

Testimony for U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy
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Dear Admiral Watkins and members of the Commission,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak and for taking your time to participate in this important endeavor. I represent the Mississippi River Basin Alliance, a non-profit organization with over 150 member groups along the entire length of the river, and offices in Minneapolis, St. Louis, and New Orleans.

I wanted very much to be at yesterday's meeting, but was in Washington, DC, testifying on behalf of the "Upper Mississippi River Protection Act," introduced by Representative Ron Kind of Wisconsin. This bill would expand the monitoring system of the U.S. Geological Survey for nutrient and sediment loss in the upper river basin. Despite the geographical focus of the bill, it is very much a piece of ocean legislation. As you have heard today, much of the nitrogen that fuels hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico comes from north of the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. The integral connections between regions and natural systems that at first seem far away has been a central theme of the panels whose testimony you've been hearing.

In Louisiana, the interface of land and sea is especially important, and we have an interesting and equally important convergence of three problems: Gulf hypoxia, coastal land loss, and climate change. These are river issues, coastal issues, and ocean issues. With the most rapid coastal land loss in the country (and perhaps the world), one of the largest hypoxic zones in the world, and an acute vulnerability to the effects of global warming, we could be seen as a laboratory for global change.

Changes already underway are forcing us to come to grips with these problems. Coastal land loss and the collapse of the active Mississippi delta have forced us to rethink the way we manage the river, which also has implications for the hypoxia problem and for the delta's importance in the carbon budget of North America. Questions of sustainability here are not academic but real, and immediate. Their answers will determine the future of the Gulf of Mexico, as well as the river system.

While Louisiana is often thought of as a backwards part of the country, our efforts to restore the coast, reduce Gulf hypoxia, and sustainably manage the river are moving us somewhat abruptly to the forefront of environmental policy. As you work to articulate and finalize a national ocean policy, I would ask that you keep our situation in the forefront of your considerations, work with us, and help us.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak, and let us know of any way that our organization can be of assistance.



Sources of Information:

Action Plan for Reducing, Mitigating, and Controlling Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf of Mexico, Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force, January 2001.

Coast 2050: Toward a Sustainable Coastal Louisiana, Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force and the Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Authority, 1998.

No Time to Lose: Facing the Future of Louisiana and the Crisis of Coastal Land Loss, Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, 1999.

Danger & Opportunity: Implications of Climate Change for Louisiana, A Report to the Louisiana State Legislature, 1999.