

**Challenges in Collaborative Governance for Coastal Restoration: Lessons from the  
Caernarvon River Diversion in Louisiana**

(Short title: Collaborative Governance for Coastal Restoration)

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## **Abstract**

In effort to restore deteriorating coastal wetlands in Breton Sound, Louisiana, a diversion of Mississippi River water into the estuarine ecosystem has been operated at Caernarvon, Louisiana, since 1991. The diversion was implemented after a relatively long collaborative planning process beginning in the 1950s. The Caernarvon Interagency Advisory Committee, an official panel of stakeholders, considers scientific aspects of the freshwater inflow and stakeholder inputs in developing an operational plan, which internalizes stakeholder conflicts, while accomplishing goals of restoring the coastal ecosystem. Even though fishery representatives are committee members, local oyster fishers filed lawsuits in federal and state courts from 1994 through 2005, claiming damages to their oyster beds. These lawsuits were initially successful in state courts but were reversed by the Louisiana Supreme Court. The federal suits were unsuccessful. Following these lawsuits, voters in Louisiana in 2000 amended the State Constitution to protect coastal restoration projects against lawsuits reflecting increasing overall statewide support. Increasing scientific knowledge has contributed significantly to diversion operation. For better collaborative governance, efforts to increase common understanding among stakeholders will be needed, and a process to compensate interests of stakeholders suffering from impacts of restoration projects at an earlier stage should be institutionalized.