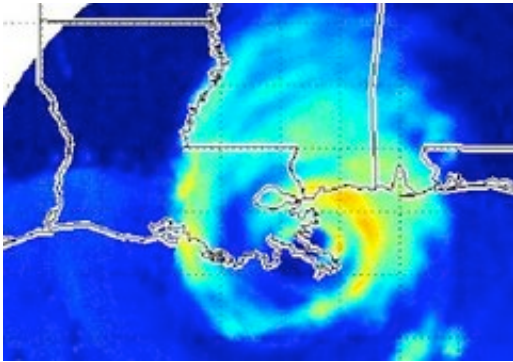


## Corps releases Category 5 hurricane protection study, but document contains no action plan

Posted by [ccharpen](#) March 05, 2009 21:58PM



Radar of Hurricane Katrina as it made landfall on Aug. 29, 2005.

More than a year after Congress ordered the Army Corps of Engineers to devise a strategy to protect Louisiana from the strongest hurricanes, on Tuesday the agency released a [4,000-page technical study](#) that offers countless alternatives but no action plan.

The document, dubbed the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Study, came under immediate fire from state officials who called the exercise a waste of money and time in the face of the need for urgent action.

"The lack of specific recommendations violates the law in at least two places," said Garret Graves, director of the state's Office of Coastal Protection and Restoration.

Graves said the corps' New Orleans district office was ordered by the Bush administration to abandon the idea of recommending specific projects soon after the study was begun in October 2006.

- [View Map of one of the most realistic options presented in the study](#)

"The authors of the report had one arm and two legs tied behind their back in writing this thing, and that results from the policy guidance they were given," he said. "From late 2005 until about May 2006, we had a good partnership with the corps, and that's when it ceased, when the corps got new direction from Washington and blew \$23 million on this study."

Graves said the Obama administration can salvage the research that went into the report by asking Congress to authorize the corps to choose projects from the alternatives and start construction quickly -- which would eliminate the need to get congressional approval for each individual project.

### Sifting through the options

The study contains five or six sets of levee and coastal restoration alternatives for each of five sections of the coast. One coastwide combination would cost \$102.2 billion to build, including a 50 percent allowance for contingencies.

Col. Al Lee, commander of the corps' New Orleans District office, concluded in the report that further research is needed to choose among the alternatives. The only action the corps plans immediately is to ask Congress for money to extend the study.

"We took over a million different possibilities and we used a risk-informed decision-making framework to get to a reasonable number: 111 alternatives," Lee said.

In the New Orleans area, alternatives include:

-- Levees high enough to protect from surges accompanying storms as strong or stronger than Katrina.

-- Levees protecting the Slidell lakeshore and other northshore communities, or gates and weirs -- dam-like structures that slow storm surge -- at the Rigolets and Chef Menteur Pass that would block surge from entering Lake Pontchartrain.

-- Restoration of large wetland areas east and south of the city.

-- An even larger floodgate on the West Bank that would block surge from entering the Harvey Canal.

-- Higher ring levees along smaller communities such as Lafitte and Des Allemands.

-- Programs to pay for either raising buildings or buyouts and relocations of residents and businesses in areas that won't be sufficiently protected.

### **Corps wants local input**

The alternatives in the study included proposals that would protect areas from a storm with a 1 percent chance of occurring in any year, also referred to as a 100-year storm, from 400-year storms comparable to Katrina, and from even larger 1,000-year storms.

The corps already has committed to giving the New Orleans area protection from 100-year storms by 2011, and construction is under way.

In studying the much higher level of protection, corps officials winnowed the alternatives to a handful for each coastal section, after discussions with environmentalists, shipping leaders, public officials, commercial fishers and community groups.

Now, Lee said, it's up to state and local officials to give the corps input on which projects to build.

The report was put on the Web at <http://lacpr.usace.army.mil/> on Thursday, two days after it was sent to the National Academy of Sciences, which will conduct a peer review of its contents.

An earlier peer review sent the corps scrambling to include language that indicates the alternatives will include "sustainable" solutions, especially in the area of coastal restoration, Lee said. But he said he expects additional criticism from the scientists and engineers who will review it.

A revised version of the study then will be presented to state officials and the public before

the final revision is given to the secretary of the Army. After that final review, it will be forwarded to Congress, Lee said.

### **Projects that can start now**

If Congress agrees to finance additional study, Lee said, the corps will identify projects that can move forward under already approved levee and coastal restoration programs and those that will need additional authorization from Congress.

The agency also will sit down with state and local officials to begin work on a plan for elevating buildings or buying out property owners in especially vulnerable areas, as well as identifying the money to finance that strategy, he said.

Additional authority from Congress may be needed for those so-called nonstructural programs to combine efforts of other federal agencies, including the Department of Housing and Urban Development and FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program, said corps program manager Tim Axtman. He said the corps already is moving forward with demonstration programs, including one that would raise homes in flood-prone areas of New Orleans.

The report also recommends asking Congress to amend its legislation governing the Mississippi River and Tributaries project, which governs all navigation and flood control along the river, to include environmental projects and coastal restoration.

That would give new authority to the Mississippi River Commission to oversee parts of the restoration process. The commission is made up of corps and other federal agency officials and representatives of business and shipping interests in states along the river.

It shouldn't be a surprise that the plan does not include specific recommendations, said Mark Davis, director of the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy.

"The lesson is . . . you're going to have to lead the corps, " Davis said. "The corps can't and won't tell us how safe our cities need to be, how sustainable our coast should be, what values we should enhance and protect.

"They can't do that because it's not their job, " he said. "It's our job."

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Categories: [Levees/Flood Protection](#)

### **Comments**

#### **KSchmill says...**

This report finally talked about rebuilding barrier islands. Now can we get Dubai to build the islands? Afterall they have been doing it for years, while others just talk.

Posted on 03/05/09 at 10:11PM