



On America's energy coast, we can have it all

Coastal Louisiana might not be known for white sandy beaches and high-rise condo complexes, but to those of us who live and work here, we have so much more. Our coastal communities boast world-class fishing, abundant fresh seafood, cozy family-owned camps, and an offshore energy industry that fuels jobs and powers our local economies.

As we say here on America's energy coast, "When it comes to environment, economy and energy, we can have it all!" A recent study by The Water Institute of the Gulf confirms that perspective and also recognizes the unique and dynamic resiliency of our region to overcome natural disasters and economic turbulence.

As the study points out, much economic activity in this area strongly depends on the Gulf of Mexico and its renewable and non-renewable resources, like seafood and oil and gas. Commercial and recreational fishing exist productively alongside workboat fabrication and offshore drilling, and our communities enjoy the benefits of all.

According to the institute, communities with more oil and gas development or

better access to good fish habitats within a short driving distance score higher in socioeconomic "quality of life" factors. As such, many oil- and gas-dependent communities, particularly those that support the offshore industry, tend to have relatively low levels of poverty and unemployment and — as in Lafourche Parish, where Port Fourchon is located — also have higher rates of home ownership. The study notes nearly 34 percent of all workers live in coastal Louisiana.

"Oil and gas development in particular has long been a key component of Louisiana's coastal economy as well as a primary indicator of wellbeing in coastal communities," explained the institute's Scott Hemmerling.

In fact, economic indicators from Port Fourchon demonstrate those findings. As economist Dr. Loren Scott determined in a recent analysis of the impacts of the port, annual operations at the port supported over \$2.1 billion in sales in 2013 in the Houma-Thibodaux metropolitan area (Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes), \$458 million in household earnings

and over 8,000 jobs for local residents. Average earnings per job were \$57,155, compared to the average Louisiana wage of \$41,805. The impact on local governments is impressive, too, with \$12.8 million in indirect sales tax revenue from purchases by all of those workers earning money from their jobs related in some way to the offshore energy industry supported by Port Fourchon.

The Water Institute also noted the abundant ecological resources of our coastal communities, including 37 percent of all marshes in the contiguous U.S., which provide valuable ecosystems that support wildlife and fisheries habitats, recreation and energy production. These resources and our coastal infrastructure are threatened, however, by this area's high rate of wetlands loss. That reality has spurred the offshore energy industry into action over the years to voluntarily help preserve and restore Louisiana's coastal landscape.

Several operators, for example, have partnered with the America's Wetlands organization to build a 1-mile, \$1 million pilot project to battle erosion along the

Gulf Intracoastal Waterway. According to reports, at least one oil and gas company, which happens to be one of the largest private landowners in Louisiana, has helped fund over 70 restoration projects, enhancing nearly 200,000 acres of wetlands.

Our coastal communities boast an offshore energy industry that fuels jobs and powers our local economies.

The Offshore Committee of LMOGA appreciates The Water Institute's findings, and we are pleased to see others recognize the tremendous value of our energy industry to the economy and quality of life of coastal communities. When it comes to having it all, Louisiana's offshore energy industry knows we are all in this together.

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