



For Immediate Release

New book from Institute's Scott Hemmerling highlights Louisiana's shifting populations over time

"LOUISIANA COASTAL ATLAS," PUBLISHED BY LSU PRESS MARCH 2017

BATON ROUGE, La. (March 15, 2017) – Oil booms and busts, wars, hurricanes, coastal land loss, and so much more shaped Louisiana through the decades and dictated how residents decided to adapt, or move, to meet changing conditions, sometimes in surprising ways.

A new book out today from LSU Press, "A Louisiana Coastal Atlas: Resources, Economies, and Demographics," written by The Water Institute of the Gulf's Director of Human Dimensions Scott Hemmerling, condenses decades worth of information from multiple sources into an easy look at why and where Louisiana residents decided to settle down.

"My colleagues and I at the Institute are constantly looking for ways to better predict and understand the future. As the saying goes, we can't know where we're going if we don't know where we've been," Hemmerling said. "This new book helps tell the complex story of our past in an easy to understand way."

Full of maps that allow a reader to quickly glance at changing conditions over time, the book gives an unprecedented look at the changes Louisiana has seen during the 20th and 21st centuries. From the changing density of farming, fishing, and forestry across the state to the changing landscape of oil and gas exploration, the map shows the shifting tides of populations, resources, and economics across the state.

Although it's easy to assume population shifts primarily follow disasters like hurricanes which displace residents from coastal communities, the picture is much more complex.

For example, in the section dedicated to population changes, the maps tell a varied story starting with 1950s urbanization, a trend seen across the southern United States as people left rural areas for the economic opportunity of the cities. In the 1960s, the maps show a large increase in population concentrated in the central-western part of the state. That population boom could be a mystery until you realize that the military decided the area around Fort Polk closely resembled Vietnam and as a result the base became a favored training station for troops being sent overseas.

"When you look at it through time it's really not just the storms," Hemmerling said about population shift trends. "It's not just the environment."

Moving forward even further through time, Louisiana saw growth centers in the suburban areas of New Orleans in the 1970s, while the 1980s saw the focus shift back to Fort Polk. In the 1990s, Lafayette became one of the growth centers of the state as the offshore oil and gas industry really took off. In the 2000s, a visible population shift occurred as people living in the greater New Orleans areas started moving to the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain after hurricanes Katrina and Rita

Strikingly, the same population shift wasn't seen after the 1960s hurricanes of Camille and Betsy. Although south Louisiana residents have long adapted, and continue to adapt, to a changing environment, resiliency in the face challenges doesn't mean a community can rebound after a disaster at the same level every time.

"All of these challenges compound people's degree of resilience and their ability to recover back to a pre-disaster level," Hemmerling said.

Those lessons from the past remain relevant today as sea level rise, coastal land loss, changing economies, and a host of other challenges face the residents of Louisiana. The atlas provides a way of examining how Louisiana residents have adapted in the past and gives suggestions of what adaptations may be needed for the future.

"Louisiana's residents have always adapted to the ever-changing environment in which they reside," Hemmerling said. "As the challenges of a changing environment and economy continue into the future, once again it appears Louisiana residents are up to the challenge whether that includes statewide coastal restoration plans or individual and community-level development decisions."

More information about the book from LSU Press is available [here](#).

About The Water Institute of the Gulf

The Water Institute of the Gulf is a not-for-profit, independent research and technical services resource with a mission to support resilient coasts and sustainable water systems worldwide. Our work helps ensure livable communities and a thriving economy and environment. For more information, visit www.thewaterinstitute.org.

###