



# **COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2006**

South Central Planning and Development Commission

P. O. Box 1870

Gray Louisiana

985-851-2900

[www.scpdc.org](http://www.scpdc.org)





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## **ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT**

### ***Legal Structure of the Organization***

SCPDC is one of eight (8) sub-state regional planning and economic development districts within the State of Louisiana. The district was created in 1972 by resolution passed by each member parish and municipality. At that time the Commission was established as an Economic Development District (EDD) with assistance from the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA). In 1977 the State of Louisiana formalized the eight sub-state planning districts with the passage of Act 472. SCPDC was established under the act as Planning District 3. Additionally, SCPDC is incorporated as a non-profit organization as provided in Louisiana Revised Statutes 12:201 et. seq., as amended, provided however, that such activities shall be consistent with those necessary to accomplish the purpose of a regional planning or economic development district and are for charitable, educational and scientific research purposes. The Commission currently operates under Articles of Incorporation, Commission By-Laws, Administrative and Personnel Policies.

### ***Brief Description of the Planning Process***

The U. S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) provides guidance for the development of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The EDA perceives the CEDS as a process that brings together the public and private sectors to create an economic roadmap to diversity in order to strengthen regional economies. The CEDS analyzes a region's economy in order to establish goals and objectives and then identifies investment priorities and funding sources. The CEDS is the result of a continuing economic development process that includes public and private participation.

The CEDS process in the South Central District is coordinated at a regional level and is usually implemented locally at the parish or municipal level. Most member parishes maintain independent economic development committees, which formulate specific economic development concepts. The South Central Planning and Development District has a regional Strategy or CEDS Committee made up of public and private representatives from member communities. The CEDS Committee incorporates individual community economic development goals into the larger regional Action Plan. Yearly updates are based on work that has progressed at the regional and local levels and changes in the region's economy.

Each year SCPDC conducts an annual review with a committee of the Region's economic development professionals in order to monitor progress and update the Action Plan. The annual review process includes the review of goals and objectives, identification of accomplishments, discussion of constraints and potentials for development within a parish and the region, and updating of the regional implementation strategy. The implementation strategy that results is approved by the Regional CEDS Committee, which is the SCPDC Board of Commissioners. The approved CEDS is submitted to EDA.

## **Local Contact for the SCPDC CEDS**

For more information on the CEDS process or specific economic development programs contact:

**Mr. Kevin Belanger, Chief Executive Officer**

**South Central Planning and Development Commission**

**P.O. Box 1870, Gray, LA 70359**

**985-851-2900**

**[www.scpdc.org](http://www.scpdc.org)**

## **Areas Included in the Economic Development Plan**

The area included in the CEDS process is co-terminus with the geographic jurisdiction of the South Central Planning and Development Commission. This includes the parishes of Assumption, Lafourche, St. Charles, St. James, St. John the Baptist, and Terrebonne. Included in the process are the six (6) municipal members of SCPDC: Golden Meadow, Gramercy, Lockport, Litcher, Napoleonville, and Thibodaux. The City of Houma was consolidated with Terrebonne Parish in 1983 to form one government called the Terrebonne Parish Consolidated Government. The South Central District is roughly bounded by Lake Pontchartrain on the east, the Gulf of Mexico on the south, and the Atchafalaya River to the west. The total area exceeds 4,400 square miles. Thibodaux, located approximately 60 miles southwest of New Orleans, is the geographic center of the district. The distance from Thibodaux to Baton Rouge is 68 miles and the distance to Lafayette is 103 miles.

## **Report Organization**

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is a mechanism for coordinating the efforts of those concerned with economic development and improving the overall quality of life of the community. The CEDS comprises four main elements:

- *An Analysis* of the regional economy and the external trends and forces that impact it.
- *A Vision* comprised in the statement of the region's goals.
- *The Action Plan* developed to implement the goals.
- *An Evaluation* to determine what improvements or changes should be made in the strategy.

## **Board Members and Planning Committee**

In December 1991, the SCPDC's Board of Commissioners approved amendments to the Commission's by-laws enabling the expansion of the Board from 18 to 24 seats so as to add private sector representation. Under the 24 seat system; 6 seats are filled by the Parish Presidents, 6 seats are filled by the Mayors of the municipalities, 6 seats are filled by minority representatives selected by the parishes and 6 seats are filled by private sector representatives selected by the parishes. Individual parish economic development committees are composed of representatives selected by each parish under differing rules. The Appendix contains a list of the SCPDC Board of Commissioners and a list of participants in the annual CEDS update and review process.



## **BACKGROUND OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SITUATION**

The Native American people of Louisiana built monumental mounds and some found in the State's Coastal Plain are believed to be the oldest in North America. European settlers included successive waves of Spanish, French, Germans, Irish and English settlers. Europeans brought with them African slaves who worked on the large plantations laid out along the Mississippi River and bayous or in skilled trades. These diverse groups of people brought a rich mix of language, food, music and art that survives today in the varied music traditions (Cajun, Jazz, Gospel), food dishes (gumbo, courtbouillion, jambalaya), and place names (Lake Cataouche, Des Allemands, Attakapas Landing, Hahnville, Convent, LaPlace, Houma, Terrebonne, Lafourche) found throughout the region. All of these people came to the South Central Louisiana Region because of and made their livelihoods from the abundant natural resources bestowed on the Region; waterways for transportation, wildlife and fisheries for food or fur, and rich soils and a good climate suitable for varied crops.

In August and September of 2005 the world's attention focused on Louisiana as two back-to-back major hurricanes made landfall along the Gulf Coast. Hurricane Katrina devastated the New Orleans Metropolitan area as it crossed St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes and made landfall along the Louisiana/Mississippi State line and pushed ahead of it a 27 foot wall of water. The Parishes of the South Central Region fared far better after Katrina than the larger metropolitan area to the East. St. Charles and Lafourche Parishes sustained flooding, but not to the extent of their neighbors. Wind damage was scattered from severe to light throughout the South Central region. Many individuals who evacuated from flood damaged communities along the southern most reaches of the Mississippi River sought safety in South Central communities with family or friends or at public or private shelters. Makeshift triage centers were set up at or near the region's small rural hospitals or the larger facilities in Houma and Thibodaux. Communities of the Region assisted in the evacuation and care of persons injured and displaced. As the South Central Region pooled its resources to support evacuation and assistance efforts in the wake of Katrina, Hurricane Rita made landfall to the west of the South Central Region along the Texas/Louisiana border. The second storm inundated and, in some cases, destroyed entire communities along the Louisiana coast. The area covered by the storm's 15 foot tidal surge was immense and water pushed inland, once again inundating St. Bernard, Plaquemines, New Orleans and flooding the low lying areas of Lafourche and Terrebonne that had been spared by Katrina. Communities further west suffered even greater damage, with small towns along the more sparsely populated coastline south of Lake Charles totally wiped out. Lake Charles, Louisiana's 5<sup>th</sup> largest city, experienced severe flooding, as water levels in the Lake rose as much as 8 feet above normal. The resources of the State of Louisiana were spread thinly across the entire coastal region and inland parishes impacted by wind and storms as Rita moved across the state. Nearly every Louisiana community had some level of damage.

Many of the communities hit by one or both storms are still having trouble recovering due to a lack of or inadequate insurance to cover damages, ruined or damaged public infrastructure, lack of a labor force sufficient to handle the clean up and rebuilding effort, and rising material and labor costs. Many South Central towns and parishes are receiving bids and cost estimates for public works projects well over original estimated costs and are having trouble funding the difference. In post Katrina-Rita Louisiana, uncertainties loom large, affecting the ability of many to move forward with rebuilding their lives and communities.

Post-disaster, like the rest of Louisiana, the South Central District faces an economic transition. In the near-term, the regional trend is upward. As the *2007-2008 Louisiana Economic Outlook* noted, "While hurricanes destroy wealth, rebuilding that wealth creates a lot of spending." In May 2006, the Houma



MSA had an unemployment rate of 3.7%, lower than the state's 4.6% unemployment rate and the national rate of 4.7%. In October 2005, just after the two hurricanes, and with offshore energy fields shut down, unemployment climbed to 10.1%, but by September and October 2006, the rate had dropped to 2.7% and 2.9% respectively. Soaring energy prices and federal offshore lease requirements have spurred massive investment in replacement and repair of damaged offshore energy infrastructure. With competing Gulf Coast ports in ruins, the action concentrated at Port Fourchon in Lafourche Parish. Oil-field service and rig fabrication companies in neighboring Terrebonne Parish also benefited. The ship and boat building industry saw extensive activity in repairs to watercraft used in offshore support.

Other parishes in the district experienced similar employment patterns. In the New Orleans MSA, St. Charles Parish had 27.2% unemployment in October 2005, but in September and October 2006 had rates of 4.6% and 4.8% respectively. St. John the Baptist Parish went from 30.9% unemployment just after the storms to 4.6% and 4.8% in September and October 2006.

Two of the district parishes are not in MSAs. Assumption Parish had 12.9% unemployment just after the hurricanes and in both September and October 2006 had a rate of 4.6%. St. James Parish, which has had the district's highest unemployment rates, shot up to 16.1% just after the hurricanes, but in September and October 2006 had rates of 5.4% and 5.9%.

Another issue of most concern is the ability to continue to protect some areas with the loss of the barrier islands and coastal wetlands that once absorbed the brunt of storm surge. The U. S. Geological Survey reported in February 2006 that 118 square miles were lost between the Atchafalaya River and the Chandeleur Islands between the fall of 2004 and September 2006.

*"The Effect of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita - Before the storms, scientists predicted that this area might lose 60 square miles of vegetated wetlands by 2050. In just two days, when Hurricanes Katrina and Rita passed through, 218 square miles of vegetated marsh turned to open water."*  
*From the "America's Wetland" webpage.*

The State's barrier island chains have remained largely uninhabited. While a few islands (Isle Dernieres and Grand Terre) historically supported some development, Grand Isle is the only island that has full time residents today. Some islands have seasonal camps or work sites, but these are becoming rarer as each hurricane takes its toll. Vast areas of salt and brackish marshes sit between the barrier islands and natural ridges created by seasonal overflow of rivers and bayous. These coastal wetlands cover an area larger than the Everglades. Together the barrier islands and wetlands provide a natural buffer from storm surge and seasonal tidal flooding. Hurricane storm surges like the 15 foot Rita surge and the 27 foot Katrina surge hit these coastal, mostly uninhabited, areas first. This breaks the surge before it reaches inland communities like Golden Meadow, Bayou Dularge and Dulac in the South Central District. These and other communities are the places where the Gulf's fishermen live and work. The small communities dotting the Louisiana coast line were transformed from fishing communities into the working, or blue-collar, coast of today that supports 15% of the nation's refining capacity and the Louisiana petroleum industry, third largest State producer in the country.

Loss of the wetlands and barrier islands has been a growing concern for decades. **Figure 1** shows the problem. Louisiana contains about 25% of the nation's wetlands and 41% of its coastal wetlands. These

# Southeast Louisiana Land Loss

[illegible][illegible]

Source: LaCoast.gov

coastal wetlands form one of the world's largest and richest estuaries, essential to the reproduction of marine fishes, oysters, crabs, and shrimp. The coastal wetlands are also critical wintering areas for migratory birds, especially waterfowl. Unfortunately, each year about 100-120 square kilometers of Louisiana's coastal wetlands are lost to open-water or non-wetland habitats because of natural and human causes.

The actions people took to protect their communities and economic interests along the Louisiana coast have resulted in unforeseen consequences. Levees were built to protect farmlands and towns from seasonal river and bayou flooding. The long term result has been loss of new sediment to nourish the wetlands and continue the building process. Canals were dug to provide direct access for cypress lumbering and oil and gas production without evaluation of the cumulative impact on habitat, flood protection and hydrology. Canals, like the Houma Navigation Canal, were dug to make access between inland waterways and the Gulf quicker and easier. The result is a quicker and easier way for Gulf water to move or be pushed further inland. The saltwater intrusion killed many cypress swamps. Subsidence has both local and regional causes, regionally it is a natural phenomena of the Gulf of Mexico, where land is naturally compacting under the weight of sediments from numerous alluvial delta fans like that of the Mississippi, Atchafalaya, Appalachicola, Trinity and Brazos Rivers. Some subsidence in the Gulf Coast region of the United States is localized due to loss of wetlands and the subsequent compaction of land. In the Houston Galveston Region, subsidence has been linked to withdrawal of oil, gas and water from the subsurface. Another cause of wetland loss is overeating by an invasive species – nutria.



**Figure 2** shows a section of the Chandeleur Island barrier island chain in 2001 and again in August 2005 after Katrina. This illustrates how devastating a direct hurricane hit can be on Louisiana's fragile coastal environment.

*"Louisiana's barrier islands are eroding so quickly that according to some estimates they will disappear by the end of this century. Although there is little human habitation on these islands, their erosion may have a severe impact on the environment landward of the barriers. As the islands disintegrate, the vast system of sheltered wetlands along Louisiana's delta plain are exposed to increasingly open Gulf conditions. Through the processes of increasing wave attack, salinity intrusion, storm surge, tidal range, and sediment transport, removal of the barrier islands may significantly accelerate deterioration of wetlands that have already experienced the greatest areal losses in the U.S. Because these wetlands are nurseries for many species of fish and shellfish, the loss of the barrier islands and the accelerated loss of the protected wetlands may have a profound impact in the billion dollar per year fishing industry supported by Louisiana's fragile coastal environment". ---Dr. Jeffrey H. List, U.S. Geological Survey <http://marine.usgs.gov/fact-sheets/Barrier/barrier.html>*

Louisiana's shallow, flat, marshy coast offers little topographic relief to slow or stop storm surge. The more coastal land lost, the easier it is for the surge to reach further inland. Communities once considered inland from the Gulf coast (Chalmette, Erath, New Orleans, Houma, Golden Meadow) once were concerned about seasonal flooding from adjacent streams and waterbodies, but now must be concerned about flooding from tidal and storm surge. It is estimated that in all about 10,000 structures were damaged in the six parish South Central region during Katrina and Rita. These structures were in areas once thought well removed from the coastline.

Traditionally, economic development planners ask "What do we need to entice businesses to locate and stay in our community?" In light of the post hurricane conditions in the South Central Region other questions must be asked, too. Some of these might be the following.

***"What kinds of business and industry can we support?"***

With the natural and manmade network of waterways, the area of the South Central Region is ideal for supporting water based commerce and industry. Agriculture and natural resource development are easily supported. Large scale manufacturing and industrial growth is found in cluster industries identified in Louisiana's Vision 2020 for the Region; shipbuilding and oil and gas development in the Bayou Parishes and petrochemical industries in the River Region.

***"What must we do to support and sustain the population necessary to run these industries?"***

The Region needs to have a plan of action that encompasses the steps that area government and business leaders can take to create the kind of environment that will support diversification in the Region's strongest industrial clusters and induce growth in emerging and new cluster development.

***"What kind of actions must we take to ensure that this Region's economy is sustainable?"***

The industries of the South Central Region are driven by the natural resources found in the surrounding environment. Steps need to be taken to ensure that these natural resources are sustained if the local and regional economies are to be sustained. For example, the water quality of the Barataria Terrebonne Estuary or Lake Pontchartrain Basin has to be maintained at a level that can support the fish and wildlife that support food industries like oysters and fisheries and recreational industries like fishing, boating, hunting, birding and tourism. Water has to be suitable for human consumption so people that support the inland and offshore extraction and refining industries can live and work in the area. The wetlands need to be maintained and rebuilt as habitat to support the fisheries and to continue their role as a buffer against tropical storms. Infrastructure design and construction and maintenance standards need to include capacity to withstand conditions generated by hurricanes and to reduce the influx of saltwater. Manmade channels, too, need to be maintained and built in compliance with similar standards and with consideration for how these will impact the safety of inland sites during storms and how they might impact salinity levels. It is clear, that the South Central Region is an area that cannot separate the health of the surrounding environment from the health of its economy.

## ***Economy***

Historically the region prospered from development and use of the abundant natural resources; including lumbering, commercial and recreational fisheries, salt and sulfur mining, fur trapping, oil and gas development, and commerce along the network of waterways. Due to the wealth of petroleum reserves found in coastal and offshore areas of the Gulf of Mexico, the region boomed through the 1980's as a staging ground for extraction, production, and processing of these resources. Local fishermen and boat builders converted their shrimp, oyster and tugboats into crew and service boats that supplied the industry as it pushed out further into Gulf waters. Businesses restructured themselves to provide supplies and services to the growing offshore petroleum industry, including a range of necessities like specialized drilling tools, metal fabricators and food suppliers. The region prospered through the mid 1980's when the world wide petroleum market suffered several price shocks due to the actions of OPEC. Many small businesses collapsed under the weight of the global changes and others merged with larger firms or relocated. Current data show a rebound in all parishes resulting from renewed oil and gas exploration and development and activity in the Region's petrochemical industries.

### **Employment and Workforce**

From about 1985 to 1992 the Region, and especially Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes, suffered severe population and economic decline. The 1992 unemployment rate for Terrebonne Parish was 8.1% and for Lafourche it was 6.2%. Other areas of the Region were hard hit as fuel costs rose and manufacturing plants temporarily cut back, shut down, down sized or closed. In Assumption, the 1992 unemployment rate was 9.9%, some of which is associated with closure of the Supreme Sugar Refinery. In the next year, 1993, unemployment rose higher in the River Region Parishes with 13.1% in St. John, 10.8% in St. Charles and 11.1% in St. James. Since that time, most of the South Central Region has enjoyed relatively good employment opportunities. The predominately rural communities of Assumption and St. James Parishes still struggle with chronic unemployment, most likely due to the seasonal nature of the agricultural industries that still dominate the landscape.

Unemployment rates rose dramatically in the months immediately following Katrina and Rita. Rates rose as high as 33.6% in St. John the Baptist Parish for the month of September 2005. For the most part, the unemployment situation caused by the storms leveled off in 2006. **Table 1** gives unemployment rates for 2000 to 2004. Information for 2005 is incomplete because household sample data was not available for St. Charles and St. John.

**Table 1: Unemployment in South Central Parishes 2000 to 2005**

Year	Assumption	Lafourche	St. Charles	St. James	St. John	Terrebonne
2000	6	4.2	5.2	8.1	6.4	4.3
2001	5.6	4.2	5.1	8.6	6.4	4.4
2002	6.2	4.6	5.4	8.9	6.8	4.7
2003	6.7	4.8	5.4	9.9	6.7	4.9
2004	8.3	4.8	4.9	9.6	6.5	5
2005	9.8	5.9	NA	10.6	NA	6.6

The latest monthly unemployment statistics show most areas are enjoying a healthy job climate. Unemployment rates for the month of October 2006 were as follows: Assumption, 4.6%; St. James, 5.9%; Lafourche, 2.9%; St. John the Baptist, 6.9%; St. Charles, 4.8%; and Terrebonne, 2.8%. In 2004, jobs were spread across all sectors of the economy (see **Tables 2 and 3**). The largest sectors in term of numbers of jobs were Manufacturing (18,530), Retail (14,735), Health Care and Social

Table 2: 2004 Average Number of Employees by Industry Sector and Parish (Source: Louisiana Department of Labor)						
Industry Sector	Assumption	Lafourche	St. Charles	St. James	St. John	Terrebonne
Forestry, fishing, hunting, and agriculture support	334	302	16	224	44	192
Mining	31	754	*	*	283	4,640
Utilities	*	163	828	*	160	225
Construction	196	1,599	2,828	258	1,256	3,622
Manufacturing	1,844	2,462	5,197	2,235	2,271	4,521
Wholesale trade	65	605	2,079	122	471	1,799
Retail trade	562	3,818	1,559	616	1,662	6,518
Transportation & warehousing	282	4,462	1,280	365	761	2,877
Information	45	391	166	25	171	535
Finance & insurance	149	844	302	146	301	1,168
Real estate & rental & leasing	28	1,507	467	149	166	1,718
Professional, scientific & technical services	54	654	546	224	227	1,302
Management of companies & enterprises	0	1,001	77	76	76	360
Admin, support, waste mgt, remediation services	20	2,862	1,734	304	637	1,919
Educational services	*	3,555	*	*	*	4,444
Health care and social assistance	465	3,766	1,362	515	1,097	5,696
Arts, entertainment & recreation	48	390	199	151	198	336
Accommodation & food services	96	1,879	914	278	1,017	3,978
Other services (except public administration)	42	570	296	85	260	1,536
Public Administration	194	1,287	737	455	492	1,681

\*Data Non-publishable

<b>Table 3: 2004 Total Reporting Businesses by Industry Sector and Parish</b> (Source: Louisiana Department of Labor)						
<b>Industry Sector</b>	<b>Assumption</b>	<b>Lafourche</b>	<b>St. Charles</b>	<b>St. James</b>	<b>St. John</b>	<b>Terrebonne</b>
Forestry, fishing, hunting, and agriculture support	37	39	6	28	4	22
Mining	8	46	*	*	5	106
Utilities	*	13	14	*	6	14
Construction	29	169	128	30	68	291
Manufacturing	17	56	52	28	28	159
Wholesale trade	11	81	104	14	43	191
Retail trade	56	307	121	54	121	480
Transportation & warehousing	34	185	79	39	52	153
Information	5	25	12	4	15	34
Finance & insurance	19	143	49	26	50	169
Real estate & rental & leasing	10	101	43	9	34	167
Professional, scientific & technical services	22	168	93	21	52	241
Management of companies & enterprises	0	10	5	4	3	13
Admin, support, waste mgt, remediation services	5	79	60	17	48	125
Educational services	*	10	*	*	*	19
Health care and social assistance	19	187	79	28	68	252
Arts, entertainment & recreation	4	28	22	7	15	46
Accommodation & food services	16	149	64	24	57	204
Other services (except public administration)	24	129	58	19	56	227
Public Administration	20	64	31	26	35	60

\*Data Non-publishable

Assistance (12,901) and Transportation and Warehousing (10,027). The Retail sector had the largest number of reporting businesses (1,139) followed by Construction (715) Professional, Scientific and Technical services (597) and then Transportation and Warehousing (542). The Professional, Scientific and Technical Services although reporting a large number of business entities employed only 3,007 people, leading one to believe that these are for the most part small businesses. Construction businesses, probably a mix of large and small businesses, employed 9,759 people.

Today, the Region is actually faced with a labor shortage. Contributing factors include increased offshore activity; related increases in offshore service and support; relocating businesses replacing or adding employees; and competition from high-wage jobs with federal agencies and contractors involved in disaster cleanup, demolition, repairs and reconstruction. Wages have climbed with competition for the limited pool of skilled labor. Ship and boat building companies in Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes have struggled to find sufficient skilled labor to fulfill contracts to construct and repair vessels for the energy industry. Many of these companies are now hiring skilled labor from other regions of the United State and other countries, in particular from Latin America.

### **Income and Wages**

Per capita income rates reported by the Bureau of Economic Analysis show steady increases between the years 2000 and 2004 for all of the South Central Region (see **Table 4**). Interestingly St. James has the lowest per capita income for each year, \$18,506 in 2000 and \$22,344 in 2004, but it had the highest average weekly wages for the community as a whole, \$730.74 (see **Table 5**). The highest per capita income rate was found in Lafourche Parish, \$27,465. None of the South Central parishes exceeded the Louisiana or National per capita income rates for those years.

**Table 4: Annual Per Capita Income Rates From The Bureau Of Economic Analysis On October 25, 2006**

Year	Nation	Louisiana	Assumption	Lafourche	St. Charles	St. James	St. John	Terrebonne
2000	\$29,845	\$23,079	\$19,169	\$22,539	\$24,211	\$18,506	\$19,721	\$20,763
2001	\$30,574	\$24,692	\$23,825	\$25,187	\$25,050	\$19,310	\$20,611	\$22,441
2002	\$30,810	\$25,194	\$24,763	\$25,644	\$25,235	\$20,498	\$21,963	\$23,069
2003	\$31,484	\$25,877	\$25,127	\$26,451	\$25,818	\$21,384	\$22,683	\$23,593
2004	\$33,050	\$27,297	\$25,926	\$27,465	\$27,005	\$22,344	\$23,817	\$24,646

The highest average weekly wages were found in the Utilities Sector (\$1,752.93), but it had a relatively small amount of Total Annual Wages probably due to the small number of reporting firms, (47) and the number of employees (1,376). The same appears true for Management of companies and enterprises with average weekly wages of \$1,189.33 and a total annual payroll of \$4.77 million from 35 reporting businesses that employed 1,590 people. Manufacturing and Mining offered comparable wages, with the average ranging between \$1,117.71 and \$1,508.25. Transportation and Warehousing and Health Care and Social Assistance have large annual payrolls, most likely due to a combination of the numbers of workers and the relatively good paying positions. Another area with a large annual payroll is Retail, employing over 14,000 people but offering some of the lowest average weekly wages, \$430 and under.

Scott and Richardson (2006) estimated a 2.2% growth in jobs for the two parish Houma MSA (Lafourche and Terrebonne). The growth is expected to be generated from expansions in area fabrication industries related to rebuilding damaged Gulf energy infrastructure, new contracts at area shipyards and the reconstruction of La. Hwy. 1 in Lafourche Parish. One shipyard, Bollinger has a new contract to build littoral ships for the Navy that will result in a planned expansion of 500 to 1,000 new jobs. Edison Chouest also announced an expansion with construction of a new yard in Larose that will add 750 new employees by the end of 2007 and another 800 to 1,000 by the end of 2008. Edison Chouest is planning to add another 250 to 500 workers at its North American Fabricators Yard in Houma, too.



**Table 5: 2004 Total Wages and Average Weekly Wages by Industry Sector and Parish (total wages are in \$1,000 and rounded)**

	Assumption		Lafourche		St. Charles		St. James		St. John		Terrebonne	
	Total Wages (\$1000)	Ave. Wkly. Wages	Total Wages (\$1000)	Ave. Wkly. Wages	Total Wages (\$1000)	Ave. Wkly. Wages	Total Wages (\$1000)	Ave. Wkly. Wages	Total Wages (\$1000)	Ave. Wkly. Wages	Total Wages (\$1000)	Ave. Wkly. Wages
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$177,064</b>	<b>\$628.83</b>	<b>\$1,019,785</b>	<b>\$596.27</b>	<b>\$1,014,399</b>	<b>\$861.52</b>	<b>\$265,940</b>	<b>\$730.74</b>	<b>\$426,249</b>	<b>\$645.57</b>	<b>\$1,577,820</b>	<b>\$618.14</b>
Forestry, fishing, hunting, and agriculture support	\$6,082	\$350.55	\$6,701	\$426.80	\$363	\$427.84	\$5,768	\$494.27	\$918	\$ 404.29	\$4,446	\$455.35
Mining	\$2,399	\$1,492.13	\$47,421	\$1,209.48	*	*	*	*	\$12,849	\$ 872.65	\$269,696	\$1,117.77
Utilities	*	*	\$6,161	\$725.73	\$75,482	\$1,752.93	*	*	\$8,158	\$982.08	\$8,074	\$688.85
Construction	\$5,549	\$543.98	\$62,763	\$754.68	\$104,352	\$709.73	\$7,800	\$581.25	\$37,476	\$573.92	\$125,836	\$668.21
Manufacturing	\$92,284	\$962.20	\$98,136	\$766.63	\$407,557	\$1,508.25	\$136,605	\$1,175.40	\$137,654	\$1,165.78	\$187,362	\$796.91
Wholesale trade	\$1,468	\$437.70	\$20,965	\$665.95	\$85,674	\$792.64	\$6,315	\$994.11	\$22,928	\$936.81	\$64,727	\$692.08
Retail trade	\$8,596	\$294.31	\$69,488	\$349.99	\$34,905	\$430.59	\$9,864	\$308.16	\$32,758	\$379.04	\$130,449	\$384.90
Transportation & warehousing	\$12,456	\$850.44	\$228,688	\$985.70	\$61,771	\$927.99	\$13,087	\$689.20	\$28,740	\$725.96	\$122,118	\$816.35
Information	\$844	\$336.46	\$14,603	\$718.56	\$6,814	\$789.06	\$610	\$473.83	\$6,642	\$746.58	\$16,224	\$582.73
Finance & insurance	\$4,492	\$581.05	\$22,762	\$518.90	\$10,064	\$641.59	\$4,478	\$588.18	\$9,314	\$595.41	\$42,457	\$698.94
Real estate & rental & leasing	\$553	\$381.88	\$55,162	\$703.80	\$153,467	\$631.41	\$5,541	\$715.19	\$4,639	\$536.93	\$72,925	\$816.54
Professional, scientific & technical services	\$1,549	\$549.91	\$21,213	\$623.61	\$21,700	\$764.99	\$8,794	\$754.43	\$6,929	\$587.91	\$52,293	\$772.47
Management of companies & enterprises	-0-	-0-	\$36,179	\$695.34	\$4,772	\$1,189.33	\$3,559	\$905.59	\$2,663	\$676.84	\$13,445	\$719.24
Admin, support, waste mgt, remediation services	\$599	\$564.96	\$36,688	\$246.52	\$44,712	\$495.85	\$8,486	\$536.68	\$13,544	\$409.15	\$42,674	\$427.70
Educational services	*	*	\$105,507	\$570.75	*	*	*	*	*	*	\$76,495	\$331.04
Health care and social assistance	\$7,434	\$307.65	\$118,361	\$604.43	\$30,948	\$437.03	\$13,614	\$508.03	\$32,648	\$572.42	\$199,322	\$672.99
Arts, entertainment & recreation	\$493	\$196.33	\$4,797	\$236.30	\$2,023	\$195.80	\$1,926	\$245.27	\$2,587	\$251.51	\$4,894	\$280.26
Accommodation & food services	\$786	\$157.81	\$16,632	\$170.20	\$8,909	\$187.37	\$2,634	\$182.07	\$9,251	\$174.90	\$48,367	\$233.18
Other services (except public administration)	\$847	\$388.70	\$11,071	\$373.56	\$8,976	\$582.68	\$2,122	\$478.18	\$4,489	\$331.58	\$47,635	\$596.37
Public Administration	\$4,695	\$464.79	\$36,146	\$540.10	\$25,188	\$657.24	\$12,449	\$526.35	\$16,130	\$631.12	\$48,100	\$550.35

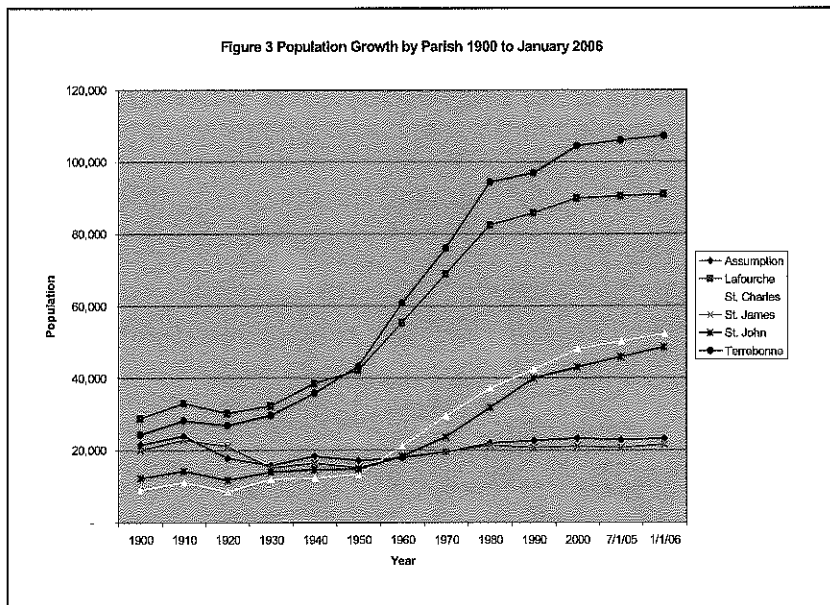
**Source: La. Dept. of Labor \*Data Non-publishable**

## Population of the South Central Region

During the second half of the last century, population grew steadily throughout the Region (Table 6) except in Assumption, where the number of residents has stayed relatively the same. In 1990 the total regional population was 308,907. The 2000 Census reported a total regional population of 330,197. This was an increase of 21,290 persons (about 7%) over 1990. The 2000 population was approximately 49% male and 51% female, with roughly 71% white and 29% black or nonwhite. It was estimated that the 2005 population was 336,655. In the year 2000, 26,735 people dwelt in the Region's six municipalities, Thibodaux being the largest with 14,431 people. Another large number of people, 32,393, lived within the old Houma municipal area. Two other large population centers are found in the unincorporated commercial/residential center of LaPlace (27,684) and the Bayou Cane community contiguous to Houma (17,046). Roughly one-third of the Region's population lived in these six municipal and three unincorporated areas.

TABLE 6 POPULATION FOR THE SOUTH CENTRAL REGION, 2000, JULY 2005 AND JANUARY 2006							
YEAR	ASSUMPTION	LAFOURCHE	ST. CHARLES	ST. JAMES	ST. JOHN	TERREBONNE	REGION
2000	23,388	89,974	48,072	21,216	43,044	104,503	330,197
7/1/05	22,996	90,543	50,203	20,885	45,950	106,078	336,655
1/1/06	23,361	91,153	52,269	21,773	48,642	107,291	344,489

Evacuees from devastated communities have relocated to parts of the district on the periphery of the New Orleans metropolitan area. News reports indicate that many intend to make the move permanent. Determining population impacts has proven difficult. The state of Louisiana is cooperating with the U.S. Census Bureau to conduct rapid population estimate surveys in selected parishes. The initial study area includes none of the South Central parishes. However, preliminary estimates are available from other sources. The March 2006 Financial Services Roundtable report *What's Needed for Post-Katrina Recovery*, prepared by Dr. James A. Richardson of LSU, offers three alternate estimates for parishes in the New Orleans MSA. Population figures for St. Charles Parish, based on data from parish visits, school enrollment data and a February 2006 New Orleans Times-Picayune report, range from 52,879 to 51,830 to 52,744. The population figures for St. John the Baptist Parish range between 47,248 and 49,289 to 53,581. The June 2006 Brookings Institute report *Katrina and Rita Impacts on Gulf Coast Populations: First Census Findings* shows St. Charles Parish with a 4.1% gain, from 50,203 to 52,269 and St. John the Baptist Parish with a 5.9% gain, from 45,950 to 48,642, the majority of that growth being in the LaPlace area. The Brookings report also includes the Houma area of Terrebonne Parish, with a gain of 1.1%, from 106,078 to 107,291. Anecdotal traffic and housing cost evidence indicates that this estimate may be low. Variations in the numbers may relate to the timing of information gathering and the fact some evacuees took temporary refuge and then moved on. Figure 3 illustrates the growth and includes the Census special estimates for January 2006. Whatever the actual numbers, the sudden influx of population has contributed to traffic congestion, housing shortages, increased school enrollment and associated costs, increased housing prices and additional building and development. Rising sales tax revenues have been accompanied by increased burdens on public infrastructure. To meet rising demand, St. Charles Parish is expediting a planned project to increase capacity at its east bank water plant. Large industrial and business water users can expect higher rates.

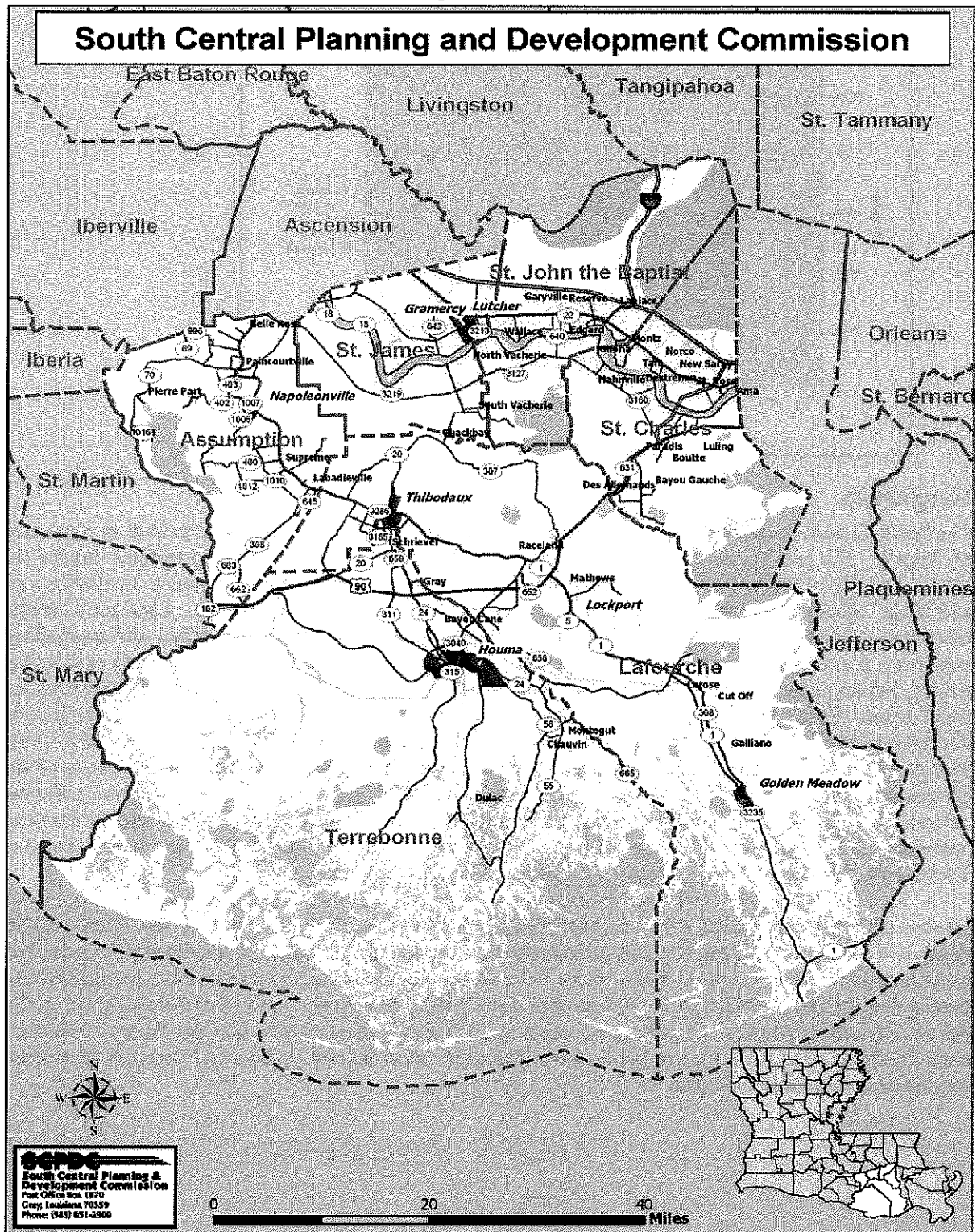


## Geography

The South Central Louisiana Region comprises six Louisiana parishes and six municipalities as illustrated on **Map 1**. The area is part of the Mississippi Deltaic Plain and major topographic features include the Mississippi River, Bayou Lafourche, inland waters of the Gulf of Mexico and many other smaller bayous and lakes. According to the 2000 Census, the Region covered 4,400 square miles. Land uses include rural, urban, industrial, and agriculture activities. Large expanses of open marshland and swampland unsuitable for urban development offer an array of commercial and recreational uses such as boating, fishing, hunting and trapping. The land was built from successive deposits of sediment left from seasonal flood events of the Mississippi River as it changed courses over the eons between today's River and the Atchafalaya River, found to the immediate west of the South Central District. Approximately 85% of the district area is open water. Development is confined to narrow ridges along the natural levees of the Mississippi River, Bayou Lafourche, Bayou Terrebonne and many other smaller bayous radiating outward from these main channels. Large stands of cypress-tupelo gum swamps and bottomland hardwood forests are found in the Region. The southern reaches of St. Charles, Lafourche, and Terrebonne Parishes include vast fresh to saline marshlands.

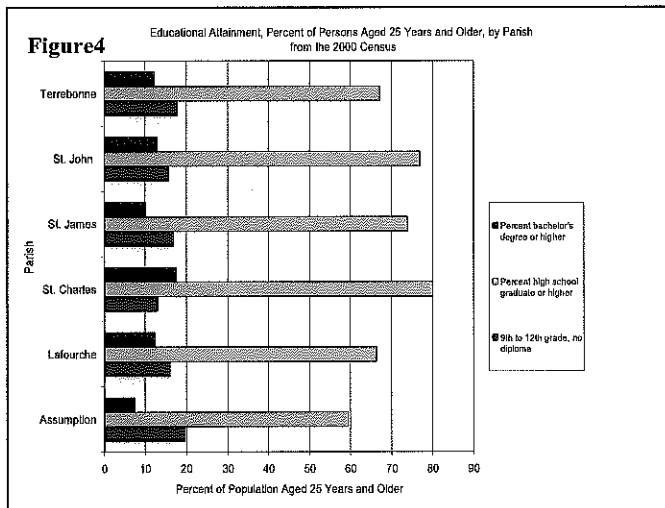
Human activities have greatly altered the Mississippi River ecosystem. Most of the River and its floodplain (the adjacent, generally flat surface that was at one time periodically inundated by floodwaters overflowing the River's natural banks) have been extensively modified for commercial navigation and human developments. Much of the Mississippi watershed is intensively cultivated, and many tributaries deliver substantial amounts of sediment, nutrients, fertilizers and pesticides into the River. Pollutants enter the River from farming, metropolitan and industrial areas located in the Mid-West and other areas outside the South Central Region.

Map 1



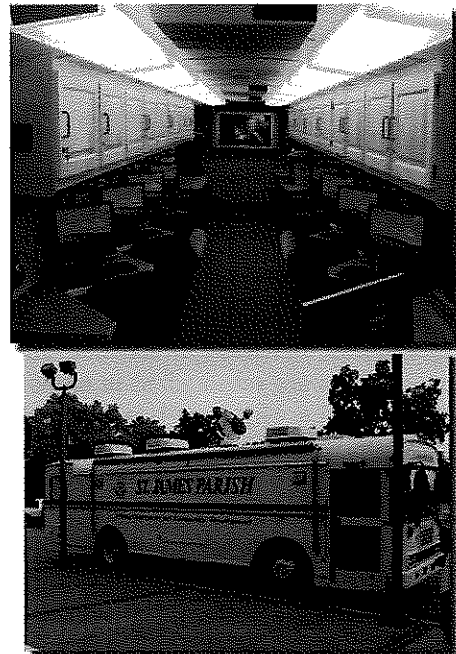
## Workforce Development and Use

Education prepares a most important economic parameter, the Region's workforce, to take advantage of job and business opportunities, especially in today's highly technical society. Along with health and social well-being, education is most important in order to strengthen the population and help individuals realize their personal aptitudes and achieve personal goals. The correct knowledge, proper training and skill development will strengthen individual advantages in entering the Region's job market and advancing to higher paying positions. In 2000 approximately 8% of the population had less than a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education, 10% had between 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade education but held no diploma, approximately 8% had a bachelor's degree or higher (see **Figure 4**). The majority of the population had a high school education and diploma. Louisiana's traditional four year universities and its technical and trade schools focus on those areas of education that advance general knowledge and skills but also meet the demand for



particular job training in local industry and business. The Louisiana Community and Technical College system will design specialized training programs to meet the demands of a particular industry. These kind of programs include allied health training, welding, construction and trades, marine related (captain's licensing) and many more. The South Central Region is home to the four year Nicholls State University, the L. E. Fletcher Technical Community College in Houma and two Louisiana Technical College campuses, in Thibodaux and Reserve. Nicholls State offers many programs geared toward the area industries. These include agricultural training (in particular the sugarcane industry), nursing and allied

health care, manufacturing safety and engineering, and marine biology. A culinary arts program is offered, too, the only four year culinary program offered at a public university in the United States. All of the Region's school districts offer high school level vocational and technical training programs. In Terrebonne, there is a Vocational Technical High School offering electronics, computer and allied health programs to high school students. Similar programs and training are offered through other school districts and high schools. Continuing education programs offered through these school districts provide adults an opportunity to return to school and complete their diploma requirements, making them eligible to continue on to advanced training at Nicholls or one of the technical colleges. A main deterrent for many adults desiring to continue their education is often the means to travel to the training facility. St. James Parish has developed a unique training model that addresses this hurdle through a grant from the Louisiana Community Development Block Grant Program (see **Figure 5**). The Parish has purchased and equipped a mobile education lab that can be brought to different central locations, making travel to the training program easier. The Technology Bus is fully equipped with



**Figure 5: St. James Technology Bus**

computers enabling the Parish to offer GED preparation, a Certified Nurse's Assistant course, basic computer training and job skills and readiness training for area adults. The Parish is developing plans and seeking partners to increase the kind and number of programs it can offer with this unique community asset.

The Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium (LUMCON) is another unique regional asset located at Cocodrie in Terrebonne Parish. LUMCON is a consortium of 13 Louisiana public universities. LUMCON offers a modern facility for marine science research, technology, and education. The facility includes classrooms, dormitories, and a harbor for vessels used in Gulf of Mexico research. Nicholls is the closest university to LUMCON and this has resulted in expansion of its marine biology department, which now offers a Masters Degree in Marine Biology. LUMCON and the Barataria Terrebonne National Estuary Program, housed on the NSU campus, work in concert under the direction of a common executive director.

Other training facilities include the Lafourche Merchant Marine Training Services, offering specialized training for those seeking a career in the marine industries and the Omega Institute of Cosmetology is located in Houma. In St. Charles Parish, programs are offered through the ITT Technical Institute offers degreed programs in computer technology and business administration and the Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc., provides apprenticeship programs. The Greater New Orleans Industrial Training Center provides ongoing OSHA and other industry related safety and training programs. The Region is within easy driving distance to a number of universities and colleges in Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and Lafayette and the education and training opportunities are very good.

The Louisiana Department of Labor has projected where the jobs are expected to be through the year 2012. This allows area workforce trainers and educators to program training efforts to ready the Region's residents for job entry in growing areas of the economy. In the Bayou Parishes, jobs in agriculture, fishing, forestry and hunting are expected to continue to decline and growth is anticipated in mining support activities, specialty trade contractors, transportation equipment manufacturing, transportation support activities, administrative and waste services, and food services and drinking places. The three River Region Parishes are combined in the New Orleans labor market where gains are expected in durable good wholesalers, specialty trade contractors, health care and social assistance, administrative and waste services, retail, and public administration.

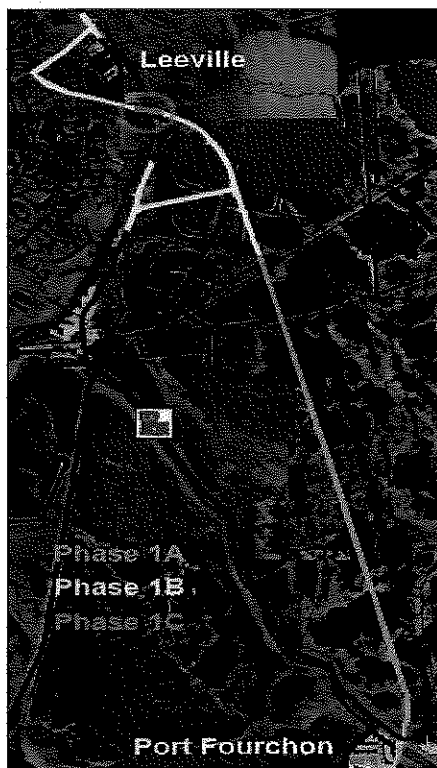
### ***Transportation Access***

The South Central Region is a transportation hub with all modes of transportation offered. It is the location of many small and large marine and inland boat builders.

#### **Highways**

Of primary concern to area residents is the condition of roads, in particular in relation to emergency preparedness, hurricane evacuation and transport of essential goods and services. Most of the area thoroughfares are substandard in terms of capacities and conditions. A prime example is the deplorable condition of La. Highway 1 in Lafourche Parish. The State began the initial phases of improvements in early 2006 with the start of construction on a new Bayou Lafourche Bridge at Leeville, a \$162 million job. La. Highway 1 is the only link between the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port (LOOP) and Port Fourchon, two Gulf Coast facilities of State and National significance, and the Louisiana mainland. The highway provides the only overland transport for supplies, emergency operations, personnel, and cargo to these two destinations. In several spots the road embankment is near collapse. **Figure 6** shows a schematic of the proposed phases of construction overlain across an aerial of the area. La. Highway 1 once followed a naturally high bayou ridge, and it is easy to see in the aerial how little land is left. Lost use of this

highway would be a serious economic blow to the Region, one that would be felt by the State and Nation as well.



**Figure 6 Proposed Leeville Bridge from the La. Dept. of Transportation and Development Website.**

U.S. Highway 90 is not only the major east-west route traversing the South Central Region, it also the historic southern trade route between the East and West Coasts of the United States. The highway has been upgraded to four lanes for much of its length through the Region, but still follows the general route of the "Old Spanish Trail." Highway 90 is the future corridor of Interstate 49 between Lafayette and New Orleans. It is also the "main street" of a number of older communities between Raceland in Lafourche Parish and the Westbank Expressway in Jefferson Parish. Most of these small communities are located in St. Charles Parish. In order to bring the highway up to the interstate standard for its full length, an alternative, elevated route that runs roughly parallel and south of the existing Highway 90 is being considered. An environmental impact statement on the proposal is expected to be completed in late 2007.

Access to the Veterans Memorial Mississippi River Bridge at Gramercy and Wallace in St. James Parish has been a hindrance for some time as there is no direct route on the West Bank of the River. The connection is now via the two-lane La. Highway 18, the River Road. This approach is seriously inadequate for the kind of traffic that is beginning to utilize the bridge. Construction finally got underway in 2006 on the connection between the bridge approach and La. Highway 3127, a first step in creating a longer connection south to U. S. Highway 90 (the future I-49 Corridor). This new stretch of roadway will greatly improve emergency response and evacuation efforts in the River

Region. Access from the east is via Airline Highway (U.S. Hwy. 61), La. Highway 3125 and Interstate 10.

Road and bridge crossings throughout the area are in serious need of improvements, repairs, and/or replacement, both geometric and surfacing. A serious and growing problem in some locations is traffic congestion as the pace of community growth is greater than the ability to upgrade/maintain the carrying capacities of roads and intersections. Inadequate traffic signage and signalization prevail in some areas.

### **Public Transit**

The South Central Region would greatly benefit from improved public transit opportunities. This would not only help reduce some congestion, but would improve access to job centers, health care and other essential trips for those with no or unreliable transportation. Much of the South Central Region is rural and there is not enough density to support traditional fixed route lines that prove to be most efficient. This has led to development of the kind of service better suited to sparsely populated areas, demand response. Terrebonne's Good Earth Transit and the St. James Parish Transit systems are providing good coverage in a cost effective manner in their respective territories. The Good Earth system is a fixed route service, taking advantage of the more densely developed areas within Houma and its immediate surrounding neighborhoods. The service offers routes into Thibodaux to enable riders to reach Nicholls State University. Additional routes in Thibodaux are being considered. In its rural bayou communities,



Terrebonne provides demand response service through a contract with the Parish Council on Aging. St. James offers a deviated fixed route service that works well in its rural communities with many of the rides being provided through prescheduled trips. It is hoped a recent commitment of local funds to match State and Federal grants will result in a new transit service covering St. Charles and St. John Parishes through the River Parishes Regional Transit Authority in the near future. Lafourche Parish is considering a new start service, too. The Assumption Parish Council on Aging offers a limited transportation service.

After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the State started a commuter service, LaSwift, between Baton Rouge and New Orleans on Interstate 10. The service is operated by the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority and has a stop in LaPlace. During the one year period between October 2005 and 2006, LaSwift counted 213,678 riders. The project is funded as part of the recovery effort by FEMA and is planned to continue through March 2007.

As the population continues to age, there will be a greater demand for convenience of services and alternative modes of transportation. In reviewing new plans for commercial and residential developments, South Central communities need to take into consideration the impact that deep setbacks, large lots, lack of sidewalks and other barriers have on creating and sustaining a good transit system. New developments should be given guidelines that provide a better layout that encourages alternative transportation modes.

#### **Pedestrians and Bicycles**

Many South Central communities are trying to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety and encourage these forms of transportation not only as a means to a healthier lifestyle but also as a way to improve mobility of different generations of inhabitants and reduce automobile congestion and pollution. Communities are taking advantage of Transportation Enhancement and Safe Routes to Schools programs to provide bicycle routes, sidewalks, traffic calming, lighting and other safety features that enhance these modes of transit. Terrebonne is developing a walkway along Bayou Terrebonne in Downtown Houma as a means not only to enhance the visual experience of the community, but to improve access to the many small businesses that dot the bayou side. Assumption Parish continues to look for funding alternatives to provide similar features in Napoleonville, the Parish seat of government. The three River Parishes are individually pursuing funding for separate links of a regional bicycle/walking path along each side of the Mississippi River. Cyclists use existing stretches of this path to travel to work and for pleasure. These bikers and the pedestrians who use the path along the crown of the Mississippi River levee enjoy a unique perspective of the Region's transportation resources and issues, international ship and barge traffic on one side, and automobile congestion on the other.

#### **Water Transportation**

The abundance of natural and manmade waterways contributes to the area's importance as a center of waterborne commerce. The major waterways include the Mississippi River, Bayou Lafourche, the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW), and the Houma Navigation Channel. Lower reaches of Bayous Grand Caillou, Terrebonne, Petit Caillou and Des Allemands provide access to natural safe harbors for smaller fishing and service vessels. The proximity to the Gulf of Mexico and major inland waterways has resulted in the location and growth of two ports important to the entire nation. These are the Port of South Louisiana on the Mississippi River and the Greater Lafourche Port Commission's Port Fourchon facility on the Gulf Coast. A third, new and emerging inland port, the Port of Terrebonne, is located at the confluence of the Houma Navigation Canal and the GIWW.

The geographic jurisdiction of the Port of South Louisiana covers all three of the River Parishes. It operates the Globalplex facility on the Mississippi River in Reserve. The facility has rail spurs providing access to the Kansas City Southern Rail and the Union Pacific and is in close proximity to Interstate 10,



making it an intermodal hub of activity. The Port handles more tonnage than any other port in the United States and its Globalplex facility is a desirable location for industries needing access to water and rail transportation. The Port is attempting to improve access further by seeking funding for a highway providing direct access to Globalplex from Interstate 10. This will improve travel and shipping time and help take the heavy truck traffic serving the facility off of area local roads.

While the Port of South Louisiana supports the import and export of raw materials and manufactured goods from all over the World, Port Fourchon supports the Gulf Coast's oil and gas industries. From this location supplies and workers are dispatched to all points offshore. The Port has facilities that serve maritime interests including fueling, docking, repairs and more.

The Port of Terrebonne recently obtained its first long term tenant, a tugboat builder, and several more have submitted plans for development. The Port anticipates that its site will be of interest to other ship builders and to barging operations along the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway.

### **Rail**

The South Central Region is served by two north-south rail lines and one east-west railroad. The Kansas City Southern (KCS) and the Union Pacific provide service between Baton Rouge and New Orleans along the East Bank of the Mississippi River on parallel lines. The Union Pacific has service along a line paralleling U. S. Highway 90 between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. A third rail line connecting New Orleans to Hammond, Louisiana, diverges north across Pass Manchac at LaPlace. The Union Pacific Railroad also offers service on its east to west line that runs parallel to the old Highway 90 route from New Orleans to all points west.

Amtrak offers passenger service between San Diego California and Jacksonville Florida on the Sunset Limited, running along the same rail corridor as the Union Pacific. There is one stop in the South Central Region, a limited service stop in Terrebonne Parish at Schriever. Nearby full service stops are found in New Orleans to the east and New Iberia and Lafayette on the west. However, service east of New Orleans has been temporarily discontinued as many of its depots and rail crossings have been ruined by the Hurricanes of 2005 and previous disasters along the eastern portion of the Gulf Coast. In New Orleans, riders can travel Amtrak on the City of New Orleans to Chicago and on the Crescent through to Atlanta, Washington, D.C. and New York.

Passenger rail service between New Orleans and Baton Rouge has been a long desired transportation alternative by many in the Region. Since the storms, efforts to push this service through have evolved from a need to move displaced workers between the two metropolises. Many residents of the most heavily damaged neighborhoods of the New Orleans Metropolitan Area are now living and working in the River Region or in Baton Rouge. The LaSwift service proved that there is a need for transportation of people between the two cities. Rail planners have worked out agreements between the Kansas City Southern and Amtrak to provide the service. Several stops are being considered and one is in LaPlace. The River Parishes Transit Authority is monitoring development of this proposal as it could be a great impetus for ridership on their evolving local bus service.

Rail service once extended south into Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes but the rail lines have been abandoned. Growth at Port Fourchon and the Terrebonne Port has generated renewed interest in rail service to these ports and the industries they serve.

### **Air**

The Houma-Terrebonne Airport and Industrial Park is located at the site of an old Naval Land Installation. The Airport has two intersecting runways, one 5,000 feet long and one 6,508 feet long. It

provides a base of support for operations that serve offshore enterprises, such as Petroleum Helicopters, Inc., Era Aviation, Air Logistics and a division of Edison Chouest and is home to the Hammonds Air Service which offers flying lessons and other crop dusting services. The property has also been developed as an industrial park and many of the tenants provide ancillary services and products for the oilfield. The Airport has a master plan which calls for longer runways and other improvements that will allow it to serve larger airplanes. The Thibodaux Municipal Airport provides housing and maintenance facilities for about nine or ten small single engine planes and helicopters. Its 2,999 feet long runway offers transient aircraft fueling and other assistance. St. John the Baptist Parish Airport has a 4,000 feet long runway and the Parish has taken great strides to improve the facilities and services it offers small general aviation craft. In 2002 the Greater Lafourche Port Commission took over the South Lafourche Leonard J. Miller, Jr., Airport in Galliano. The Port is moving forward with plans to improve the previously underutilized facility as a base for offshore transport services and as a possible location for worker housing. After the 2005 hurricane season, many support companies began looking for areas where operations could be better protected from storm surge and flooding. The Port Commission expanded the runway length to 6500 feet and made safety improvements to accommodate relocation and expanded services at the facility. It also plans to improve the drainage, sewerage, internal roadways and other airport infrastructure and services.

## ***Resources***

The principal resource of any locale is of course its people. The people of the South Central Region bring diverse experiences, talents, skills and knowledge to bear in accomplishing their common goal of creating economic opportunities while protecting the natural environment all cherish. The struggle to achieve a sustainable balance between developing and protecting the Region's natural resources impacts the daily life of residents.

### **Wildlife and Fishery Resources**

Most of the South Central Region land area and population are found within the Barataria Terrebonne Estuary, the most productive estuary in the world. Areas of the River Region on the east side of the Mississippi River are located in the Pontchartrain Basin. This has resulted in a diverse fishery industry that includes a variety of marine and freshwater fish species like oysters, shrimp, crabs, crawfish, catfish, menhaden and more. Inland wetlands of these two watersheds are spawning grounds for many more fish species. The total value of fisheries and wildlife production from the South Central Region in 2005 was over \$108 million.

Several unique botanical habitats have been located in the Region. These include coastal live oak, hackberry, and black mangrove swamps in Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes. The mangrove swamps are of particular interest to the State as they offer shelter and food source for the marine and land animals and help to stabilize the shoreline.

The Region's forested and marshy wetlands support the great variety of avian species that make the annual migration along the Mississippi Flyway. The great number of birds and other wildlife long ago gave Louisiana its nickname, "The Sportsman's Paradise." Louisiana's wetlands have not always been easily accessible to travelers. However, interest in seeing this natural wonder and the wildlife it supports has led to a small guided tour industry. Nearby Grand Isle has a bird watching festival that celebrates the annual trek of the great number of birds, especially waterfowl. National Wildlife Refuges offer education and walking trails and other amenities for those wanting to learn more about Louisiana's wetlands. There is one federal wildlife refuge, Mandalay, in the Region, located near Houma. The Mandalay Wildlife Refuge offers controlled hunting seasons and programs that monitor animal populations and protect sensitive and endangered habitats and species. The Refuge received a small grant to build a scenic overlook and is developing plans for better public access. Unfortunately for the South Central Region,

proposed Federal budget cuts for Refuge programs will affect Mandalay over the next three years. Interest in bird watching is a growing pastime and access to spots where interested persons can see the wildlife up close along with the guided tour businesses is opening an opportunity to generate tourism in the area. Funding cuts at the federal level threaten access and programs offered at the Refuge.

There are also a number of State Wildlife Management Areas in the South Central Region, including Elm Hall in Assumption Parish, Pointe aux Chenes in Terrebonne, Wisner in Lafourche Parish, Bonnet Carre Spillway and Salvador/Timkin in St. Charles, Manchac in St. John the Baptist and the Maurepas Swamp in St. John and St. James. Wildlife Management Areas offer public lands where hunting and fishing is closely monitored and provide areas for the scenic enjoyment of the public. The Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries closely monitors activity on these lands and offers educational programs to adults and children alike. The Department also operates several refuges. One is in the South Central Region, the Terrebonne Barrier Islands Refuge found in the Isles Dernieres Chain located across the coastline of Terrebonne Parish. Three islands, Wine Island, Whiskey Island, and Raccoon Island were acquired in June of 1992 from Louisiana Land and Exploration Company via a 25-year free lease to create the Refuge. The three islands comprise a total of approximately 630 acres, although the lease agreement covers several thousand acres of water.

Much of the Louisiana fishing fleet is composed of small independent fishermen, usually operating one family boat. These fishermen were hard hit by Katrina and Rita. Many suffered damage to their boats and homes. Boats were stranded on mud flats or smashed against each other, docks and other structures. Conversations with some area fishermen indicate this may have been the death knell for many who have enjoyed this way of life for generations. Small business loans and tax incentives are largely unavailable to fishermen as their boats are not treated that same as real estate and they tend to be sole proprietors. Programs designed for specific needs of this sector of the economy are needed if Louisiana's fishing industry is to survive.

Changes in coastal wetland and upland habitats affect the fish and wildlife species the areas support. Scientists who study the region's wetland dynamics are concerned that many coastal species are on the verge of collapse. For example, speckled trout are moving further inland to spawn in areas that are now ideal for their growth. This is creating a large number of trout in the short run, but if more saline marshes replace the intermediate and fresh marsh this species can tolerate, its numbers will decline in the long run.

As already mentioned, the vast wetlands also provide a buffer against tidal and storm surge flooding, absorbing the energy of such waves before they hit heavily populated higher ground.

#### **Agricultural and Forestry Resources**

The natural levees of the Mississippi River and its multitude of distributaries are prime agriculture land. Due to the rich soil and the temperate climate a variety of agriculture commodities can be grown. However, the dominant crop is sugarcane, yielding sugar and molasses products. In the South Central Region, the 2005 annual gross value of sugar products exceeded \$81.2 million. Assumption Parish is one of Louisiana's smallest parishes but produces over 8% of Louisiana's sugar product. Five mills and one of Louisiana's two existing refineries are located in the Region. A new refinery is planned for the St. John the Baptist community of LaPlace as the sugar industry tries to restructure itself to take advantage of improved sugar trade opportunities when NAFTA allotments are lifted in 2008.

Soybeans and vegetables are also grown. Truck farms providing a variety of produce are found throughout the Region. One unique farmland area identified in St. James Parish is on the East Bank of the Mississippi River. There a small area is found in which the world's only Perique tobacco is grown, highly prized in Europe as a rare blending tobacco.

Many areas of the Region, in particular Lafourche Parish, offer natural pastureland that is suitable for grazing, especially for cattle and horses. Goats and swine are raised in smaller numbers. The gross value of livestock produced within the region during 2005 was over \$18 million, with the great bulk of this, \$11 million, generated in Lafourche Parish.

The old large cypress swamps of early Louisiana are largely gone and forestry is not a major economic stimulus in the South Central Region. However, there are some isolated stands of large cypress that are under scrutiny for development and for conservation. These are areas of invaluable habitat, supporting the wildlife and fisheries mentioned previously and offering Louisiana coastal communities a generous storm buffer. Concern has generated over use of such a valuable resource for a most unlikely and, for what many believe to be, a seemingly wasteful use, mulch.

### **Oil and Gas**

The oil and gas industry began in Louisiana in 1901 with completion of an oil well near Jennings in southwest Louisiana. In 1947, Kerr McGee constructed the first well out of site of land in waters south of Terrebonne Parish. In 2004 there were 15,660 producing wells just in the South Central Region, over 13,000 of which were in Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes. In 2005 there were 184 active rigs in Louisiana, 79 offshore, 23 in inland waters and 82 on land. In that year, the State of Louisiana produced 482.8 million barrels of crude oil and condensate from both on and off shore sites. When offshore production is taken into account, the State is the number one producer of oil and the second largest producer of natural gas in the United States. In 2005, 37% of all natural gas and oil produced in the Gulf's offshore waters was at a depth greater than 200 meters. The State estimates that there are about 40,000 miles of pipeline throughout the State moving oil and gas from production sites to storage, refining or further distribution centers. They estimate 7,000 miles of the pipelines are in offshore waters. Four of the State's 18 refineries are located in the South Central Region, three in St. Charles and one in St. James Parish.

Oil and gas prices have gone through some wild fluctuations making it hard to predict the future economy. In their 2006 report, Scott and Richardson noted that the historical facts are that as fuel prices rise, consumers adjust their spending habits to reduce their need for oil. They also mentioned that a large find in the Gulf of Mexico 270 miles southwest of New Orleans is the largest find in the past 38 years, which could be a good indication of future growth potential for the South Central oil and gas cluster.

### **Salt**

After petroleum production, salt (halite) is the primary mineral mined in Louisiana. Louisiana's coastline is dotted with salt domes, a geologic formation associated with oil and gas pools. Salt strata are more buoyant than other sediments and are pushed up due to pressure from surrounding deposits of sediments, forming domes, pillars or other formations. Fractures created around the salt formation as it is pushed upward trap oil and gas, creating pools. Salt domes stand out along the relatively flat Louisiana coastline, the most famous being Avery Island. Salt is used in a great variety of processes. In the South Central Region, brine is produced from one of the State's largest salt dome operations in Assumption Parish. The brine is used in manufacturing processes.

### ***Environment***

As mentioned earlier, the Region's natural environment permeates economic and development decision making. Therefore many aspects of this topic have already been addressed. Environmental factors may play a role in decisions by companies or people to relocate or expand. The factors may involve inability to meet regulatory requirements or preference to locate away from environmental problems. On the other hand, it may be that people choose to locate where favorable environmental conditions support their

business endeavors or a chosen lifestyle. Following is a summary of environmental factors not considered elsewhere.

#### **Air Quality**

Baton Rouge is the only CO non-attainment area in the State. Ascension Parish is included in the non-attainment area and it lies directly adjacent to Assumption and St. James Parishes, however neither has as yet been affected by the non-attainment levels. Monitoring stations are found in each parish.

#### **Water Quality**

Water quality is a major concern throughout the Region. Humans come into frequent contact with water bodies due to their jobs involving fisheries, agriculture, petroleum, waterborne commerce or due to recreational boating, swimming and fishing activities. Contact with contaminated waters is a health concern for humans and a concern for the Region's fishery and wildlife resources. Poor water quality can impact industries. For example, salt water intrusion further inland along Bayou Lafourche is a concern for the Valentine Paper Mill which uses a large amount of fresh water in its processes. The Region's sugarcane industry needs large quantities of potable water for the milling and refinery operations.

The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality issues periodic advisories concerning fish taken from and/or swimming in certain streams. The full advisories are posted on their website. At the time of this writing the following advisories were in effect.

- Advisory concerning frequent consumption of bowfish (choupique or grinnel) caught in Blind River (St. James and St. John Parishes) due to Mercury contamination.
- Advisory against the frequency of consumption of King Mackerel, blackfin tuna, cobia and greater amberjack caught in Gulf of Mexico waters due to Mercury contamination.

Mercury accumulates in the food chain and species at the top are often the most contaminated. Mercury poisoning is especially dangerous to pregnant women and young children as the affects can be lasting.

Of concern is the impact poorly treated wastewater can have on the Region's water. Rapid growth in the Region has outpaced the ability of local governments to provide regional sewage treatment systems. The linear development pattern found in the area increases the cost of providing the network of force mains and sewer lines that are essential to such systems. New development tends to rely upon small community package plants or individual homeowner plants that run on the household electrical system. After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, long periods of electrical outages put the private individual plants out of service and resulted in discharging untreated sewage into area waterbodies. Use of such systems also requires larger lots, contributing to sprawl and increasing the cost of construction and maintenance of any future public sewer lines. Area governments are looking into ways to provide public treatment systems that will avoid potential problems and forestall increasing costs of constructing sewers and providing service.

#### **Waste Sites and the Brownfield Program**

SCPDC has been awarded an EPA grant to provide funding assistance for brownfield sites. The grant pays for Phase I and II Environmental Site Assessments. A brownfield is an abandoned, idle or under-used industrial and/or commercial facility where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination. Because of such real or perceived contamination and the profusion of government regulation in such instances, business and industry often choose to look for new sites to avoid potential problems and may move outside the region to develop or expand. The EPA Brownfields Economic Redevelopment Initiative helps communities revitalize such properties both environmentally and economically thus offering an incentive to return a real or perceived tainted property

into the market place. The State of Louisiana has established a similar program to address properties that may be outside the scope of EPA. This state program is The Voluntary Remediation Program. These programs do not fund actual clean up, but rather provide assistance in assessing what must be done to clean up a particular site. Once sites are cleaned to the recommended standard, the EPA or State would provide documentation to the owner that the work is complete. The documentation allows the owner of the site to decrease his/her liability and thus find better financing opportunities to return the property to use.

EPA brownfield grant funds received by SCPDC have been used to conduct Phase I reports for single family housing provided by Habitat for Humanity on residential and commercial lots in Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes and two church community centers, one in Napoleonville and one in Labadieville. Two ongoing Phase II studies are being conducted on an old municipal waste site in Thibodaux and abandoned wastewater treatment ponds in Reserve. Thibodaux plans to reuse the old waste site for expansion of a public park. The abandoned wastewater treatment ponds are located in Globalplex and if these can be closed, the Port will use the land for further industrial activity. SCPDC has received two new grants from EPA to address brownfields and hopes to provide 14 Phase I and four Phase II Environmental Assessments through the combined funding.

In the South Central Planning and Development District, the EPA identified 50 locations that are no longer under their regulatory jurisdiction that could be potential brownfield candidates. The State of Louisiana's List of Inactive and Abandoned Sites indicates there are other locations which could be considered for assessment by the State. There were two Voluntary Remediation Program sites in the Region as of June 2005, Buddy B's Restaurant in Garyville and Acadian Shipyards, Inc., in Bourg.

### **Scenic Streams**

Four waterways in the Region are designated on the Louisiana Natural and Scenic Rivers list. These are Blind River in St. James and St. John the Baptist Parishes; Bayous LaBranche and Trepagnier in St. Charles Parish; and Bayou des Allemands in Lafourche and St. Charles Parishes. In order to be designated a "scenic stream", the stream must be in free flowing condition, have not been channelized, cleared, or snagged within the past 25 years, and have not been realigned, inundated or otherwise altered, have a shoreline covered by native vegetation and have had no or few manmade structures along its banks.

### **Endangered Species**

The Louisiana Natural Heritage Program of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries tracks threatened, rare, and endangered plant and animal species and unique habitats. Through this program a number of endangered or threatened species have been found in the Region, including the Bald Eagle and the Red Wolf. Through the efforts of local, State, and Federal conservation agencies and group, several once endangered species are now on the reappearing in number, including the Louisiana brown pelican and the American alligator. Alligator populations in Louisiana wetlands have grown to such success that a controlled hunting season has been put in place by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

### **Floodplains**

All of the Planning District is in a floodplain, although there are varying degrees of the likelihood of flooding. Changes in Louisiana's coastal landscape have increased the flood potential in areas once considered high and dry. All 12 of the communities in the Region participate in the National Flood Insurance Program and several maintain Community Rating System status. The Community Rating System (CRS) rewards communities that undertake floodplain management activities beyond the minimum requirements. It is a point system program that reduces flood insurance premiums for citizens of participating communities. In the wake of the 2005 hurricanes, FEMA is developing new NFIP maps

that will give revised base flood elevations for many areas. In the interim FEMA issued advisory elevations for all new or substantially damaged structures.

### **Coastal Management Programs**

Much of South Louisiana is comprised of wetlands: swamp or marshlands. Uses of such areas are governed by State and Federal wetland regulations. The State of Louisiana Coastal Management Program requires coastal use permits for particular uses in the designated coastal zone when the uses occur on lands outside of fastlands (the leveed areas) and below 5 feet mean sea level. A Parish may adopt a Local Coastal Use Program and assume limited permit review for uses that the State has determined to be of "local concern". These include primarily small maintenance projects. Several parishes in the District have chosen to implement such local coastal use programs including St. Charles, St. James, Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes. St. John is working on completion of its local coastal management plan. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredge and fill permits are also required for most activities in the wetlands.

The Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary covers most of the Region. The Estuary also encompasses all or parts of the neighboring parishes of St. Mary, Ascension, Iberville, Point Coupe, Jefferson, Orleans, and Plaquemines. The Barataria-Terrebonne area includes 4,400 square miles of wetland and waterways. The region offers a multitude of opportunities from commercial fishing and trapping to a range of water recreational activities. The proximity to navigable waterways and the Gulf of Mexico offers a natural network for water trade.

The Federal Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act (1990), and the Louisiana Wetlands Fund established under the state's Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Fund (1980) together provide approximately \$50 to \$60 million annually for coastal restoration in Louisiana. Under the federal legislation, better known as the Breaux Bill, federal, state, and local agencies work together in a planning process involving proposal, review, selection, funding, and implementation of projects. State funds are often used to supplement federal funds for approved projects.

## ***Public Utilities***

### **Electricity, Gas, Telephone**

The Region is served by a number of public utility companies including gas, electric, and telephone. The low cost of natural gas and electricity was at one time a major attraction for heavy industries locating in the Region. In 2002, Louisiana was not only one of the largest producers of energy fuels, the State consumed more than any other state. Of the total consumed, 62% was for industrial purposes, 21% was for transportation and 8% was used for commercial purposes. Many of the State's industries use natural gas to power their plants and the oil and gas refineries use it in the refining processes.

### **Fiber Optics**

A growing issue in the Region is lack of access to fiber optics for high speed transmission of data. Fiber optic lines are limited and are needed for much of today's technology.

**Water** is provided throughout the Region by parish, municipal or special district governments. Water is obtained from the Mississippi River and Bayou Lafourche. The capacity of treatment plants in some communities is being strained and, in others, the potable water system is threatened by salt water intrusion. Rapid growth resulting from relocation of families and businesses post Hurricanes Katrina and Rita into the River Region has put a strain on the capacity of water treatment plants in St. Charles and St. John. The latter anticipate several new major food processing industries and 800 to 1000 new homes all within the space of a year in the same water district. This has led the Parish to seek help to immediately

rectify the situation in particular due to the amount of water several of these food processing industries, like a new sugar refinery, will need.

St. Charles Parish, in the New Orleans MSA, reports an increase in businesses relocating from New Orleans to the Parish's East Bank. Even before the storms, firms in the warehousing and transportation sectors had begun leaving the City to avoid traffic congestion. Post-disaster, reduced capacity of City infrastructure has become a factor. Industrial and commercial parks off Airline Highway on the east side of the River are 100% occupied. The Parish is encouraging relocating businesses to consider the West Bank, which has its only remaining non-wetland tracts open for development. In the meantime the rapid growth has taxed the East Bank water supply and the Parish is moving forward with a plan to link the West and East Bank treatment plants via a pipeline under the Mississippi River, a possibility today due to advances in drilling technology.

Gramercy is working on upgrading its aging water treatment plant. Other older or remote communities suffer from low pressure due to undersized waterlines or inadequate pumping capacity.

Bayou Lafourche is the primary source of drinking water in three South Central parishes, Assumption, Lafourche and Terrebonne. In southern Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes, concern has been raised about the increasing influx of salt water in the vicinity of the Lafourche Parish water plant intake pipe. The Bayou once had an ample supply of freshwater as it was a major distributary of the Mississippi River. Steamboats once transported people from Donaldsonville on the River to areas near the Gulf. Annual flooding along the Bayou led to its being dammed off from the River in 1903. Later a pump was located at Donaldsonville to keep freshwater flowing into the Bayou. The Lafourche Parish Water District built a water treatment plant and intake pipe at a point centrally located to its customers near Lockport. In recent years there has been an occasional problem with salt water reaching the plant's intake system. Now the event is becoming more frequent and lasting for a longer period of time. In 2006, the Water District issued several advisories to persons who have salt intolerance health conditions and the Bayou Lafourche Freshwater District (which maintains the pump and flow of water through Bayou Lafourche) barricaded off the Company Canal in the Lockport area to stop saltwater from further encroaching into Bayou Lafourche. Concern about the saline content of the water has also been expressed by area businesses, in particular the Valentine Paper Mill located near the Water District Plant. The paper mill relies upon freshwater in its operation and is concerned that continued saltwater problems could affect its economic viability. Salt water is now encroaching from two sources, the Company Canal and from lower reaches of Bayou Lafourche that have become increasingly saline.

There are some areas in the Region where well water might be found, but only St. John Parish utilizes a well operation for potable water, the Ruddock Well. In other areas the wells are used primarily for agricultural or industrial purposes.

**Wastewater treatment** is a primary concern throughout much of the Region due to the affects untreated wastewater has on potable water sources and the fishing industry, in particular the oyster industry. All of the Region's municipalities have sewerage systems and some of these systems serve areas directly adjacent to the towns. St. John, St. Charles and Terrebonne have municipal systems covering the most densely populated areas of the parishes. However for the most part, the rural or remote portions the Region either lack municipal facilities or rely on small, self-contained package plants that serve limited areas. The problem with provision of wastewater treatment systems is the distance between remote communities in need of sewerage and the primary municipal treatment facilities. The distance has made it too costly to tie-in many communities to a large central sewerage treatment plant and thus the reliance on community and individual plants. A number of communities have sought Louisiana Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and Louisiana Municipal Facilities Loans to offset the cost. St.



James and Lafourche Parishes are looking into the feasibility of creating a series of smaller regional plants located around centers of population that could be constructed through a combination of loans, front foot assessments and grants.

South Central Planning and Development Commission was fortunate to receive two EPA grants to address the sewerage needs of the Region. Through the grants, SPCDC will develop two feasibility analyses concerning availability of and need for treatment capacity and the potential for sharing or regionalizing treatment capacities. The report will make recommendations for priority projects and give possibilities for funding each. One report will cover Assumption, Lafourche, Terrebonne and St. Mary Parishes and a second one will cover the West Banks of St. Charles, St. James and St. John the Baptist Parishes. A similar study conducted through the Pontchartrain Basin covered the East Bank of these three Parishes.

Treatment of drainage pump outfall waters is not so advanced. Generally drainage water is pumped outside the particular location's levee area. While concern has been expressed about the damage to fisheries from untreated wastewater, a side benefit noted in some areas is the return of properly treated water as a source of freshwater to wetland areas that are dwindling from saltwater intrusion.

**Solid Waste Handling and Disposal** is an issue that impacts all of the South Central Region. All communities are in compliance with solid waste handling and disposal regulations. The communities have their waste hauled pursuant to publicly bid contracts. Throughout the Nation, communities resist being the host for a waste disposal site. However, with the growing population and the need to properly dispose of waste, concern is growing over cost of transporting municipal waste to distant sites. SCPDC formed the South Central Regional Solid Waste Disposal Authority to monitor trends and technologies and make recommendations for disposal and transport of waste. It is hoped that through a regional cooperative venture of this sort, shared facilities or transportation alternatives might help keep the costs lower. Recycling has turned out to be an expensive means to reduce waste except in two areas. Newspapers can and are recycled by a private paper company that has drop-off locations throughout the region. The company is a subsidiary of a large newspaper publishing company that makes its own newsprint with the recycled paper, making it an affordable option. Schools and churches take advantage of the drop off containers as a small fund raising operation. Yard waste can also be recycled by returning it to mulch. Lafayette has developed a cost effective method of doing this and the mulch is used by area residents in home and small vegetable gardens. While South Central Parishes do not have a similar public program, they do encourage homeowners to reuse yard waste in their home gardens.

Through its Revolving Loan Program, the SCPDC has supported the efforts of one private endeavor to recycle an agricultural byproduct. Bagasse is a byproduct of the sugarcane milling process. It is the ground up stalks and leaves not converted into sugar products. The material has been used to make ceiling tiles and other commodities. A new company that has received a loan through SCPDC is using the product to make mulch and absorbent materials used in the oil field.

## ***Housing***

In 1900 there were 112,597 total housing units in the region. Of this approximately 69% were owner occupied, about 21% were renter occupied and there was a 10% vacancy rate. In 2000 there were 125,175 housing units available. Much of the housing, 61.48% was built prior to 1980. The Census Bureau estimated that the number of houses grew to 131,382 in 2004. The 2005 hurricane resulted in the devastation of a large number of the State's housing stock and the impact has rippled throughout South Louisiana.

As seen in the **Table 7**, during 2000, 73% of the housing units were single family dwellings and another 17.7% were mobile or manufactured units, boats and recreational vehicles or vans. This means that somewhat less than 10% of the units were apartments or condominiums. A majority of the housing units were owner occupied, 72% and a good number, about 25%, had no mortgage. Median values of South Central homes were below the National median value of \$119,600. Only St. Charles had housing valued above the State's median of \$85,000. In 2000, roughly 68% of Louisiana and 66.2% of the Nation's housing units were owner occupied.

Every parish in the Region offers subsidized housing, emergency housing, and weatherization programs, to those persons eligible based upon income. Subsidized housing is offered through a mixture of scattered sites and central locations. The City of Thibodaux, due to its size, has its own Section 8 Housing and Housing Rehabilitation Programs in addition to that offered by Lafourche Parish. All of the Parishes but Assumption have Housing Authorities which operate multi-family housing units. There are also some private developments built through the USDA Rural Utilities Service Subsidized housing program that offer rental assistance based upon income need. The Terrebonne Council on Aging operates one housing complex for senior citizens and recently announced it will build a second facility and access will be based upon income and need.

American Community Survey data for 2005 is only available for Lafourche and Terrebonne. The information provided by the Census Bureau shows an increase of 4,287 dwelling units just in these two parishes. Occupancy rates remain high, 87% in Lafourche and 90% in Terrebonne.

**Table 7: 2000 Housing Statistics by Parish and Region and 2004 Estimated Number of Houses**

	Assump tion	Lafourche	St. Charles	St. James	St. John	Terrebonne	Region
Total Housing Units	9,635	35,045	17,430	7,605	15,532	39,928	125,175
1 Unit Detached	6,302	24,986	13,198	5,394	11,750	27,676	89,306
1 Unit Attached	102	533	370	76	326	662	2,069
Percent Single Family (not mobile homes)	66.47%	72.82%	77.84%	71.93%	77.75%	70.97%	73.00%
Mobile Homes & RV, Boast, Van	3,034	6,351	1,972	1,590	2,049	7,177	22,173
% mobile homes, RV, etc/	31.49%	18.12%	11.31%	20.91%	13.19%	17.97%	17.71%
Built prior to 1980	5,940	22,696	9,622	4,892	8,168	25,638	76,956
% built prior to 1980	61.65%	64.76%	55.20%	64.33%	52.59%	64.21%	61.48%
Occupied units	8,239	32,057	16,422	6,992	14,283	35,997	113,990
% Occupied	85.51%	91.47%	94.22%	91.94%	91.96%	90.15%	91.06%
No vehicle available	1,042	3,000	1,049	715	1,354	3,296	10,456
% no vehicles	10.81%	8.56%	6.02%	9.40%	8.72%	8.25%	8.35%
Owner Occupied	6,921	24,998	13,374	5,982	11,573	27,212	90,060
% owner occupied	71.83%	71.33%	76.73%	78.66%	74.51%	68.15%	71.95%
Median Value	\$78,800.00	\$78,900.00	\$104,200.00	\$81,500.00	\$83,500.00	\$80,500.00	
Median mortgage	\$738.00	\$754.00	\$959.00	\$795.00	\$804.00	\$784.00	
Not mortgaged	2,321	9,953	3,909	2,573	3,243	9,099	31,098
% no mortgage	24.09%	28.40%	22.43%	33.83%	20.88%	22.79%	24.84%
Median Rent	\$ 368.00	\$ 402.00	\$ 507.00	\$ 317.00	\$ 489.00	\$ 460.00	
Ave. Household Size	2.85	2.75	2.90	3.00	2.98	2.86	
2004 Estimate	10,087	36,360	18362	7849	16632	42092	131,382

*Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census*

The severe housing shortage in New Orleans has turned the district's growth areas into bedroom communities for people commuting into the city for work. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reports 204,700 housing units in the state were destroyed or sustained major damage. The bulk of these units were located in New Orleans and its environs. Before the storms, the 2000 CEDS noted ongoing residential, retail and service industry expansion already occurring in LaPlace in St. John the Baptist Parish. Post-disaster, the *2006 Louisiana Economic Outlook* noted the same trend in the Houma MSA (Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes), identified in the 2000 CEDS as the region's largest growth center. St. Charles Parish reports new subdivisions under development, with all lots pre-sold.

The high percentage of home ownership and occupancy rates contributes to the stability of the Region. It may also contribute to the inability of individuals to find suitable housing. Scott and Richardson estimated that the population of the Houma MSA swelled by 62,810 evacuees immediately following the storms but the number dropped to an estimated 4,401 based upon postal address changes. Some believe reasons people left included the shortage of housing.

Area shipyards and manufacturers have noted the short supply of laborers. Unemployment is low and many companies are looking for workers outside the Region. Accommodating the influx of workers is difficult with the housing supply of the Region being as it is so at least some companies have decided to supply their own housing. For example Bollinger Shipyards has set up temporary housing within its facility and one company in Assumption Parish has bought an old trailer park with the intention of offering it as company housing. This has led to some concerns as many of the new workers are foreign, in particular from Mexico or South American countries, and do not speak the language. The South Central Region does not have a long history of Spanish immigrants or workers and the language barrier is a real problem for those seeking health care, transportation, basic necessities, and the other social services offered through various agencies.

Issues with the provision of new housing include remoteness of inexpensive land from public infrastructure and services, retail and medical centers, and adding to the conditions of sprawl. In some cases these lands are more marginal and are situated away from higher ground adjacent to natural bayous and thus are more flood-prone. Another issue is the increasing vulnerability to flooding due to changes in the Region's landscape. Throughout the Region, poor choices in housing locations are being made based upon land values only without consideration for the distance and time and ability to travel to schools, services, jobs and medical or retail centers. Many roads within the Region are already at capacity and without sufficient public transit, poorly sited or spread out housing lends to the problem. Many of these new developments are relying upon individual package plants, increasing the risk of nonpoint source pollution caused by poorly maintained plants. Others are developing land around community package plants with limited capacity, which will eventually increase the public's maintenance costs as the numbers of such plants grow. Parishes and municipalities need to devise ways to encourage new development in places where infrastructure already exists.

After the 2005 Hurricane season, the State mandated adoption of the State Uniform Code (the International Building Code and other national model codes) by January 2007. The Uniform Code provides minimum standards for construction and offers standards for building in hurricane zones. The new code will greatly improve building standards and give owners some assurance of a building's ability to withstand conditions generated during hurricanes. The same or similar codes are enforced throughout the United States. Many fear the Code will drive up the cost of new homes while others are sure it will improve the safety factor of housing and lend to its long term durability. There will be a cost to communities to implement the code, including hiring and training staff to review permit requests and conduct the required follow up inspections. In order to avoid some of these costs, South Central

communities have organized a regional building code committee that is looking into the possibility of creating a regional building inspection team. This working committee of the Region's planning and building officials meets frequently in an effort to work out the details of a potential interagency agreement to accomplish the objective.

## Insurance

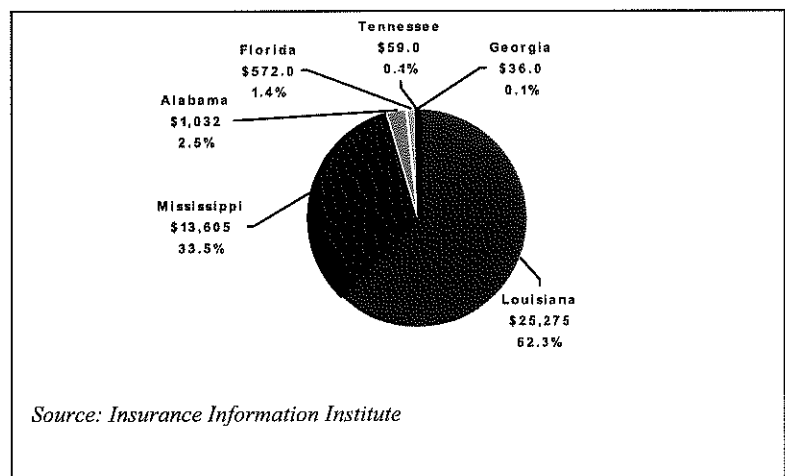
Concern about insurance is growing among Louisiana homeowners and businessmen. Hurricane Katrina generated the largest single loss in insurance history, more than the combined damage inflicted in 2004 by Hurricane Ivan and other storms. The amount of claims paid for Hurricane Katrina was double the size of the National Floodplain Insurance Program. Almost 56% of the 1.7 million insurance claims generated by Katrina were from Louisiana (see **Figure 7**). In 2006, many homeowners and businesses received annual premium statements that were much higher than any previous year, if they were reinsured at all. In late 2006, St. Paul Travelers Cos., Inc., announced it would not renew small and mid-sized commercial policies in New Orleans, Lafayette and Lake Charles Metropolitan areas in 2007 in order to reduce its risk. Traveler's provides 14% of Louisiana's commercial coverage. This has led many to believe that other insurers might pull out of coastal areas. State Farm has not written new homeowner's policies south of Louisiana's Interstate 10 for many years. Allstate announced it would no longer insure customers south of Alexandria unless it is an existing customer moving elsewhere within the State. The Farm Bureau and Allstate are no longer providing wind and hail coverage for their clients, but are referring them to the State insurance program of last resort.

Many people are finding themselves forced to turn to the Louisiana Citizen's Property Insurance Corporation, the State run insurer of last resort. The Corporation oversees Louisiana's Coastal and Fair Access to Insurance Requirements (FAIR) Insurance programs. The emergency reserves of the Corporation were wiped out when the FAIR Plan had hurricane losses totaling \$1.07 billion. Louisiana officials expect that the Corporation's policyholders will incur a 20% premium surcharge in the next year to cover insurers' passed-on assessment (an average of 15%) and the cost of issuing bonds (5%) to pay for Katrina claims and to increase the reserves. A recent article in the New Orleans

Times Picayune noted that that premiums offered through the State program are expected to rise dramatically, 138.4% increase in rates for commercial properties and 31.7% for homeowners.

The Houma Courier reported on August 1, 2006, two examples of the impact of rising insurance costs on home owners in Terrebonne Parish. The Farm Bureau dropped wind and hail coverage for one individual. The cost in the previous year was \$700 and the new cost through the Citizens plan was \$3,000. The homeowner got the premium down to \$1,800 by reducing the home's insured value and increasing his deductible. Another resident saw an increase from \$2,200 to \$6,200 through American National Insurance even though there were no claims on the property.

**Figure 7: Hurricane Katrina Insured Losses by State (\$ millions)**



Many within the Region fear that the cost of insurance will prevent people from attaining homeownership and affect small businesses, thus hindering economic stability and growth.

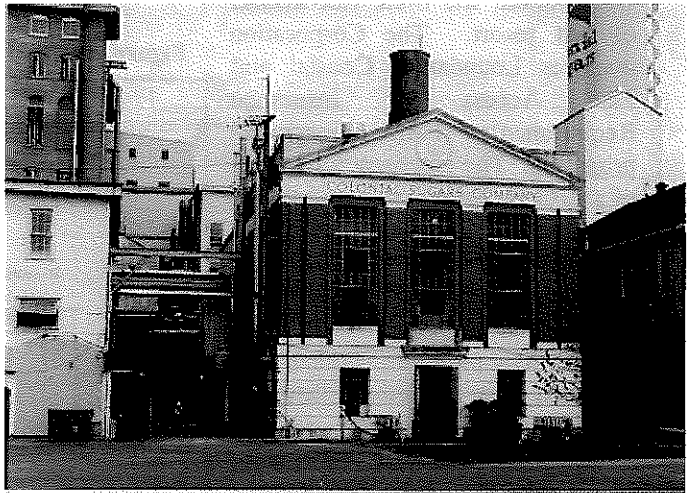
### ***Cultural and Historic Resources***

The South Central Region values its cultural and historic heritage. Louisiana has many ancient Native American sites. One in the neighboring Acadiana Regional Development District has been carbon dated to within 260 years of 2490 B.C. There are many places of historic interest scattered throughout the Region. Early European explorers traveled and settled along the Mississippi River and its major distributaries, Bayous Lafourche and Terrebonne. Some communities date from the time Acadians arrived from Nova Scotia in the 1700's.

**Archaeological Resources:** The earliest Native Americans of Louisiana lived in small nomadic groups collectively identified as early Paleo-Indians. The groups remained in areas only as long as food was plentiful. Sites left by these groups are uncommon because what little they left has been eroded or washed away by rain, the shifting Mississippi River and its distributaries, and sea level rise. Later Paleo-Indians and their successors built more permanent encampments and remnants of these groups are more common. While the Region contains sites associated with the archaic mound complex of Louisiana and numerous shell midden sites, none of these prehistoric archaeological sites are open to the public. Generally the State prefers not to publicize the location of possible archaeological sites in order to protect locations from unauthorized digging.

**Historic Buildings:** There are a number of historic buildings in the Region which are open to the public including Madewood, E. D. White, Laurel Valley, Southdown, Oak Alley, Laura, San Francisco, and Destrehan Plantations. These offer examples of rural Louisiana antebellum life. Other buildings of historic significance include many of the early churches in South Central Louisiana such as: St. Michael Catholic Church in St. James Parish, Christ Episcopal Church in Napoleonville, and St. John's Episcopal Church and Cemetery in Thibodaux. There are over 70 sites in the Region that have received designation on the National Register of Historic Places, however only the following are considered of national significance.

**Figure 8: Colonial Sugar Company Historic District, from the National Register Website.**



- Madewood Plantation House, Assumption Parish
- Edward Douglas White House, Lafourche Parish
- Homeplace Plantation House, St. Charles Parish
- Kenner and Kugler Cemeteries Archaeological District, St. Charles Parish
- Bayou Jasmine Archaeological Site, St. John the Baptist Parish
- Evergreen Plantation, St. John the Baptist Parish
- San Francisco Plantation House, St. John the Baptist Parish
- Whitney Plantation Historic District, St. John the Baptist Parish
- Colonial Sugars Historic District, St. James Parish (see **Figure 8**)
- Manresa House of Retreats, St. James Parish

- Oak Alley Plantation (Bon Sejour), St. James Parish
- Southdown Plantation House, Terrebonne Parish

Sixteen other sites are designated as of State significance and about 47 others are of local significance. In addition to the historic districts on the list of sites of national significance, there are three others in the region, the Garyville Historic District and the Downtowns of Thibodaux and Houma. Thibodaux and Houma each have successful Main Street Programs. Main Street and historic district programs together raise the significance of the buildings as an ensemble and encourage the maintenance of the original architectural features of each building.

*Louisiana: Where Culture Means Business*, a report prepared by Mt. Auburn Associates for the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, noted a significant concentration of businesses involved in the culinary arts coupled with strong culinary art programs at Nicholls State University in the "Bayou Region" (Assumption, Lafourche, St. Mary and Terrebonne Parishes). The three River Parishes are grouped into the larger New Orleans Metropolitan Region making it difficult to isolate information in the report that is pertinent to them. It is safe to say that there is a lot of potential for growth in the area of cultural economies. Two areas mentioned in the report that are of interest to the South Central Region are the growing Chef John Folse Institute of the Culinary Arts at Nicholls, the only public university program offering a Bachelor of Arts Degree in culinary arts in the United States, and the numerous fairs and festivals, favorite local traditions. These fairs and festivals offer a means to distribute art work, including music, fine arts, food and so on, and many attract large numbers of tourists.

Art programs could play a stronger role in the economic development tool kit of the Region. South Louisiana has a strong cultural identity and involvement in the arts, but it seems to be taken for granted. However, there are companies and higher skilled professionals who seek to locate in a region based upon the arts and entertainment offered to employees and family. Better promotion and outlet for the Region's cultural activities will enhance economic development efforts.

## ***Health Care***

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita severely damaged Louisiana's capacity to deliver healthcare. According to a report by the Louisiana Public Affairs Research Council (April 2006), prior to Hurricane Katrina, there were 4,083 staffed hospital beds in Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes. In the Spring of 2006, there were 1,984. Additionally there was a 79% decrease in the number of Orleans Parish physicians and a 51% decrease in the number of licensed nursing home beds. Many of the hospitals in New Orleans were the large regional hospitals that provided specialty care and services not offered elsewhere in the State. Two were the teaching grounds for Louisiana's largest medical schools, Louisiana State University at Charity Hospital and Tulane University at Tulane Hospital. Although Tulane has reopened, Charity has not. The New Orleans Charity Hospital was the second oldest public hospital in the United States and it was the Level I Trauma Center for the Gulf Coast Region. According to the American College of Surgeons (which established the definitions of Trauma Center Levels and maintains certifications as such for hospitals), a Level I trauma center "...must provide leadership and total care for the every aspect of injury..." Due to the level of commitment involved, Level I Trauma centers are most often university based teaching centers. According to the November 2006 roster of Trauma Centers maintained by the ACS, the only other Louisiana Level I Trauma Center is in Shreveport and the next closest are located in Houston, Texas and Birmingham, Alabama. There are none in Mississippi.

Louisiana's public healthcare system is based upon a network of State owned and operated Charity Hospitals, the largest in New Orleans, a unique system among the 50 states. Almost all health care aid for Louisiana's uninsured and indigent population is provided through these State owned hospitals. For the most part, private hospitals are not eligible for the kind of aid offered through the Charity system. The

result is that the State's poor are dependent upon these hospitals to provide care through their emergency rooms. The State was dealing with looming problems with the system prior to the storms. But in their wake, the cost of replacing the damaged facilities and equipment in New Orleans has accelerated the pace to devise a better way to provide health care assistance to the poor. Another new issue is the healthcare of foreign workers as area hospitals cannot recoup costs of services provided to those without legal status. The State is currently working on a resolution to these issues.

There are nine hospitals in the six parish South Central Region. The largest ones are the Thibodaux Regional Medical Center, and in Houma the Terrebonne General Medical Center and Chabert Medical Center. Chabert is part of the State Charity Hospital system and is seeing many of the patients previously served at the still closed New Orleans facility. All of the Region's hospitals are public hospitals supported through special Hospital Service Districts with two exceptions, Chabert and Our Lady of the Lake Assumption Community Hospital, owned by the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady. There are also many out-patient clinics such as dialysis centers that are part of larger regional hospitals located in the New Orleans or Baton Rouge metropolitan area. The Veterans Administration has a clinic in Houma. There is also one private out patient hospital facility in Houma, Physicians Surgical Specialty Hospital. Houma is the headquarters of the Cardiovascular Institute of the South, a growing specialty care clinic with 10 offices throughout Louisiana, 400 employees and 40 staff physicians.

Many of the South Central Region's hospitals are small rural community hospitals. Most had ongoing expansion plans prior to 2005. These plans have been ramped up where possible as the demand for health care in the Region has increased with the number of displaced persons relocating into the area and the loss of health care options in neighboring New Orleans.

### ***Land Use Planning***

The early French settlers divided land along South Louisiana's waterways into arpents, long strips of land with narrow river frontages that fanned out away from the waterfront. With this system, each property owner had access to the primary source of transportation, the waterway. Communities arose along the waterways, the Mississippi River and the various bayous, on the narrow bands of high ground formed by deposits of sediment during seasonal flood events. A dominant land pattern developed, with linear communities spread out along each side of the waterways. There are examples of traditional European style grid patterns, typically present in the Region's incorporated municipalities and company towns (Napoleonville, Thibodaux, Garyville, Houma, Lockport, Gramercy and Litcher). Another typical pattern found is the long linear neighborhood running perpendicular to the waterway as property owners sold their arpents for development, often without provision for interconnecting streets.

Much of the Region's land area is low lying. As residential developments are pushed further into lower areas the availability of flood insurance and control over development occurring in a flood plain become more important. The problem is compounded by the Region having a relative subsidence rate of approximately two and a half (2.5) centimeters per year. Growth brings a greater demand for both drainage and hurricane protection. Drainage is of prime concern throughout the area. Most communities enforce drainage standards designed to preserve the integrity of the public drainage system and prevent downstream flooding.

In the unincorporated areas of the District land use controls are generally limited to subdivision regulations, floodplain management permits, and various ordinances addressing specific problems. All of the Region's municipalities have zoning except Napoleonville. Houma, formerly a municipality and now the Urban Services District of Terrebonne Parish Consolidated Government, also has zoning. St. Charles and St. John the Baptist Parishes have parishwide zoning. All of the communities enforce building codes necessary to comply with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) elevation standards. A



new State law going into effect in January 2007 will require all to enforce the State's Uniform Building Code.

Land use controls might be designed to temporarily discourage growth or to slow growth until public services and infrastructure are available. The Region is experiencing rapid growth in population due to increased growth in industrial sectors such as petroleum, petrochemical and shipbuilding, along with the added growth of new residents wanting to remain close to the New Orleans Region. All South Central communities are grappling with inadequate infrastructure such as roads, water systems, solid waste management, wastewater management, education, and other public infrastructure. Land-use controls need to be reviewed to ensure that infrastructure the governments are expected to maintain (e.g., new roads, drainage, etc.) is built to a uniform standard, ensuring the life of the facility. Proper controls will address community goals and objectives, preserve and enhance potential resources, and direct growth to appropriate areas where infrastructure is adequate. **Table 8** gives a summary of land use controls by community.

Lack of appropriate land-use controls or the improper enforcement of such often results in haphazard development that does not take advantage of a community's available resources. This leads to increased costs in providing public services and facilities. Lack of safeguards for residential, business, and industrial areas leaves each type of development unprotected from encroachment from competing uses that often results in outright confrontation. Development may occur in a manner that is not conducive to further growth and may result in costly maintenance and expansion in the future, e.g., substandard roads, inadequate drainage, remoteness from social services increasing transportation costs or sewerage problems. There is a perception that much of the Region may not require land use controls, as there is an abundance of open land. Nevertheless, reasonable control measures would prevent unwanted problems in the future and allow for more orderly growth. All of the South Central Parishes have some level of control, and most are looking into ways to expand what they have in order to offer a higher degree of protection for the citizens and make better use of the Region's resources.

TABLE 8: LAND USE CONTROLS BY COMMUNITY												
LAND USE CONTROL	ASSUMPTION	LAFOURCHE	ST. CHARLES	ST. JAMES	ST. JOHN	TERREBONNE	GRAMERCY	GOLDEN MEADOW	LOCKPORT	LUTCHER	NAPOLEONVILLE	THIBODAUX
FLOOD DAMAGE PREVENTION	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
DERELICT OR UNSAFE BUILDINGS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
SEWAGE/WASTE WATER DISPOSAL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
DRAINAGE REGULATIONS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
MOBILE HOME REGULATIONS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
ZONING			X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X
BUILDING CODE OR REGULATIONS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
AIRPORT HAZARD ZONING		X	X		X	X						
COASTAL MANAGEMENT*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
HISTORIC DISTRICT**						X			X			X

\* The State Law has reserved coastal management regulations to the State and parish governments.

\*\* There is a historic district covering the old Houma Downtown area.

## PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The “wild card” for the South Central Region is the chance that one or more catastrophic storms may strike future in hurricane seasons. Ongoing coastal land loss and subsidence make the region vulnerable to storm surge from even smaller weather events. Other uncertainties abound. As of December 2006, FEMA had not yet issued final base-floor elevation (BFE) maps and guidelines for raising flood-damaged buildings. The district’s few certified building-elevation companies have long waiting lists. Coastal parishes are still determining how to enforce new, mandatory state building codes. Major insurance companies like Allstate and State Farm have stopped writing new homeowners’ policies and raised premiums on existing policies. St. Paul Travelers, a major carrier of commercial insurance in Louisiana, has announced that it will not reinsure commercial properties in coastal Metropolitan Areas. Electrical utilities have requested rate increases to cover damages, repairs and lost revenues that could double the cost of electricity. All the above factors could have a chilling effect on regional capital markets. A labor supply shortage is making it difficult for the Region’s entrepreneurs to fill the jobs they have created. Funding to improve the Region’s aging infrastructure is lacking.

Along with uncertainties come many post-disaster opportunities. Often these occur at points where existing core industries and disaster impacts intersect. The *2006 Louisiana Economic Outlook* projects an increase of 6,200 jobs in the two-parish Houma MSA during 2006 and 2007. Jobs have been created in steel fabrication for repair of offshore energy infrastructure; in ship and boat building and repairs for the offshore energy industry; in transportation and logistics on the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW) and the Houma Navigation Canal; at port facilities like Port Fourchon and the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port; and in infrastructure and construction projects like the new Leeville Bridge, phase one of upgrading Louisiana Highway 1 to Port Fourchon. Other construction projects, like Morganza to the Gulf, which has begun phase one construction in Terrebonne Parish, will improve flood-protection. Business incentives that were developed to help business restart in hurricane damages areas offers short term opportunities. Possibilities for improved public transit and rail passenger service can help get more people to work in the Region. Technical and academic opportunities and programs strengthen the region’s workforce and industries. The Region has a strong cultural and geographic identity that includes an appreciation for and participation in the arts.

Following is a summary of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats facing the South Central Region.

## **STRENGTHS**

- Skilled workforce
- Labor force that is one of the most productive in nation on a per capita basis
- Cross training between petrochemical and refinery industries
- Natural resources: fisheries, wildlife, oil and gas
- Navigable Waterways: Mississippi River, Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, Gulf of Mexico, Bayou Lafourche, etc.
- Region supplies 20% of the nation's oil and gas
- Nicholls State University and Louisiana Technical College campuses in Lafourche and Reserve
- One of two technical and community colleges in Louisiana, L.E. Fletcher Technical Community College offering job readiness, skill development and academic programs
- Private vocational technical training institutions including ITT Technical Institute, Greater New Orleans Industrial Education Center and Associated Builders and Contractors in St. Charles Parish.
- Ports: Port Fourchon, Port of South Louisiana, Terrebonne Port
- Airports: Houma Regional Airport, St. John Parish Airport, South Lafourche Leonard J. Miller, Jr. Airport, Thibodaux Municipal Airport
- Abundant inventory of available land well suited for development
- Access to a four-lane, interstate grade U. S. Hwy. 90 (future I-49 corridor)
- Strong cultural identity
- Strong sense of place (history, architecture, etc.)
- Strong arts programs
- Strong entrepreneurial spirit
- Regional and local Revolving Loan programs
- Retail centers
- Medical centers

## **WEAKNESSES**

- Not enough local skilled workers for shipbuilding industry
- Not enough local population to fill available jobs in area industries
- Need to revamp state and regional strategies for filling jobs so industries can remain competitive
- Workforce with industry specific skills
- Heavy reliance on oil and gas cluster
- Insufficient cross training between offshore oil and gas and onshore petrochemical and other industries
- Need to redefine and refocus training education direction to focus on region's strengths
- Need to start educating students about training and academic options at an earlier age
- Need to develop more certification programs like those offered for the construction and maritime trades
- Inadequate capacities of water infrastructure
- Inadequate sewage treatment
- Roadways in need of upgrade, repair (La. Hwy. 1) and capacity increases
- Lack of a West Bank Hurricane Protection Levee
- Limited rail access in the Bayou Region and River Region West Bank increases freight costs for industries
- Lack of adequate drainage systems and levees for flood and storm protection
- Lack of public transit in some areas

- Other aging infrastructure
- Need high speed internet access for data transmission—fiber optics
- Coastal erosion
- Not enough support for art programs
- Lack of diversity in the arts community

### **OPPORTUNITIES**

- New petroleum finds in Gulf deep offshore waters
- Construction work generated by need for repair and replacement of infrastructure damaged by hurricanes
- Skills developed in petroleum and petrochemical industry that could transfer to environmental, food technologies, health care and safety fields
- Proposed business incubator programs in Thibodaux, Terrebonne and St. Charles Parishes
- Businesses relocating to South Central Region from devastated areas
- Temporary enhanced business incentives for rebuilding efforts
- Demand for alternative fuels which could use soybeans, sugar canes and other agricultural products
- Proposed passenger rail service between New Orleans and Baton Rouge with potential stop in the River Region
- Possible channel connections between Port Fourchon and Terrebonne Port
- Proposed regional transit service for St. John and St. Charles and a separate service for Lafourche Parish
- Population growth
- State focus on cultural economy
- Older population looking for leisure travel (ecotourism)
- Older population looking for areas suited to retirement plans
- Regional focus of and cooperative endeavors among District communities

### **THREATS**

- Rising insurance costs and decreasing number of insurance providers
- Increasing construction costs
- Rising cost of housing
- Rising utility costs caused by increasing natural gas costs
- Other post disaster uncertainties
- Loss of wetlands to sustain fisheries, wildlife and act as hurricane buffer
- Salt water intrusion affecting potable water supplies and changing habitats
- Discharge of inadequately treated wastewater into fishery grounds, recreational waters, potable water supplies and public health threat
- Large amount of hurricane damages to the offshore energy industry infrastructure
- No funding for deepening the Houma Navigation Canal and addition of flood gates to provide for transport of larger offshore structures and ships and to prevent storm surge flooding
- Lack of adequate resources and infrastructure to accomplish protective measures
- Lack of adequate funding for the social services and education needed for the growing influx of workers from other regions of the United States and other countries
- Lack of mental health services due to closure of regional facilities in New Orleans

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

In 2001, the South Central Region identified six goals that are still applicable today. These Goals link the Region's vision to the State's three Vision 2020 goals; to become a Learning Enterprise, to promote a Culture of Innovation, and to be a Top 10 State. These goals and objectives are designed to help the Region focus on maximizing its strengths and opportunities and resolving problems. The SCPDC goals and objectives follow:

**Goal One:** Improve the public infrastructure of the region in order to support and sustain a viable economy and environment

- *Objective 1:* Improve road infrastructure and capacity
- *Objective 2:* Improve water and waste water treatment and collection capacities
- *Objective 3:* Improve public facilities and services
- *Objective 4:* Continue infrastructure improvements at area Ports and airports
- *Objective 5:* Improve flood protection and drainage

**Goal Two:** Create and retain quality jobs and foster a more diversified economy

- *Objective 1:* Work within existing industry clusters to identify workforce development needs
- *Objective 2:* Provide technical support and infrastructure necessary to support new start ups
- *Objective 3:* Support research and development of new and emerging clusters

**Goal Three:** To improve the overall capacity of the Region to make efficient land use decisions

- *Objective 1:* Develop and/or update Parish Comprehensive Plans
- *Objective 2:* Develop and implement other programs that enhance existing land uses and encourage development near existing centers of business and industry

**Goal Four:** To improve the overall capacity of the Region to make economic development decisions

- *Objective 1:* Identify sites suitable for various types of industrial development
- *Objective 2:* Support efforts that sustain regional tourism
- *Objective 3:* Continue to explore opportunities to further new and emerging clusters

**Goal Five:** To improve the fiscal capacity of local government and to make the Region financially attractive for economic development

- *Objective 1:* Identify and educate the public about business incentives available to the Region

**Goal Six:** To protect and conserve the natural resources of the Region and to promote more equitable use of these resources for business and recreation

- *Objective 1:* Conserve the available resources for future generations

## SOUTH CENTRAL INDUSTRIAL CLUSTERS

The South Central District's business development strategy takes a proactive, cluster-based approach in line with the *Bayou Regional Industry Cluster Analysis and Recommendations*, issued in 2005 by the Louisiana Department of Economic Development. As that report stated, "Industry clusters do not *need* a public sector strategy in order to exist, but the right strategies can help businesses in clusters to become more successful and competitive."

The cluster strategy summarized here is based upon that developed for the SCPDC Revolving Loan Program (RLF). It builds on SCPDC's ongoing relationships with elected officials, parish economic development departments and regional development organizations. The planning process to generate the strategy also engages other stakeholders like Workforce Investment Boards, Community and Technical Colleges, Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) and private utility companies and electrical co-ops that provide services critical to cluster success. The regional business community participates both directly, as in meetings conducted for devising the CEDS Action Plan and for the RLF strategy, and less formally in the course of implementation of the CEDS strategies.

The business development strategy recognizes potential for additional growth in the existing oil and gas; petrochemical, maritime; logistics and transportation; and shipbuilding industries. It is also informed by lessons learned in past economic downturns in these industries. According to the *2006 Louisiana Economic Outlook*, from 1982 to 1987, with the energy industry in freefall, the Houma MSA lost about 17,200 jobs or nearly a quarter of its previous workforce. The lesson was reinforced in 1992, when soft gas prices cost the MSA 1,500 jobs. In a global, post-disaster economy, with the pace of change quickening, the district can no longer afford to wait for market impacts. To capitalize on current and future opportunities, it needs a proactive strategy for developing a culture of innovation supported by continuous upgrading of technology, workforce skills and infrastructure. The strategy should also serve as a kind of compass, helping to orient the district to recognize changing market conditions, to act on opportunities and to identify viable opportunities for diversification.

To nurture a culture of innovation and cooperation, the district needs useful and timely information. The cluster concept, with its district wide scope and industry specific detail, offers a practical framework for shared understanding and action. The CEDS process and the RLF Loan Advisory Committee and Loan Administration Board enable SCPDC to acquaint key stakeholders and decision makers with the cluster concept and to enlist them in promoting the vision.

Tracking the *Cluster Analysis*, the district strategy treats the Bayou Parish's energy, maritime and ship and boat building industries as elements of a single, interrelated "super cluster." Similarly, the petrochemical, maritime and logistics industries form a single system in the River Parishes. A "united front" approach can help maximize cost effectiveness in delivering value-adding support services such as links with university-based expertise and a sector oriented training pipeline to develop skills transferable across related clusters. Effective training to expand the pool of skilled labor is critical to the region's capacity to capitalize on post-disaster opportunities for future prosperity. The Workforce Alliance report *Workforce (Re)Development in the Gulf Coast Region*, issued in November 2005, recommends organizing training efforts on an industry sector basis. As the report states, "it is clear which industries will need workers in the coming months and years. Training efforts must target these industries, based on employer demand, and consider which jobs have wages and benefits that will support families." Cross-cluster coordination can also help facilitate global marketing of regional services and expertise and adjustments in regulatory and tax issues that affect the business environment.

Existing assets give the South Central District a solid foundation for pursuing a proactive development strategy. The Region benefits from the high incidence of innovation in major industries and of entrepreneurship in small businesses. It has a long history of leadership in developing and manufacturing specialized machinery and equipment for the energy, agricultural and seafood industries. It has and continues to develop exportable products, expertise and services in its major industries. Proximity to the Mississippi River, the Gulf of Mexico and other important waterways makes the district an increasingly important logistical, transportation, maritime and warehousing center. Activity in these sectors has accelerated in the post-disaster economy.

Another key asset is the District's tradition of proactively addressing regional economic defects that hinder development. The RLF and the SCPDC-administered Terrebonne Parish revolving loan fund both intervene in capital markets to increase access to financing for small business development. Over twenty years of SCPDC-prepared applications have secured funding for a succession of EDA public works projects to provide infrastructure critical to expanding development opportunities at key industrial sites. Without multiple EDA projects, Port Fourchon could not have achieved its current economic preeminence. The SCPDC-administered MPO coordinates highway improvements to rationalize traffic flows in urbanized areas of Lafourche, Terrebonne and part of Assumption Parishes.

Longstanding structural challenges could hamper the district's ongoing prosperity. The limited supply of skilled labor and often substandard infrastructure both contribute to loss of executive functions and value-adding innovations to the Houston area. Lack of mentoring and peer-networking often leave the next generation of entrepreneurial businesses prone to costly mistakes that can keep them from prospering. Financing oriented toward established businesses leaves many new ventures undercapitalized and the district lacks a pool of less risk-averse investment capital oriented to such development. Limited links to university-based research and development expertise slow the pace and raise the costs of trial-and-error innovation. The same global markets that open to local exports also bring less costly foreign competition into regional markets.

In the post-disaster economy, the need for programs like the RLF has increased. While the majority of the district's small businesses did not sustain direct damages, the environment is perceived as riskier and local capital markets will likely experience a chilling effect. According to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) *Spring 2006 Louisiana Profile*, banks outside the most devastated parishes showed healthy growth in core deposits and their past-due loan ratios had generally rebounded to pre-storm levels. However, with lenders keeping a wary eye on rebuilding issues like insurance coverage, the bulk of additional deposits went not to loans, but to investments, primarily in liquid United States government securities. If the trend continues, the South Central Region could see additional shrinkage in the supply of private capital available for small business development.

Under SCPDC's Revolving Loan Fund development strategy, good candidates for financing were identified as the smaller vendor and service companies within major industry clusters and small firms in emerging clusters. In general, applicants are either not yet fully bankable, experiencing temporary financial challenges, requesting financing beyond their bank's comfort level or expanding into lines of business in which they lack direct experience. Applicants may also be relocating businesses that have not yet established local banking relationships.

Since the 2005 hurricane season, the Bayou Parishes have seen strong growth in metal/steel fabrication and ship and boat building. As of November 2005, Gulf Island Fabrication in Terrebonne Parish had returned employment to 1,100 and had an \$86 million backlog of work. Lafourche-based ship and boat builders Bollinger and North American Shipyard-Edison Chouest both continue to expand outside their



home parish. The shortage of skilled labor could be a brake on continued growth in the ship and boat building cluster.

Before and after the storms, the River Parishes have experienced steady growth in transportation, logistics and export activities. The Port of South Louisiana's Globalplex industrial park offers trans-load and storage of all types of cargo via ship, barge, truck and/or rail, as well as deep draft bulk and general cargo docking. With the port topping the nation in export tonnage, the district has a distinct advantage in entering global markets. Statewide, export figures show a strong upward trend, especially since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) eliminated tariffs and expanded trade partnerships with Canada and Mexico. In 2000, Louisiana's \$593.4 million in exports of agricultural crops to Mexico nearly quadrupled pre-NAFTA values. Chemical exports to Canada climbed to \$455.2 million, an increase of 116.3%, while those to Mexico nearly doubled to \$206.6 million. State exports of petroleum and coal products; transportation equipment (primarily automobile parts); and food and related products showed similar increases. It should be noted that the bulk of current export commodities are not produced in the district or even in-state, but are shipped down the Mississippi from other parts of the country. However, with the infrastructure already in place, the district is well-positioned to increase exports of local products and services. Such activities have strong job creation potential. In 2000, export trade with Mexico already directly supported approximately 6,244 Louisiana jobs, while trade with Canada directly supported another 5,290 jobs.

Looking to the future, the SCPDC CEDS aligns with the State's *Louisiana: Vision 2020* in promoting diversification into emerging technology areas where high growth is expected in coming years. "Seedling" clusters identified as having growth potential for the South Central District follow.

**Environmental and Safety Technologies:** The district possesses extensive practical experience in oil-spill cleanup, remediation and mitigation; offshore safety; and marsh, wetland and coastal restoration technologies. Through public and private in-state universities, it also has access to a wealth of applied-science expertise in these areas. Pre-disaster, environmental technology cluster analysis identified waning demand for regulatory, compliance-based services, but potential for growth in the treatment, recovery and reuse of industrial waste, especially toxic waste materials. SCPDC has participated in an RLF loan to Organic Processors, which uses bagasse waste from sugar processing to make garden mulch and absorbent material used in the energy industry. Post-disaster, opportunities in safety technologies are likely to expand as government regulations and insurers require more rigorous emergency planning, risk reduction, prevention and damage mitigation. The regional workforce is either skilled in implementing such technologies or has skills adaptable from oil field, pipeline and construction work. The region's package of products, knowledge and skills has export potential, as witness the work of Texas companies Red Adair and Boots and Coots in dousing oil-field fires after the war in Kuwait. Local companies can increase their competitiveness in world markets by qualifying for certification under the recently implemented ISO (International Organization for Standardization) 1400 environmental management program. Less skilled members of the workforce have already begun to benefit in activities such as growing plants for use in marsh, wetland and barrier island restoration.

**Food Technologies:** As *Vision 2020* suggested, food products are a natural for south Louisiana. Though activity in the district is not yet as well organized as in the Acadiana region, there have been promising developments. Zapp's Potato Chips in St. James Parish is a homegrown success story with plans for expansion. The RLF participated in a loan to St. Charles-based Mem Paul's, makers of packaged Cajun food mixes. Kyle LeBlanc Crawfish Farms, in Lafourche, uses internet marketing to ship crawfish, shrimp, crab and alligator meat nationwide. In Mardi Gras season, regional bakeries take national phone and internet orders for king cakes. Recent developments expand growth potential. Cargill Sugar North America and a cooperative of Louisiana sugar mills and growers have announced plans to construct a

million-ton-per-year sugar refinery in St. John the Baptist Parish. New Orleans companies are relocating to Globalplex at the Port of South Louisiana. NATCO Food Service Merchants, a commercial meat supplier to hotels, restaurants and casinos, will employ 70 full-time workers. Flood-damaged Baumer Foods, makers of Crystal hot sauce, will expand over the next year to occupy 190,000 square feet. The Port's ideal shipping location was a major factor in attracting both companies. This includes strong export potential. In 1999, Louisiana exported \$179.1 million in food and related products to Mexico, with another \$41.9 million going to Canada. The Chef John Folse Culinary Institute at Nicholls State University could provide a center for testing and commercializing new recipes and products and fostering entrepreneurship to advance organization of this cluster.

**Eco-Tourism:** While current direct job creation is limited, systematic development and marketing could build on significant existing assets, both natural and organizational. The Region possesses unique marine, marshland, swampland, upland and lowland wooded habitats. It has a network of swamp-tour operators and hunting and fishing guides. The annual Grand Isle Birding Pilgrimage draws thousands of birdwatchers to coastal areas to view migratory birds. The federally chartered Barataria-Terrebonne Natural Estuary Program (BTNEP), charged with protecting and enhancing the ecosystem, provides a first point of contact for national and international environmental visitors. BTNEP has established working relationships with the non-profit Louisiana Nature Conservancy and with state and federal government agencies involved in ecosystem management in the district, such as the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Natural Resource Conservation Service. Guidance from groups like the International Ecotourism Society could help BTNEP coordinate a full package involving destination marketing, coastal and marine ecotourism, cultural heritage tourism and hands-on experiences in restoration projects. The district could add value and create jobs by developing environmentally sound lodging and in the construction and operation of longer-trip tour boats plying the district's waterways. Such a project would also do "double duty," increasing national awareness and support for federal funding of coastal restoration to reduce the region's vulnerability to future storms.

**Healthcare:** This cluster already employs some of the region's most skilled and best paid professionals and para-professionals. Regional assets could support further development and organization. Cardiovascular Institute of the South in Terrebonne Parish is a nationally recognized leader in the treatment of heart disease. Chabert Medical Center, also in Terrebonne, is part of the state's Charity Hospital system and linked to the Louisiana State University Medical School. A network of private hospitals, some affiliates of major regional medical powerhouses Ochsner in New Orleans and Our Lady of the Lake in Baton Rouge, provides access to recent medical research. SCPDC has taken the lead in drafting legislation that creates the regional South Central Louisiana Human Services Authority, to ensure effective delivery of mental health, developmental disabilities and addictive disorders services within the six SouthCentral parishes and neighboring St. Mary Parish.

**Information Technology:** This cluster, identified in *Louisiana: Vision 2020*, includes software, auto regulation, internet and telecommunications technologies. District assets include a talent for innovation and invention. Local companies have been early adopters of technologies such as 3-D Seismic in energy exploration and global positioning systems (GPS) in the maritime industry. This indicates the greatest initial potential may be in building on existing technologies to create niche-market adaptations that meet core industry needs. An example is the GPS data base a local company developed to track chemical cargoes on the Mississippi River. This cluster could also include development of computer games, which qualify for state tax incentives similar to those offered to films made in state. The computer technology program at Nicholls State University could offer technical support. The university is exploring potential for a game development major.

The CEDS stays open to long-term, “big-picture” possibilities like alternative fuels. With world energy supplies in crisis, the district’s unique combination of energy infrastructure and workforce, “big oil” and bio-fuel producing agribusiness giants and sugarcane farming could create opportunities. The major corporations have access to national and international markets and financing, as well as the capacity to fund research to commercialize new products. The planned sugar refinery in St. John the Baptist Parish, with capacity to process 70% of the state crop, could provide a supply chain for alternative-fuels development. Although most bio-fuel currently produced in the United States is corn-based, Brazil offers a national model for using sugarcane. Cross-cluster collaborations could give established local vendors and sub-contractors opportunities to “go along for the ride.” As demonstrated by repairs to the Mars deepwater platform, district businesses have the capacity to provide support on “high-tech” projects. University-based technology transfer programs could provide “applied-science” expertise to help facilitate the transition.

## **ACTION PLAN**

In order to address the needs identified, an Action Plan has been devised that promotes economic development, fosters effective transportation and enhances and protects the environment. The Plan promotes use of technology and the effective development and use of the workforce. Of great concern is the availability of adequate funds to accomplish the plan. Many of the region's communities have limited resources to implement the needed upgrades to aging infrastructure and to implement the projects that will help protect the area from further coastal erosion and storm surge. More funding opportunities or flexibility in providing local match would greatly help.

### ***Performance Measures***

The CEDS is reviewed annually in order to determine its effectiveness in meeting the Region's goals. SCPDC monitors the number and kinds of projects implemented as identified in the CEDS as one way to gauge its usefulness. Participation in the process by area public and private partners is also one way to estimate the success of the process. Using jobs created or new investment in the Region as a way to measure the success of the CEDS is difficult as there are too many unknown factors that play into industry start-up, expansion, relocation or closure that are beyond the control or the scope of the CEDS, as exemplified by the 2005 hurricane season. Still, the document and the process that leads to its conclusion is a useful tool for the Region's planners in developing their plans and fostering a forum for exchanging ideas and strategies.

**Goal One:** Improve the public infrastructure of the region in order to support and sustain a viable economy and environment.

**Objective 1: Improve road infrastructure and capacity**

- Complete Leeville bridge crossing and continue La. Hwy. 1 improvements
- Build an East/West road to connect Globalplex to Interstate 10
- Complete connection between the Gramercy Wallace Bridge and La. Hwy. 3127
- Continue efforts to complete I-49
- Develop a Master Transportation Plan for the River Parishes
- Develop a transportation loop around Thibodaux
- Investigate adequacy of LA Highways 1 and 308 as alternate hurricane evacuation routes in Assumption Parish
- Monitor plans for creation of North-South Access Road between LA Hwy 3127 and US Hwy 90
- Continue repairs and upgrades to other State and local roads

**Objective 2: Improve water and waste water treatment and collection capacities**

- Continue to upgrade water treatment facilities and capacities in all communities
- Continue to improve waste water treatment and build additional collection systems throughout the Region
- Continue to investigate ways to improve water flow along Bayou Lafourche and counteract salt water intrusion
- Provide link between the St. Charles East and West Bank water treatment facilities and provide additional treatment capacity for the East Bank
- Continue efforts to upgrade old and provide new municipal sewerage systems throughout the Region
- Identify priorities of sewerage projects for implementation
- Provide gas system improvements in Thibodaux
- Prepare engineering work for update of St James Parish-wide Sewage System facilities plan
- Continue to investigate Bayou Lafourche Diversion Project
- Implementation of Bayou Lafourche lock at Golden Meadow

**Objective 3: Improve public facilities and services**

- Continue upgrade to public libraries
- Provide public transit throughout the region
- Continue efforts to improve regional health facilities and services
- Improve neighborhood and municipal parks
- Continue work with the Regional Criminalistic Laboratory
- Continue Regional Solid Waste Authority efforts to address solid waste disposal and transportation issues
- Upgrade fire protection facilities throughout the Region

**Objective 4: Continue infrastructure improvements at area ports and airports**

- Construct improvements at all area airports
  - Construct a road to connect the South Lafourche Airport to La. Highway 3235 including a Bayou Lafourche Bridge crossing.
  - Continue to pursue general cargo opportunities to better serve the maritime industry
  - Develop a public dock on the West Bank of St Charles Parish
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- Construct conveyor from docks to service lay-down areas at Globalplex
  - Rail spur rehabilitation and extension with warehouses for Globalplex Intermodal Terminal
  - Increase warehouse and distribution capacity at the Port of South Louisiana
  - Construct Northern Expansion project for Port Fourchon
  - Convert Golden Meadow and Larose Floodgates into locks in order to facilitate waterborne commerce during high water stages
  - Explore feasibility of establishing rail service to Port Fourchon
  - Support initiatives to improve public facilities and access to Port Fourchon beaches
  - Complete EIS and Feasibility Studies for North-South Corridor connecting Port Fourchon to I-10
  - Provide rail service to the Port of Terrebonne
  - Complete infrastructure improvements at the Port of Terrebonne facility
  - Deepen the existing east-west channel connecting the Houma Navigation Canal to Port Fourchon to 12-feet to facilitate flow of traffic between the ports of Terrebonne and Fourchon
  - Continue efforts to ensure the planned Houma Navigation Canal and lock system are designed for medium draft vessels at 200 feet wide and 20 feet deep

**Objective 5: Improve flood protection and drainage**

- Improve area levees, in particular the Morganza to Gulf and other hurricane protection levees
- Support efforts to create a Comprehensive Hurricane Protection Plan for Coastal Louisiana
- Support Governor's LA 1 Task Force plans for hurricane evacuation route from Grand Isle to Alexandria
- Continue drainage improvements throughout the Region
- Reduce regional businesses' vulnerability to natural disasters by coordinating informational resources to facilitate preparedness and recovery planning
- Continue to upgrade and improve area pump stations and pump capacities including the Lafourche-Company Canal Pump Station Project
- Construct the West Bank flood protection levee

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**Goal Two: Create and retain quality jobs and foster a more diversified economy.**

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**Objective 1: Work within existing industry clusters to identify workforce development and training needs**

- Continue efforts to design education programs that train local workers for the area job market
  - Support efforts to expand on existing job training programs
  - Exploring potential for building on existing institutional assets like the Chef John Folse Culinary Institute at Nicholls State University in implementing such training alliances
  - Increasing coordination to bridge basic and occupational skills training for adults with limited education and skills and linking training to workforce needs identified by employers
  - Coordinate with the SBDC at Nicholls State University and regional Chambers of Commerce to expand on existing leadership programs to develop a regional "young president's forum" to provide mentoring and peer networking to improve fledgling entrepreneurial companies' chances of success
  - Explore potential for using the St. James Parish mobile classroom program as a model for taking sector-specific job training linked to actual employment opportunities into communities where a significant part of the adult population possess limited education and skills
  - Explore potential for local adaptations of model joint labor/management partnership programs and of state community colleges and community-based organizations to improve access to on
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the job and skill training

**Objective 2: Provide technical support and infrastructure necessary to support new start ups**

- Create business incubators in Thibodaux and Terrebonne Parish and other communities and continue to support the incubator program in St. Charles Parish
- Provide ongoing technical assistance concerning tax incentives and loan programs
- Administration and expansion of the SCPDC Revolving Loan Fund Program
- Continue Enterprise Zone Assistance
- Provide business incubators
- Increase the number of regional businesses marketing on-line in order to enhance individual firms' ability get quickly return to business, even if a storm or other disaster destroys or damages their physical facility
- Create a micro-lending program

**Objective 3: Support research and development of new and emerging clusters**

- Develop warehousing, light industrial and high technology clusters in St Charles Parish
- Investigate feasibility of a warehouse distribution center in St John Parish
- Explore potential to expand on existing institutional structures at Nicholls State University to create cluster development centers to spur technological innovation and commercialization and export of products, expertise and services in the maritime-shipbuilding, culinary and information technology industries
- Increasing coordination among training providers and the business community in order to explore potential for undertaking regional, sector-based workforce development, planning, training, job matching and outreach
- Further the development of a distribution, light industrial, energy and advanced manufacturing cluster in St. Charles Parish

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**Goal Three: To improve the overall capacity of the Region to make efficient land use decisions.**

**Objective 1: Develop and/or update Parish Comprehensive Plans**

- Complete Assumption Parish Comprehensive Plan
- Complete Terrebonne zoning effort in areas outside Houma
- Begin St. James Comprehensive Planning Process
- Update the Lutchet Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances
- Explore possible land use Master Plan for Lafourche Parish
- Update the St Charles Parish land use plan
- Continue to keep parish and municipal codes current

**Objective 2: Develop and implement other programs that enhance existing land uses and encourage development near existing centers of business and industry**

- Develop opportunities for sharing expenses related to the enforcement of the State Uniform Building Code through participation in a regional program
  - Update of historic structure inventory
  - Revitalize the Thibodaux CBD and Historic District Area
  - Investigate feasibility of creating a Reserve Historic District
  - Plan for access and development along U. S. Highway 90 (future I-49 corridor)
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**Goal Four: To improve the overall capacity of the Region to make economic development decisions.**

**Objective 1: Identify Sites Suitable for Various Types of Industrial Development**

- Update and continue existing site inventories
- Create GIS based inventories of available sites for communities where none exist
- Inventory and assess brownfield sites

**Objective 2: Support efforts that sustain regional tourism**

- Monitor and support efforts of area tourism commission and chambers to promote the Region
- Promote the culture and heritage of the entire region
- Docking Facility at Oak Alley and other tourist attractions along the Mississippi River
- Expand tourism efforts throughout the South Central Region
- Provide additional public access to outdoor scenic and recreational areas such as Lake Verret
- Exploring potential of coordination among regional tour bus and hospitality industry to create a shuttle bus service from the New Orleans airport to locations in the district

**Objective 3: Continue to explore opportunities to further new and emerging clusters**

- Hold one or more workshops to present information on cluster development and emerging clusters
- Increase the Region's understanding of industry clusters and their role in the regional economy
- Increasing linkages to connect the business community and university-based research and development expertise in order to expedite innovation, early adoption of new technologies, development of information technology products and services and entry into export markets
- Coordinating with the Nicholls State University SBDC, Chambers of Commerce and other development organizations to offer small businesses access to up-to-date, industry oriented market data to help them forecast and respond to market and industry trends and identify and act on opportunities
- Planning and Implementation of the Bayou Lafourche Waterfront Development project to revitalize growth and development along Bayou Lafourche from Donaldsonville to the Gulf of Mexico.

**Goal Five: To improve the fiscal capacity of local government and to make the Region financially attractive for economic development.**

**Objective 1: Identify existing incentives**

- Prepare and continue to update a brochure on existing regional and state incentive programs
- Identify new incentive and other programs that would be of use to existing and developing cluster industries
- Investigate feasibility of implementation of such programs
- Identify other assistance programs that area industry would find helpful

**Objective 2: Investigate the potential of creating new incentives geared toward growth sectors**

- Encouraging cooperation and joint production and marketing ventures among businesses in clusters and across interrelated "super cluster"
- Cooperate with the business community, parish economic development departments, Chambers of Commerce and other development organizations to implement a district wide business retention program to counter migration of businesses and innovations to Texas
- Explore potential to increase the regional pool of investment capital for entrepreneurial development in the district by utilizing incentives such as tax credits under the Louisiana Early Stage Angel Investment Incentives program



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- Increase the number of regional businesses qualifying for tax credits and abatements under the Louisiana Enterprise Zone, Quality Jobs and Industrial Property Tax Exemption programs
  - Increasing the number of regional businesses utilizing tax credits and other tax relief benefits under the federal Gulf Opportunity Zone program
  - Increase the number of regional businesses complying with ISO 9000 and ISO 1400 standards in order to improve quality control and increase “exportability” of local products, expertise and services
  - Investigate potential to develop strong regional branding of food and tourism products and services and promoting improved coordinated scheduling of festivals and other events, bundling of services and use of the internet to organize and market tour packages
  - Explore possible resources to establish a micro-loan fund for entrepreneurs in self-employment businesses such as tour guide and craftspeople in the tourism and eco-tourism cluster

**Goal Six:** To protect and conserve the natural resources of the Region and to promote more equitable use of these resources for business and recreation.

**Objective 1: Conserve the available resources for future generations**

- Promote the wise and sustainable uses of non-renewable resources
  - Create education and outreach programs that promote same
  - Implement Barrier Island Restoration Projects
  - Implement the Coast 2050 Ecosystem Strategy
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**SOUTH CENTRAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
BOARD MEMBERS**

**Assumption Parish**

Martin Triche, Police Jury President  
P.O. Box 520  
Napoleonville, LA 70390

Calvin James  
128 Jacobs Street  
Napoleonville, LA 70390

Willie Reed  
180 Daggs St.  
Paincourtville, LA 70341

Village of Napoleonville  
Darrell C. Jupiter, Sr., Mayor  
P.O. Box 6  
Napoleonville, LA 70390

**Lafourche Parish**

Charlotte Randolph  
Chairman  
P.O. Drawer 5548  
Thibodaux, LA 70302

2 VACANT SEATS

**City of Thibodaux**

Charles Caillouet, Mayor  
P.O. Box 5418  
Thibodaux, LA 70302

**Town of Lockport**

Richard Champagne, Mayor  
Vice-Chairman  
710 Church Street  
Lockport, LA 70374

**Town of Golden Meadow**

Joey Bouziga, Mayor  
P.O. Box 307  
Golden Meadow, LA 70357

**St. Charles Parish**

Albert Laque, Parish President  
P.O. Box 302  
Hahnville, LA 70057

Desmond Hilarie  
P.O. Box 111  
Hahnville, LA 70057

Debra Dufresne Vial  
13979 River Road  
Luling, LA 70070

**St. James Parish**

Dale Hymel, Jr., Parish President  
Convent Courthouse  
P.O. Box 106  
Convent, LA 70723

Elton Aubert  
2740 South Bank Lane  
Vacherie, LA 70090

Howard Jones  
13414 Ash Street  
Vacherie, LA 70090

**Town of Gramercy**  
Herman Bourgeois  
P.O. Drawer 340  
Gramercy, LA 70052

**St. John the Baptist Parish**  
Nickie Monica, Parish President  
Secretary-Treasurer  
1801 W. Airline Hwy, Rm. 110  
LaPlace, LA 70068

Ann Tatje  
134 Natli Drive  
LaPlace, LA 70068

**Terrebonne Parish**  
Don Schwab  
P.O. Box 6097  
Houma, LA 70361

Joey Palmisano  
1163 West Tunnel Blvd.  
Houma, LA 70360

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**  
Kevin P. Belanger  
P.O. Box 1870  
Gray, LA 70359  
985/851-2900

**Town of Lutchet**  
Troas Poché, Mayor  
P.O. Box 456  
Lutchet, LA 70071

Cleveland Farlough  
P.O. Box 528  
Reserve, LA 70084-0528

Wayne Thibodeaux  
P.O. Box 990  
Gray, LA 70359-0990

**ANNUAL REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING  
12-5-06**

Jane Arnette	South Central Industrial Association
Gretchen Caillouet	Lafourche Parish Council
Chett Chaisson	Greater Lafourche Port Commission
Michael Ferdinand	Terrebonne Economic Development Authority
Travis Lavigne	L. E. Fletcher Technical Community College
Bonnie Lafont	City of Thibodaux
Pat Matherne	Lafourche Parish Council
Linda Prudhomme	Port of South Louisiana
Julia Remondet	St. John Economic Development Director
Juana Woodard	Houma Downtown Development District
Martha Cazaubon	South Central Planning and Development Commission
Jo-anna Jones	South Central Planning and Development Commission
Tanner Magee	South Central Planning and Development Commission

Comments received on the draft as follows:

Corey Foucheaux                      St. Charles Parish Economic Development Director  
St. John Economic Development Committee Meeting on 1/8/07.