

Bayou Culture Collaborative Working Groups

Progress/themes summary as of June 10, 2022

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This is an ongoing report of Bayou Culture Collaborative Working Group that is updated as their work progresses. See below for all seven working groups (see <https://docs.google.com/document/d/15YbShlP-jv9b10lO-HSVQ5XokCE5Uj9N/edit>) for a running history of the groups' progress.

Artists and Coastal Issues group

This group's current conversation is centered on mental health and well-being and the role art can play in this, although they are also discussing the role of artists as environmental activists (how art can be used to spread awareness of environmental issues or promote environmental justice as well as how science uses art) and the role of art - particularly collaborative art - in engaging the public and/or in education.

They are developing several ideas about using art therapy to address trauma related to environmental impacts. dix Moore-Broussard has applied for a grant to fund a project for her non-profit (Neutral Ground Collective) – dix envisions using a net as a metaphor for including a variety of community voices in an art project, and applied for a small grant to fund this idea; she feels this is something that can play a role in the work of the BCC. Courtney Taylor (LSU) also noted the importance of getting art into places that aren't institutional and Francesca Vega noted she can help with writing grants for potential projects.

They also expressed interest in the idea of “cultural corridors” (a project framework/idea to be presented to Charles Sutcliffe of the Governor's Office) that link sending and receiving communities, especially through the exchange of art related programs and/or the artists (including musicians) themselves.

Ecology and Culture group

A main theme of their work concerns developing/identifying patterns of resiliency that can allow for cultural persistence and sustain culture through future challenges while remaining representative of the people, industry, and ecology of the area (emphasizing that our environment guides the cultural aspects of what has been sustained over time).

They have identified some priorities, including 1) assisting in the establishment of cultural centers and identify ways to preserve artifacts that are at risk of catastrophic events (i.e. extreme weather); 2) identification of the groups doing similar work that are already established in the bayou region (to reduce duplication of effort and increase collaboration); 3) assisting in creating digital archives of artifacts and records in a centrally located area or online/cloud-based storage aspect (the Nicholls Archive Server has been volunteered by John Doucet).

They have also identified major themes around which they are centering their work: 1) the communities/habitats/people that move inland due to land loss (linking the ecological and the cultural by examining how to preserve habitats as these habitats migrate inland); 2) supporting funding for work to document and preserve cultural artifacts that are not mobilizable, 3) identifying a network of students from regional universities and matching them to projects within specific areas (as thesis/dissertation projects); 4) creating an additional working group for traditional ecological knowledge conservation; 5) increasing public access to natural areas; 6) identifying areas for the flood plain preservation and

educating the public about flood-plain issues; and 7) mitigating physical barriers that prevent habitat migration.

They have brainstormed various ideas for the immediate future, including:

- Creating an “Antiques RoadShow” type event for sharing local histories and treasures.
- Examining the changes in local industry over time and how these are linked to ecological changes (and the lessons learned by these industries concerning impacts on people and adaptations), especially as residents need to maintain their livelihoods.
- Understanding the migration of habitats (not just people) and other changes in ecology (how are local ecological systems changing).
- Creating the infrastructure to collect oral histories, archive and analyze the stories/data (what’s important to people and how it connects to their geography, etc.). They hope university associates could potentially write grants to fund grad students as workers on the project; they also feel it is important to pay the interviewees/participants for their consulting contributions.
- Understanding petroleum industry ties in shaping the ecology and culture of our area.

This group has also recognized that there is an agricultural component to their work, including how to develop pathways to funding for small, traditional farmers. They note it is important to examine agricultural changes as migration continues inland (e.g. what are the traditional crops grown and how can crops from ‘lost’ lands be reestablished?) The effects of a pastoral economy were also discussed, especially grass-fed livestock practices that are compatible with restoration processes. Related to this, they also noted the importance of exploring issues of soil health (and its links to cultural practices).

They have also discussed the importance of oak trees (both culturally and ecologically) in Louisiana. It was noted that oaks often hold a special role in many local cultures, especially as representative of resilience; they can also be historical indicators of flood zones/natural levee ridges, are important for migratory bird/habitat use, can be evidence/historical monuments, or can be survey or township markers. They also discussed how oaks are key to ridge formation restoration projects. The role of carbon sequestration funding to push for/support ridge restoration was another important point addressed.

John Doucet and Christie Landry are planning on consolidating this information into a white paper on project ideas, goals, objectives, etc.

Culture and Coastal Planning group

There are several themes around which they are framing their work, including: 1) centering coastal voices in identifying emergent concerns and solutions, 2) thinking broadly about policy to include how relationships make certain policies possible and vice-versa, 3) identifying existing resources for community advocacy, 4) the need for this group to identify key values that give context and meaning to more concrete suggestions and, 5) the necessity for transition plans that recognize the importance of cultural migration as people and landscapes migrate inland.

Corey Miller proposed a coastwide map of Louisiana where communities can self-identify and self-describe -- i.e. not just using traditional maps in formulating future initiatives. The need for communities to be able to access resources to make their own decisions about moving as a group to retain their culture was also agreed upon by the group.

They (with Simone Domingue as lead) are beginning to create a report on existing pathways for including culture in coastal planning; the group has decided to weave their recommendations into a white paper, with the goal of determining how to incorporate their broader policy recommendations into coastal

initiatives. Another primary issue they are discussing is identifying tools to help community organizations capture federal funds and helping to move more funds to grassroots organizations (with which Simone has experience).

The group has also begun to consider how economic variables/impacts might get the attention of the state (as was implied by C. Sutcliffe as well); they want to explore ways to interface with federal agencies and get a better understanding of how to access infrastructure bill money.

The group has identified three “ingredients” in moving forward: 1) identifying resources for capacity building, 2) an emphasis on local communities, and 3) exploring planning efforts. They feel a present need is to “connect all the little dots and pieces” to leverage our connections and be a resource for inclusive planning (e.g., grant writing, networking, advocacy, resource transfer).

They are discussing how to advance a couple of concurrent projects from the below list of three:

- Create a document outlining their “top three ingredients” for meaningfully incorporating cultural considerations in Louisiana coastal planning.
- Strategize how to amplify impacted community voices.
- Outline a plan to leverage our connections to help creating systems of inclusive planning

They identified 1) resources, 2) planning frameworks, 3) planning accessibility and engagement, 4) rights and environmental/social justice, 5) ecological preservation, 6) preserving culture, 7) mitigation, and 8) infrastructure and development as the principles/themes around which they are developing a framework.

French Language Immersion and Preservation group

Rachel Doherty (Univ. of Louisiana at Lafayette, Dept. of French, and Louisiana Folklore Society Board member) has assembled a document detailing their objectives of the. They also included several policy recommendations concerning several themes: 1) French signage, 2) French education outreach for adults, 3) Language documentation projects, and 4) French immersion curriculum support. They have detailed the potential for involvement by the Governor’s Office (low, medium, or high) as well as justifications for potential state involvement.

Languages of Louisiana working group

This group has discussed a project by Karen Leathem at the Louisiana State Museum. She is creating an exhibit exploring Louisiana's heritage through the languages of its Indigenous and immigrant populations. This group has only begun to formulate more tangible plans, and this is the only major project they have examined thus far. They identified their next step as reaching out to those doing language work with LA tribes (Louisiana Creole) as well as those among the Croatian, Vietnamese/Laotian/Cambodian, Haitian, Hungarian, and Sicilian (Liberty, LA) communities; they hope to contact folks involved in these efforts, invite them to participate in the working group, and make it clear that we want this effort to involve their sustained input for decision-making.

Preparing Receiving Communities working group

They have several important themes and principles around which they are focusing their work:

- Understanding how sense of place relates to culture (the integration of people and the landscape), how to preserve culture after relocation (creating community wherever you are) and recognizing that disruption will be occurring with migration and that awareness of this is needed as are preparations for this disruption.

- Changing perspectives to view relocation as resilience or adaptation rather than failure (not only land loss, but such things as rising flood insurance premiums make such adaptation necessary if not inevitable) and how to help communities understand this. [What can the state do to help communities move together? (e.g. the St. Bernard Parish residents that moved to Hammond)].
- Emphasizing the economic development aspect of climate migration (e.g. the loss or gain of a tax base); without planning people will leave the state and this will harm our tax base (i.e. the state needs to recognize this and invest in our communities). The role of economic development in preparing and identifying potential receiving communities (including such things as broadband access and supporting local agriculture/farmer's markets).
- The ongoing rapid and unregulated development of floodplain areas in regions that will receive newcomers and the way this transfers people from one high risk area to another. The inclusion of green space in development planning for flood mitigation and the role of natural systems in urban and suburban areas.

Some of the next steps they have identified include:

- As the State is looking for places to invest the federal infrastructure dollars, they emphasize the need to determine how to include receiving communities as a key part in investment strategies.
- Identifying receiving communities and the opportunities associated with receiving migrants.
- Exploring key issues such as 1) ordinances, flood insurance/CRS, and safe development; 2) alternative transportation options; 3) creative placemaking groups and communities.

A key priority the group identified related to determining the elements to consider in making places "receivers" - among those things identified as important are:

- good schools
- the infrastructure (internet access, etc.) to encourage remote workers
- relative high ground
- proximity to cities
- affordability
- quality of life
- walkability
- safety (crime and hazards)
- good jobs
- technologies
- health care centers
- housing availability, insurance
- leadership with a vision
- political viability of changing development regulations
- state-led policy changes (to protect local politicians)
- community/sense of place
- historic fabric
- cultural identity

The group also discussed the idea of convening a meeting of community leaders from places identified as receiving communities (or those interested in promoting migration to their communities). This could be a chance for leaders to network, compare strategies, or even possibly set up workshops or focus groups.

Some primary questions the group has identified as critical are:

- What are the policies at the state level that can help and/or incentivize communities to become receiving communities?
- What are the regional or local policies that can do the same?
- What are the financial implications of climate migration out of the state? How can we tie this to the need for, and investment in, receiving communities within the state?

The Coastal Culture Writers group

At a brief meeting on June 3 we discussed merging the writer's group with the Artists/Tradition Bearers working group. John Doucet/convener was open to the idea and saw some of the benefits of doing so.

The other primary point of discussion involved his pursuit of a project that is relevant to the BCC (and in which he hoped to involve the BCC on some level). He has been in correspondence with several well-known/published poets and wants to put together a volume of poetry that addresses coastal issues. He noted that he had already been in touch with the UL Press/Univ. of LA at Lafayette) and they expressed interest in the project. This is a work in progress and an idea only in development now, so more will be discussed soon.

Notes on Working Group progress [June]