RESTORE ACT

CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR LOUISIANA (LA-COE)

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

May 2025

Updates from LA-COE

Happy Spring/Louisiana Summer! The 2025 State of the Coast conference in New Orleans is quickly approaching and will take place May 20–22! The LA-COE is excited to be hosting a LA-COE-focused session during the conference on Wednesday, May 21st from 9–10:30am. During the session, four LA-COE RFP3 researchers, Abby Eckland (University of New Orleans), Dr. Corina Barbalata (Louisiana State University), Dr. Navid Jafari (Louisiana State University), and Dr. Gary LaFleur (Nicholls State University) will be presenting on using novel technologies to advance coastal restoration in Louisiana. We hope to see many of you there!

Additionally, the 2025 LA-COE All Hands Meeting is set for the morning of August 18th, 2025, from 8:30–1pm. During the meeting, RFP3 PIs will be asked to give a 10-minute presentation overview of their research and preliminary results during the All-Hands Meeting. PIs will also have the opportunity to discuss any questions they may have with their TPOCs and project teams.

Below is a link to the Resources page for RFP3 PIs, with additional links to the RFP3 Quick Reference Guide, Best Data Management Practices, and more.

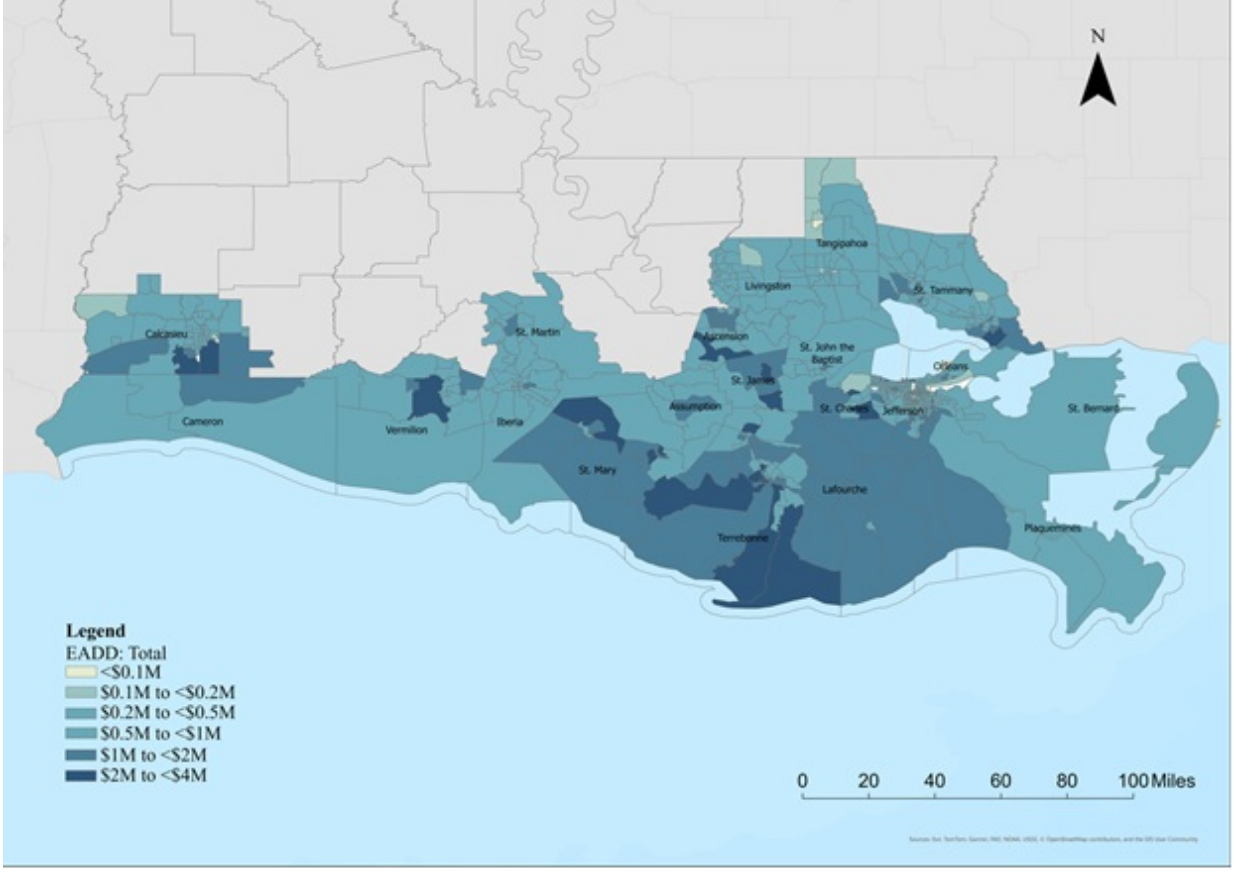
Resources

RFP3 Research Award Project Highlight: Dr. Ayat Al Assi, Louisiana State University AgCenter

The LA-COE RFP3-funded research project led by Dr. Ayat Al Assi, "Wind resilience in coastal Louisiana: A social equity approach to enhanced building code practices," has established a comprehensive wind risk assessment framework across the 20-parish Coastal Master Plan region. This includes a detailed wind risk metrics library and evaluating expected annual structure damage (EASD) and expected annual dollar damage (EADD) at the census tract level.

This framework lays the groundwork for integrating advanced wind risk metrics into future planning and policy decisions with a focus on social equity. The project evaluates how enhanced building codes can reduce long-term risk, particularly in communities facing the greatest exposure and slowest recovery.

Now entering its next phase, the research will deliver a deeper analysis of how wind-related risks intersect with socioeconomic conditions. The goal is to identify where targeted improvements—like updated building standards—can deliver the strongest, most cost-effective outcomes for both resilience and equity across Louisiana's coast.



Example of Expected Annual Dollar Damage (EADD) assessment mapped across the Louisiana Coastal Master Plan parishes as part of Dr. Al Assi's RFP3-funded project.

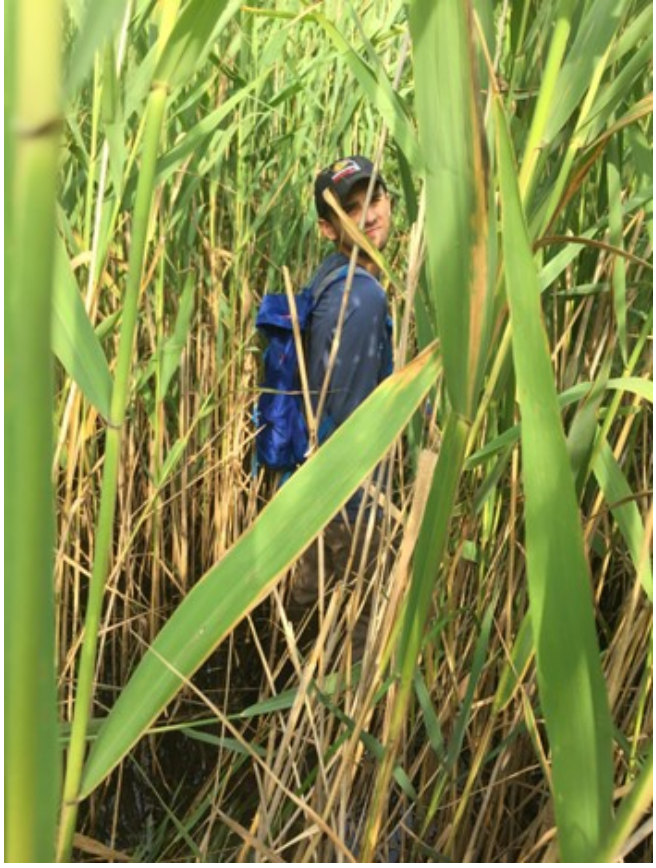
RFP3 Graduate Assistantship Award Project Highlight: Jack Williams, University of Louisiana Lafayette

Jack Williams is the University of Louisiana Lafayette graduate student working with Dr. Robyn Zerebecki on the RFP3-funded project, "Quantifying small-scale genetic variation in *spartina alterniflora*."

Originally from Chicago, Jack made the move to Louisiana in January 2025, to join Dr. Zerebecki's lab at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL). Drawn by the opportunity to work in Gulf Coast salt marshes while pursuing a master's degree in biology, Jack is merging his lifelong passion for the outdoors with cutting-edge research that supports Louisiana's Coastal Master Plan. His work focuses on comparing restored and natural salt marshes using the genetics of *Spartina alterniflora*, or smooth cordgrass, to better understand small-scale biodiversity and what that means for long-term restoration success. Fieldwork this summer will have him kayaking and boating through marshes to collect plant tissue and environmental data, which he'll analyze back in the lab.

Jack's path to this work is rooted in a childhood spent camping and volunteering in wildlife refuges, followed by an undergraduate degree in environmental science and biology. His goal is to provide meaningful insights into how restoration projects can better incorporate genetic diversity to boost resilience. Jack hopes the data collected under his LA-COE-funded research can help strengthen predictive models in the Coastal Master Plan, especially as the region continues to face sea level rise and coastal erosion.

Inspired by the importance and urgency of coastal conservation, Jack sees his research contributing directly to adaptive restoration planning. Whether his next step is with working at a state or federal government agency, an NGO, or in academia, he's driven by the same curiosity and concern that first brought him outdoors. Until then, you'll likely find him in the marsh, lab, or queuing up Bob Marley to get in the research zone.



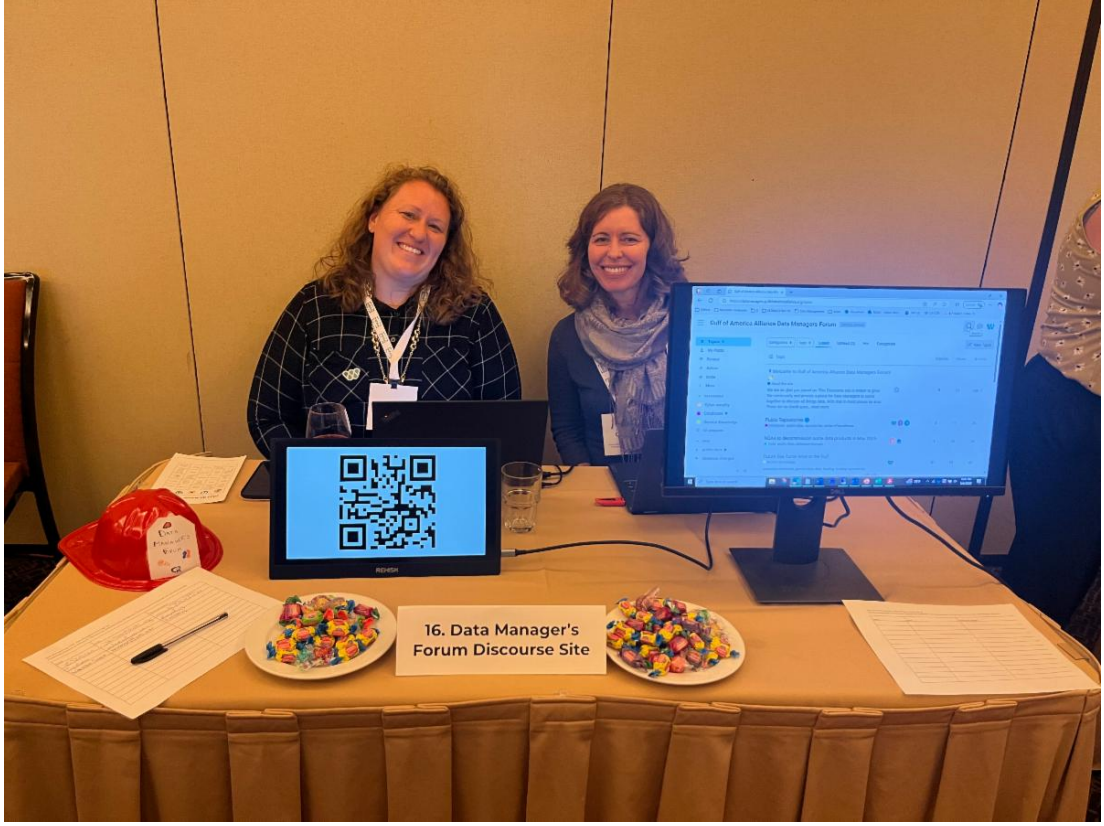
LA-COE funded ULL graduate student, Jack Williams, working in the field.

Congrats, Dr. Hiatt!

The LA-COE would like to extend a congratulations to RFP3 award recipient Dr. Matthew Hiatt for being honored as an emerging scholar at Louisiana State University! Dr. Hiatt has been named an "LSU Rainmaker in the Early Career Category" for his contributions to the field of hydrology and to the study and preservation of the Mississippi River Delta.

Gulf of America Alliance All Hands

The LA-COE team had a great time connecting with our RESTORE Act Centers of Excellence partners from across the Gulf at the Gulf of America Alliance All-Hands Meeting in Biloxi, Mississippi, May 5–8. During the meeting, our LA-COE Data Manager, Brittany Jensen, promoted a Gulf-wide Data Managers Forum to support data consistency and collaboration across the Gulf.



LA-COE's Data Manager, Brittany Jensen (left), and Cheryl Clark (right) with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, run the Data Manager's Forum Discourse Site at the GOAA All-Hands Meeting.

LA-COE's Director Jessica Henkel, Chief Scientist Alyssa Dausman, and Data Manager Brittany Jensen attend the Data and Monitoring Priority Issue Team Meeting at GOAA All-Hands in Biloxi, MS.

Call for Submissions

The journal Estuaries and Coasts is accepting submissions for a special collection on co-

production and coastal resilience through August 31, 2025, as part of a partnership[between the NOAA RESTORE Science Program, Florida State University researchers, and the LA-COE.

More Information

Why do all the oysters get excited when spring hits Louisiana?

Because they're ready to shell-ebrate!

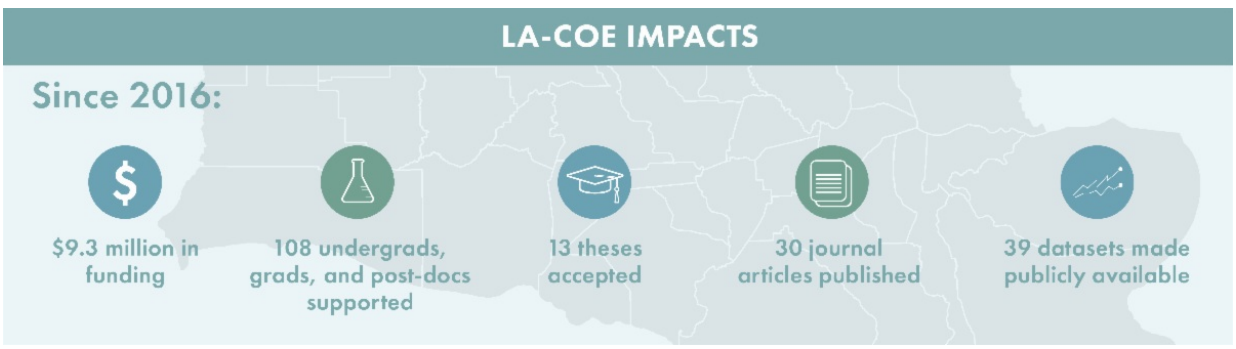
Why did the estuary break up with the river?

Because it needed some space to recharge!

Why don't coastal wetlands ever get invited to the party?

Because they always "muck" things up!

Impacts



Follow us on social media

Remember to use #LouisianaCOE with other optional additions of #Coast #Science #AppliedResearch in your posts.

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