

**Fact sheet on Lafitte National Historical Park  
Legislation: Senate Bill 783  
(Landrieu Bill)**

**Title of the Legislation:** “Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve Boundary Adjustment Act of 2007”.

**Purpose:** "To adjust the boundary of the Barataria Preserve Unit of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve in the State of Louisiana, and for other purposes."

**Location:** The Barataria Preserve of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park (JLNHP) is located south of New Orleans across the Mississippi River. It is a buffer between the Gulf of Mexico and the hurricane protection levees for the towns of Westwego and Marrero in Jefferson Parish.

**Barataria Preserve:** The Barataria Preserve was established in 1978 by legislation establishing the JLNHP. The area was targeted for residential development in the 1970's by leveeing and draining the wetlands in the area. Local environmental organizations battled developers and the Corps of Engineers to have the Hurricane levee moved out of the wetlands and onto higher ground. This move stopped the plan for development and landowners eventually sold their swampland to the National Park Service (NPS).

Litigation by some landowners, who owned land outside the Park, ended up with the government acquiring 3,084 acres of cypress-tupelo swamp outside the existing hurricane levee. In order to transfer this publicly owned land to the NPS, the boundary has to be adjusted to include the new federally owned property.

**Issues:**

The Marrero Land and Improvement Corp. (based in Jeff Parish) has consistently blocked the federal legislation which would expand the boundary of the Barataria Preserve. An issue, which appears bogus, is the need for a willing seller status within the park boundary established in 1978. This includes one landowner who wants a "retroactive willing seller status" to cover his property. The landowner has enough influence with local and federal elected officials that he has been able to block the transfer of federally owned land for nearly 10 years.

All new land to be acquired with the new legislation includes a willing seller provision for privately owned lands. The Energy and Natural Resources committee will not support a bill which would give a retroactive status to a previously passed NPS bill. If included S 783 would be dead.

**Importance of forested wetlands:**

- Aerial photography taken after Hurricane Katrina shows that the cypress forests, which make up most of the 3,084 acres of federal land to be transferred to the NPS, did not suffer major impacts by hurricane winds. Bottomland hardwoods were devastated by the wind action.
- This and other evidence proves that preserving cypress-tupelo swamps are the best way to ensure long-term surge protection for our coastal communities. Research by LSU and the USGS studying the affects of the Hurricane Rita storm surges show that coastal forests significantly reduced the water height and the destruction of storm surges.
- Opposition to the Barataria boundary expansion (rejecting S. 783, revised) blocks the protection of additional swamplands which provide protection to the Westbank of Jefferson Parish.

### **Status:**

- S. 783 is presently in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee for markup
- It has been blocked in committee by Senator David Vitter because of:
  - \* A letter from Councilman Chris Roberts asking Vitter and Landrieu to reject S. 783 (as revised)
  - \* Contacts from Marrero Land and Improvement (N. Buckner Barkley) to Roberts, Landrieu and Vitter asking that they reject the revised bill
- If the bill is voted out of committee and gets to the Senate floor, Senator Vitter has threatened a "hold" on the bill preventing a floor vote.

### **Immediate Action needed:**

- If you live in Jefferson Parish, calls or letters to Councilman Chris Roberts asking him to support S. 783 (as revised). Mention the flood protection issue.
- Calls, faxes to Senator David Vitter asking that he support S. 783 (as revised) and not block flood protection for the westbank of Jeff Parish.
- To date, Senator Landrieu supports S. 783 ( as revised) in order to move the bill out of committee to the Senate floor.

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