

Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation

Habitat Protection Program

Habitat Change in St. Tammany Parish

- The Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation publicly released a report in July 2002 commissioned by the University of New Orleans - Coastal Research Laboratory (UNO-CRL), entitled *Urbanization Effects on Habitat Change in St. Tammany Parish*.
- St. Tammany was selected since it is one of the fastest growing parishes in the state and the effects of development can be seen in the parish's declining habitats and degraded water quality.
- UNO-CRL used state-of-the-art mapping technology, known as Geographic Information Systems or GIS, to document habitat change that occurred in the parish between 1982-2000.
- The report determined that 52,216 acres of habitat have been altered in the parish over the nearly 20-year period. This is equivalent to placing 2 Metairies in St. Tammany.
- The report makes clear that urbanization and development has led to significant habitat loss, most of which has occurred in the southern part of St. Tammany.
- Much of the habitat loss has occurred in wetland ecosystems.
- During the study period: more than 11,000 acres of marsh were lost, nearly 4,000 acres of upland forest were lost, almost 34,000 acres of wetland forest habitat were lost, and over 3,000 acres of shrub/scrub wetland habitat were lost.
- Urbanization in St. Tammany has occurred at a rate of 2,699 acres a year. At this growth rate, urban areas will occupy over 138,000 acres, or 19.2% or 1/5 of the parish by 2025, and almost 206,000 acres, 28.6% or 1/3 of St. Tammany by 2050.
- Since wetlands naturally filter out pollutants and toxics from the water and they can absorb tremendous amounts of water from rain events, wetland loss can lead to poor water quality and flooding.
- Many of the converted habitats are located in floodplains - areas that, when left in their natural state, provide flood storage. Areas of significant habitat loss are now experiencing flooding problems, especially in the Slidell area.
- By completing this study, UNO-CRL has developed a methodology for conducting a habitat change analysis, which can be used in other areas of the Pontchartrain Basin. UNO-CRL also has completed a similar habitat change study for Tangipahoa Parish.