June 2004

Nutria Harvest for Wetland Restoration Demonstration (LA-03a)

Project Status

Approved Date: 1997
Cost: $2.1 million
Project Area: N/A
Status: Completed October 2003
Net Benefit After 20 Years: N/A
Project Type: Demonstration: Herbivory Control

Location

This project was located throughout the coastal zone of Louisiana.

Problems

The nutria is a non-native, furbearing species in the rodent family that was introduced to enhance the Louisiana fur industry. Since the decline of the fur industry, nutria populations have increased tremendously along the coast. Because nutria voraciously consume marsh plants that help anchor wetlands, this non-native nutria population is now having a significant negative impact on coastal marsh health.

Restoration Strategy

The goals of this demonstration project were to determine if nutria meat for human consumption could be promoted and determine if a meat processing system promotional program could be developed. Meeting these goals would have facilitated nutria harvest through an increased meat demand. The project called for Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act funding matching that of participating meat-processing plants in order to compensate trappers for the nutria they harvest. The project also included monitoring selected coastal marsh areas by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) to assess both nutria damage and recovery resulting from this project.

Other components of the project included nutria meat recipe development and publication, along with an advertising and marketing strategy focused on increasing the public demand for nutria meat. The project was implemented by the LDWF with oversight by the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Louisiana's growing nutria population is detrimental to the state's coastal marshes as the animals consume wetland plants that hold the soil together.

Progress to Date

This demonstration project was approved by the Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force in April 1997. Through this project, LDWF has coordinated with consultants to develop and implement various nutria meat marketing activities. Marketing activities included LDWF staff activities and contracting with consultants to: (1) develop and evaluate local, national, and international nutria meat market potential for human consumption; (2) develop a nutria meat marketing plan, including a Nutria Marketing Strategic Report which proposed various ways to encourage the public to eat nutria; (3) participate in festivals and chef's competitions; (4) distribute nutria meat to the public through sales at grocery stores, restaurants, and other retail outlets; (5) determine nutria meat processing costs, product price structure, and potential meat production volume; and (6) plan promotional and advertising activities based on the Nutria Marketing Strategic Report.

The LDWF 1999, 2000, and 2001 nutria coastal damage surveys and reports indicated continued nutria-related marsh damages in the Louisiana deltaic plain at a level of approximately 100,000 acres per year impacted. Because of the January 2002 Task Force approval of the larger Coastwide Nutria Control Program (LA-03b), the LDWF discontinued providing incentive payments to trappers and conducting nutria herbivory surveys under this demonstration project. Those two items will be funded under the larger project. However, funding for nutria meat processors enrolled in the program, as well as nutria meat marketing activities, continued until the project was completed in October 2003. This project is on Priority Project List 6.

For more project information, please contact:

Federal Sponsor:
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Lafayette, LA
(337) 291-3100

Local Sponsor:
Louisiana Department of Natural Resources
Baton Rouge, LA
(225) 342-7308

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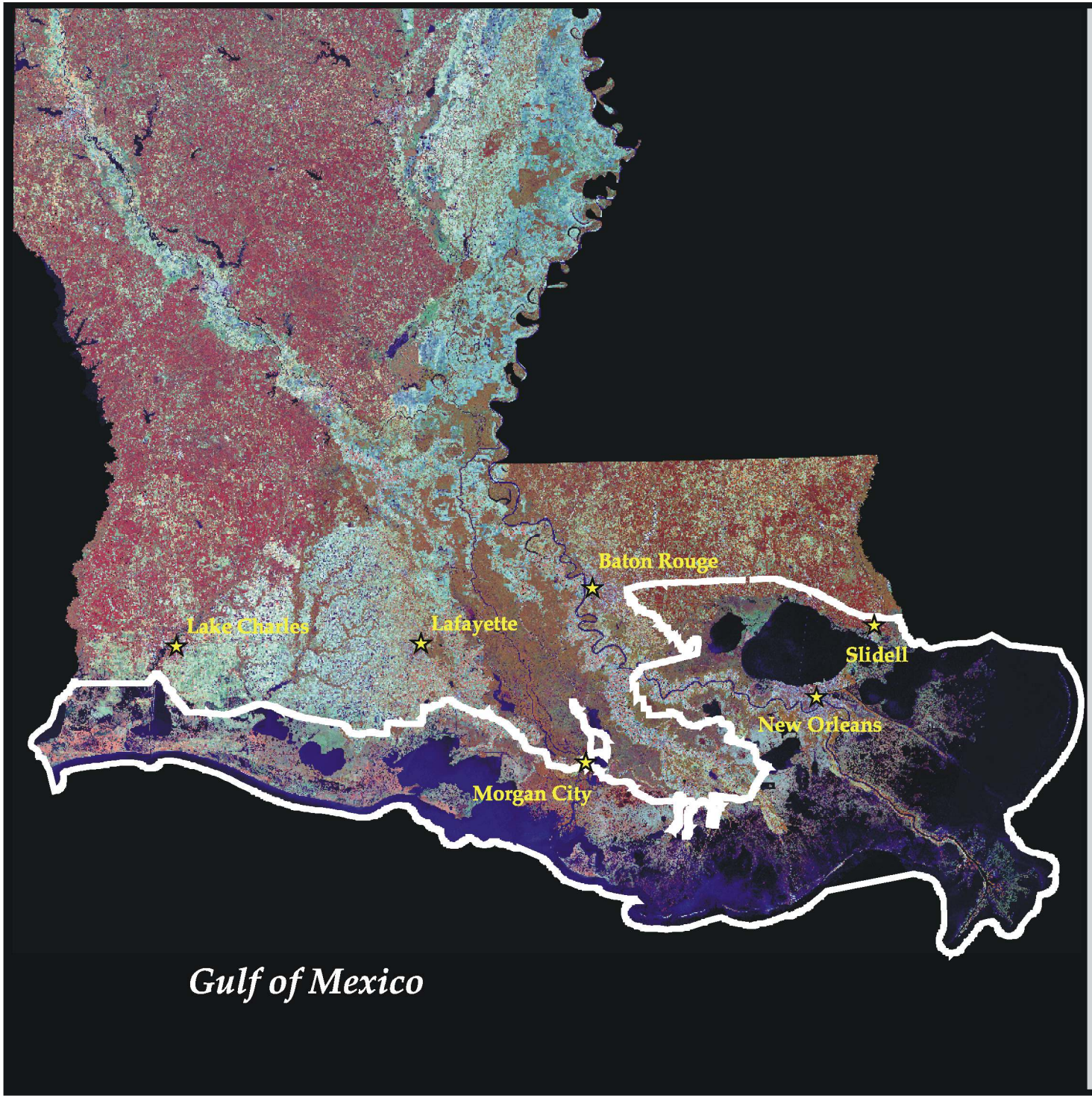

Project Boundary

USGS
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N

25 0 25 50 Miles

25 0 25 50 Kilometers

Map Produced By:
U.S. Department of the Interior
U.S. Geological Survey
National Wetlands Research Center
Coastal Restoration Field Station

Background Imagery:
Thematic Mapper Satellite Imagery 2000

Map Date: December 22, 2003
Map ID: USGS-NWRC 2003-11-041
Data accurate as of: December 22, 2003