nightmare which has focused attention on the region as our worst ecological disaster escalates.

In *SoLa, Louisiana Water Stories*, we meet some of the most unique individuals working on each of the issues, giving voice and humanity to these man-made messes. The one-hour documentary captures what is most at risk environmentally as we continue to take the Gulf coast state for granted, while simultaneously reminding us of the culture that binds the region. If these voices are not heard, too soon what remains will all disappear, drowned by pollution, erosion, storms and man's neglect.

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**WILMA SUBRA**  
CHEMIST,  
MACARTHUR  
GENIUS



**DEAN WILSON**  
ACTIVIST,  
ATCHAFALAYA  
BASINKEEPER



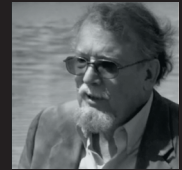
**IVOR VAN HEERDEN**  
HURRICANE  
EXPERT & AUTHOR  
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**MARY LEE ORR**  
RIVERKEEPER,  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
ACTION NETWORK



**TRACY KUHNS**  
BAYOKEEPER,  
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FAMILY FISHERMEN



**PAUL TEMPLET**  
PROFESSOR,  
FORMER DIRECTOR  
LOUISIANA D. E. Q.

**FROM 1932-2000**, Louisiana lost nearly 2,000 square miles of wetlands, the equivalent to the state of Delaware.

**FIFTY YEARS AGO**, Southern Louisiana's Gulf coast was fifty miles wide; today it's barely twenty. By 2050, expectations are that another 700 square miles of coastal land will disappear.

**HALF OF LOUISIANA'S** 4.5 million residents live in the coastal zone, where the issue of wetland loss is literally in everyone's backyard.

**THE \$70 BILLION** a year oil and gas industry in Louisiana accounts for twenty percent of the state's gross economic product; eighty percent of all offshore oil platforms in the United States sit off Southern Louisiana's shores.

**THOUSANDS OF MILES OF CANALS** have been dug through SoLa's coastal marshes to aid in the construction and transportation of natural gas and oil. Combined with the century-old levee system that wrongly attempted to rein in the Mississippi River, canals contribute to the state's erosion problems.

**THE DEAD ZONE** is created each year by an estimated 83,000 tons of phosphorous and 817,000 tons of nitrogen that wash into the Mississippi from farm fields and river networks of 31 northern states. It all ends up at the mouth of the river in the Gulf of Mexico, creating the world's first and largest dead zone, currently 8,000 square miles, the size of New Jersey. In the Dead Zone, nothing lives.

**GULF OF MEXICO FISHERIES** supply more than thirty percent of America's seafood, including seventy two percent of our shrimp, sixty six percent of our oysters and sixteen percent of commercial fish. As the Dead Zone and oil spill grows, the fishery gets smaller.

**TWO HUNDRED PLANTS** along the 85-mile industrial corridor along the Mississippi River, linking Baton Rouge and New Orleans, produce twenty five percent of America's petrochemicals. The stretch is known as Cancer Alley.

**THE PETROCHEMICAL INDUSTRY**, at its peak, accounted for one out of every three tax dollars collected by the state and more than 165,000 jobs.

The industry also discharged 150,000 tons of pollutants into the air in the form of sulfur dioxides, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxides and hydrocarbons.

**LOUISIANA'S WATERWAYS** are at risk due to illegal logging, soil erosion, natural gas and oil development, abandoned infrastructure and pollution from chemical plants.

**THE ATCHAFALAYA SWAMP** is the largest contiguous hardwood forest in North America at 1.4 million acres. It supports more than half of America's migratory waterfowl, more than 300 species of birds and 100 species of fish.

**OUR NATIONAL WILDLIFE** is dependant on Louisiana's marshes, serving as nurseries for millions of birds, including wintering grounds for seventy percent of the nation's migratory waterfowl.

**THE BP DISASTER** has become arguably the nation's worst environmental mess to-date, sending millions of gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. As our two-year-in-the-making film concludes, the leak keeps on gushing.