

Narrator: Cindy Cutrera
Interviewer: Cole Ruckstuhl
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CINDY CUTRERA: Hi, My name is Cindy Cutrera. I live in Morgan City, Louisiana. I was born in Morgan City and have been here all of my life. I was born in December of 1956. I'm married. My husband's also a lifetime resident of Morgan City. We have three daughters; two of them live in the area and one is in Lafayette. And the one in Lafayette just recently had her first baby and wants to come home as well. They just love being in the area, just the family and community environment here.

COLE RUCKSTUHL: Well, we're out here today at Land End Park and one of my first questions is "What was the idea in coming to do this interview here?"

CUTRERA: [0:51] Lake End Park- We camp here frequently; all of our family comes out. It's been the place, even when you were in school, where you came out for school trips and so on. There are some things here that remind me of things that are going on with coastal restoration. For instance, the pipe sediment delivery from the Atchafalaya River over on to the beach; there was a beach extension project that went on right here at Lake End Park so just showing you what can be done with sediment delivery. There's also some other issues with nutria out here and it's very representative of what CWPPRA is trying to do to help erosion of the area.

RUCKSTUHL: You said that you lived here for all of your life?

CUTRERA: Yes

RUCKSTUHL: Your kids are still living here?

CUTRERA: [1:51] I have two who live here. One lives in Morgan City and one in Berwick and they both have children and they're both educators. And then, as I said, I have a third one who stayed in Lafayette when she finished school. Now that she has a child of her own she knows what it is to have family and she misses a lot of our gatherings out at the park and at the house and so she wants to come back home too; she would love to be here.

RUCKSTUHL: Why are Louisiana wetlands important to you, personally?

CUTRERA: Number one, because of our way of life, the fishing, the hunting. Our families have been here for generations in this area. We certainly don't want to see this area destroyed. And we're really fortunate because we are in a growing delta here. While the rest of the state is losing land; we are gaining land. And although we are gaining land, Houma/Terrebonne just to the east of us is losing land. And right now we provide safe harbor for a number of vessels that come in from areas east of us. And we need to continue to help them

rebuild their land as well so that we can remain a safe place, a safe harbor, and keep our citizens safe from hurricanes.

RUCKSTUHL: Keeping that in mind, why would you think that CWPPRA is important, considering all the things you have told me about the industry and the protection? What does CWPPRA provide, in your eyes?

CUTRERA: [3:22] Well, CWPPRA has done so many projects that are now going to be tied to the state's Master Plan. So, they've done these projects in various areas that have helped to stabilize the shorelines and various other projects. It's provided even a source for people to see whether or not that type of project will work in the future; whether they want to do something else. So I think it's been a critical piece of coastal restoration and preservation.

RUCKSTUHL: You would say that the industry and the livelihood that we have here is one of the most important things that CWPPRA provides the protection for?

CUTRERA: Well, CWPPRA has to first provide for people, to provide for safety; but it does. In this area, our big asset is water, our waterways, and its navigation as well as the seafood industry. [4:25] Any of the bank stabilization projects that CWPPRA provides helps to allow navigation to take place through the area. This is a working coast. It's livelihood; it's life and it is industry.

RUCKSTUHL: Earlier whenever we were talking, we were talking out how Hurricane Katrina had impact on this area.

CUTRERA: Yes

RUCKSTUHL: And you mentioned about the FEMA trailers being out here and how they had to provide for that. Can you kind of explain what actually happened with this area whenever Katrina came through?

CUTRERA: [5:04] Ok, Katrina. We were actually, again, relatively safe from the major impact of Katrina. There was a Corps of Engineers project where there was a beach restoration and extension along LA-70 and along and aligning on Lake Palourde. That area which was built through sediment delivery from Berwick Bay allowed an area for trailers, or actually the plumbing and electricity and everything, to be laid out in an area where these trailers were able to be placed and people were able to live along Lake Palourde. Beautiful place when you're displaced from home, actually. They were allowed to live here for, I think, about a year and a half or so. No real significant change. Busy in the offshore industry, of course, once Katrina hit.

RUCKSTUHL: Have you seen a growing number of people coming out here now that they have the land available?

CUTRERA: [6:14] Oh My Gosh, Yes! There are some weekends, especially holidays; we just had Mardi Gras; there wasn't a place available out here for camping. That did provide additional camping spaces. I didn't mention earlier but when those FEMA trailers were moved out this provided a whole new camping section and these areas now are filled. Halloween, any type of holiday, Shrimp and Petroleum Festival- whenever there's any kind of festival going on, the park is filled with campers.

RUCKSTUHL: In your opinion, what do we stand to lose if we don't continue to protect and try to restore our coastline through these projects?

CUTRERA: [7:01] We stand to lose everything. You know, we have our homes here, we've built our homes, our families, our way of life, the seafood that we enjoy, the recreation out even in this lake, just all of those things, industry. If everyone has to leave the coast because we're not protecting the coast then we're all displaced and have to start all over again.

RUCKSTUHL: How specifically are you engaged in coastal restoration activities?

CUTRERA: [7:34] I do work for the Port of Morgan City. We do monitor all of these projects because they can affect navigation, which would affect industry. As a citizen, I like to keep abreast of what's going on. I mentioned family and I want future generations of our family to be able to enjoy this area. It's just a great place. It's just a personal thing as well.

RUCKSTUHL: Based on what you know now, what piece of advice would you offer to the next generation?

CUTRERA: I think that they need to remain educated, which CWPPRA does provide the educational aspect as well about what's happening to our coast. But, they need to remain educated. They need to become engaged in any type of legislative actions that will affect the coast, monitoring the plan, and just making sure it does not affect our area in a negative way.

RUCKSTUHL: Thinking about that, is there one specific thing you would tell the previous generation, if you could go back and do it again, people of your generation and the generation before you, is there something that you know now and you would feel obligated, in a sense, to go back and tell them?

CUTRERA: I think my biggest piece of advice is that we should have been more aware, more in tune to what was going on with the coast. You're just hearing the message now.

Would we do anything differently? Perhaps so, but I think it's just monitoring and being aware. We haven't done that.

RUCKSTUHL: [9:38] So, what would you say that you want viewers of this to take away from our discussion today?

CUTRERA: That it's well worth every dime, every dollar that's spent to restore this coast. It affects not only the area that I've been talking about our community, our families, but we provide for the whole nation. When I spoke about waterways earlier and this waterway as being our asset; it's not only an asset to this local area but to the entire nation. We provide transportation for their commodities, and it's a route out of here, out of the nation. It's worth every dime spent to restore the coast, definitely, I would never advise to future generations to recede. Do something to keep it stable.

RUCKSTUHL: Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

CUTRERA: I did want to mention that projects do, like Lake End Park for instance, Lake Palourde, with all of the wonderful things it provides, everything provides some type of an obstacle. This lake can also be a flooding issue for this city because if water were allowed to flow up Bayou Chene during high water periods and not be restricted it goes down the Atchafalaya and right back up Bayou Chene and goes in to Terrebonne Parish and it also comes

in to Lake Palourde which would then provide a threat to the city. We did have our levee district did a great project during the high water in the spring with the barge that they sunk which actually helped everybody from flooding in St. Mary and Terrebonne parish. Water is to be enjoyed but it's also to, you have to fear it just a little bit, too. [11:43] Our family, we have people that came from Houma, we have people from Patterson and we all kind of ended up in Morgan City. My husband's family is actually from Sicily. His great-grandfather was born in Sicily. They came over and probably had 2 or 3 children then had my husband's grandfather and several more kids after that. They opened a little grocery store here in Morgan City. A lot of Italian families settled here back in that time. Also, this park was donated by the Guarisco family, another Italian family that migrated into the Morgan City area and they donated this property to the city to have a park for the public to come to. We're a family; my children have multiple ethnic backgrounds from German to French. My mom's dad, actually his dad, came from Paris, France. They came into Louisiana and ended up here in the Morgan City area when my mom was a little girl. It's just become tradition; we've all done different things, we haven't followed in the footsteps of prior generations as far as the work that we do, but we have all learned to live and love living here and loving the environment.

Tape Ends [13:15]