A STRUCTURED DECISION-MAKING PROCESS FOR RESTORING THE ATCHAFALAYA RIVER BASIN, LOUISIANA

Bridging the boundaries between scientists, managers, and stakeholders

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Purpose

- Develop a stakeholder-driven process for restoration and conservation efforts in the Atchafalaya River Basin (ARB).

- Reduce conflict through substantive, local stakeholder involvement.

- Establish a collective vision to better prepare and manage the coming long-term environmental issues.
The Atchafalaya River Basin

- Over 4,000 km²
- Largest distributary of the Mississippi River
- Biodiversity hot spot
- Largest contiguous swamp in North America
- Home to Cajun culture
- 50-50 public-private land
Evolving Management

• 1928 Flood Control Act
  • Established the Atchafalaya Floodway (USACE)

• 1962 Old River Control Structure (USACE)
  • 70/30 flow policy

• 1986 Water Resources Development Act (USACE)
  • Balanced approach to water resources problems

• 1998 Creation of the Atchafalaya Basin Program (LDNR)
  • State Master Plan

• 2008 Louisiana Legislature Act 606
  • Shift to water resources management approach
Resource Use

National
- Flood control
- Navigation
- Oil and gas

State, regional, and local
- Commercial fishery
- *Sportsman’s Paradise*
- Ecotourism

Resource-use complexes
- Food, raw materials, recreation
- Flood control, navigation, mineral extraction
Act 606

- Annual Plan process
  - ~adaptive management

- Research and Promotion Board (RPB)
  - Public hearings
  - Project approval
  - Draft Annual Plan

- Technical Advisory Group (TAG)
  - Commitment to science
  - Project development

FY 2013 Annual Plan
Atchafalaya Basin Program
Atchafalaya Basin Program

Technical Advisory Group
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- US Geological Survey
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- Dept. Wildlife and Fisheries
- Dept. Natural Resources
- Dept. Environmental Quality
- Dept. Ag. and Forestry
- LSU, Sch. Renewable Nat. Resources.

Research and Promotion Board
- Dept. Natural Resources
- Dept. Environmental Quality
- Dept. Health and Hospitals
- Dept. Culture, Rec., Tourism
- Office of Governor
- Dept. Transportation and Development.
- Dept. Ag. and Forestry
- State Land Office
- Dept. Wildlife and Fisheries
- Atchafalaya Levee Board
- St. Martin Parish (non-voting)
- St. Mary Parish (non-voting)
- Iberville Parish (non-voting)
- Assumption Parish (non-voting)
Stakeholder conflict

- No ownership of results
  - Back-end inclusion of ideas
- Lack a fair and neutral forum for dialogue
- Confusion over variable boundary definitions
Boundary definitions

• **Then:**
  - Baldcypress regeneration
  - Local hypoxia
  - Altered fisheries

• **Now:**
  - Hurricane protection
  - Coastal hypoxia
  - Nutrient/carbon markets
  - Coastal restoration
  - Agriculture
Lacking a long term vision

• “Louisiana Governor Jindal Asks Army Corps to Increase Water Flow into Atchafalaya” – 96.5 fm KPEL

• “Mermentau’s Fresh Solution” - The Advocate

• “Atchafalaya River will get more water from Mississippi River to help wildlife” - The Times Picayune

Why Structured Decision Making?

• Focus on fundamental objectives

• Translates values into measurable objectives
  • “What gets measured, gets managed.”

• Bridges the boundary between scientists, stakeholders, and decision-makers

• Requires little institutional change in the ARB
Our approach

• Builds on existing scientific research and current management framework
  1. Use SDM to create a values-based, stakeholder-driven decision-making process
  2. Establish a modified governance structure that incorporates non-governmental stakeholders
  3. Continue to support decisions with rigorous scientific assessment
Professional, neutral facilitator

- Necessary due to:
  - Basin’s history and current conflicts
  - Resource value
  - Broad stakeholder use

- Set of skills not currently available
  - Committed to the process
  - Outside perspective
  - Recognize conflict and anger as potential
Stakeholder workshop

- Teach the SDM process
- Develop shared vision and management objectives
- Develop a structured decision model
  - Integrates stakeholder values with scientific data
  - Incorporates uncertainty
  - Explores alternatives
- Create a Stakeholder Advisory Board
Stakeholder Advisory Board

• Supplement the TAG and RPB
  • Develop management alternatives
  • Consensus-based project proposals
  • Revise management recommendations based on decision model

• Modeled after Tallapoosa River, Alabama
Modified governance structure

- Stakeholders propose projects at 1st public hearing
- Projects developed by the Technical Advisory Group
- Projects developed by the Stakeholder Advisory Board guided by shared vision, group preferences and values
- Approved projects incorporated into the Annual Plan by the Research and Promotion Board
- Developed projects presented to stakeholders at 2nd public hearing for comment

Flow: Process flow, Feedback loop
Stakeholder-driven Management

- All major rivers in Texas have stakeholder committees
- Also have a science committee
- Stakeholders consensus based recommendations based on science committee’s findings
Discussion

• Individual project focus → long-term vision approach
• Active stakeholder participation
• Transparent, focused decision-making process

• Transferable to other river systems in LA as increased usage will strain current decision frameworks.

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