

# Bayou Culture Collaborative Position Statement, November 10, 2022

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Given the extreme vulnerability and change affecting many Louisiana communities, especially those on the coast, the Bayou Culture Collaborative asserts that the state must address the human dimension in environmental planning, including intentional strategies to support traditional cultures and social ties to the physical environment.(1)

Attention and funding have focused to date on restoration of the coast's physical landscape, while individuals and most groups have had minimal resources for responding to the growing environmental changes. To redress this disparity, state leaders must take steps to ensure all Louisianians stay connected to, and are supported in, efforts to maintain their cultural heritage and identity.

Without assistance, the transmission of traditional knowledge will falter as community members relocate, many out of state. We must start thinking of ourselves as future ancestors and challenge everyone to ask: What will our great-great grandchildren wish we had done?

Toward the inclusion of traditional and local knowledge in planning and decision-making, future action must be taken in the following contexts.

- Recognize the agency of all Louisiana people to adapt in place or relocate and provide support for them to stay in community or relocate in community.
- Acknowledge that both environmental and cultural changes disproportionately impact marginalized communities, especially people of color, and that color-blind planning will replicate injustices of the past.
- Sustain the spectrum of Louisiana's living traditions, or folklore, practiced and passed on within groups (familial, ethnic, occupational, and/or regional). These include material culture and craft, performance, storytelling, foodways, eco-knowledge, ritual, spiritual practice, and language.
- Reflect the understanding that humans are part of a complex ecosystem, and that there are benefits to all when we preserve habitat migration corridors, plan for ecological changes, and ensure equitable access to healthy air, lands and waters in all communities, including urban green space and accessible farmlands or community gardens.

Accordingly, the Bayou Culture Collaborative recommends the following steps to state leaders:

- Include representatives from diverse cultural communities and arts and culture organizations as active participants at all stages of planning and decision making.
- Prepare and support communities to preserve their culture and placemaking while also welcoming diverse newcomers.
- Support communities that want to relocate with the resources they need to maintain cultural and social ties.
- Mobilize and support artists and tradition bearers to lead community resilience conversations and communicate the statewide impact of environmental change.
- Train local leaders and educators to include cultural assets—the people of the community, their traditions and cultures—in understanding and addressing environmental challenges faced by communities.
- Help communities identify, assess, and determine appropriate actions for endangered historic and archaeological sites, local museums, collections, and landscapes.
- Include trauma-informed strategies in planning.

*\*This statement is a starting point and living tool. It is not a comprehensive policy vision, nor does it promote specific adaptation or management strategies. We nonetheless believe in the urgent need to explore the issues, consider the options, and ultimately make recommendations to state and local leadership that center the people and cultures of Louisiana. We also acknowledge the tremendous challenges of finding balance, common ground, and synergy in this endeavor.*

#### **Endnote**

1. This position aligns with *LA SAFE's* strategy 5 and NOAA's *Theory of Change: Causal Pathways 1, 2, 3, and 4* cited below.

#### **Sources**

Office of Community Development Disaster Recovery Unit. 2018. *LASAFE: Louisiana's Strategic Adaptations for Future Environments*. Recommendations summary, pages 10-11. Strategy 5: : Support Healthy Communities, Regional Culture, and Recreational Access to Nature, page 142.

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/lasafe/Final+Adaptation+Strategies/Regional+Adaptation+Strategy.pdf>

Bey, G., C. McDougall, & S. Schoedinger. 2020. *Report on the NOAA Office of Education Environmental Literacy Program Community Resilience Education Theory of Change*. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Washington, DC. doi:10.25923/mh0g-5q69. <https://www.noaa.gov/education/explainers/noaas-community-resilience-education-theory-of-change>