

Amendment 1089 – Requires that the housing needs of all Louisiana residents displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita are met before spending money to design or construct a visitors center near Morgan City, Louisiana.

S.1248, the Water Resources Development Act of 2007, includes a provision directing the Corps of Engineers in consultation with the State of Louisiana to study, design, and construct a regional visitors center in the vicinity of Morgan City, Louisiana.

While a visitors center may provide a welcoming source of educational information and entertainment for tourists and others visiting the area, such a center is not essential, especially when thousands of Louisiana residents are still struggling to recover from the damage caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

This amendment is about setting priorities.

It would simply require that the housing needs of Louisiana residents who lost their homes be met before federal dollars are spent to design or construct a visitors center.

The amendment does not prohibit funding for the visitors center, but rather delays spending any federal funds on the project until each Louisiana resident displaced by Hurricane's Katrina and Rita has been provided stable housing.

This would be certified by the Secretary of the Army, in consultation with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), and the state of Louisiana.

Tens of Thousands of Louisiana Residents Still Lack Housing

Hurricane Katrina was the worst natural disaster in the history of the United States. More than 1.5 million people were directly affected

and more than 800,000 people were forced to live outside of their homes as a result of the storm and its aftermath.¹

The inhabitants of about 87,000 households from Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Alabama now reside in travel trailers and mobile homes. In addition, the residents of about 33,000 households still rely on federal housing subsidies in cities including Houston and Atlanta.²

The federal government recently announced that it will spend another \$1 billion to provide housing for more than 100,000 victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita through March 2009.³

“The availability and affordability of housing in parts of metropolitan New Orleans continues to be a thorn in the side of the area’s recovery more than 20 months after Hurricane Katrina,” according to *The Advocate*, a Louisiana newspaper.⁴

The cost to rent an apartment has increased dramatically in metro New Orleans, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development reports. A two-bedroom apartment costing \$676 a month before Katrina, for example, now costs \$978— a 45 percent increase.⁵

Most blacks in New Orleans (56 percent) reported problems with housing costs since the storm, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation study published on May 10, 2007. The study found that 42 percent of whites complained of similar problems. Kaiser conducted the study from September to November 2006.⁶

The government is paying rent for Debbie Holmes, who also assists the homeless, in New Orleans. Her monthly rent is \$1,128 despite

¹ Department of Homeland Security, “The 18-Month Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina - Progress Made and Lessons Learned,” March 6, 2007, http://www.dhs.gov/xprevprot/programs/gc_1173201764934.shtm

² Cain Burdeau. “Housing aid for Katrina, Rita victims will go to '09,” Associated Press, April 27, 2007.

³ Gerard Shields. “FEMA rental plan drawing criticism,” *The Advocate*, April 27, 2007, Page 13A; <http://www.2theadvocate.com/news/7215681.html?showAll=y&c=y>

⁴ Joe Gyan, Jr. “New Orleans housing ‘mixed at best,’” *The Advocate*, May 6, 2007, Page 1A; <http://www.2theadvocate.com/news/7355611.html>

⁵ Joe Gyan, Jr. “New Orleans housing ‘mixed at best,’” *The Advocate*, May 6, 2007, Page 1A; <http://www.2theadvocate.com/news/7355611.html>

⁶ Lisa Lambert. “Money, health woes haunt Katrina victims: study,” *Reuters Health*, May 10, 2007.

the home's location in a crime-ridden neighborhood. Holmes said, "We've found there are more homeless people than before. People are trying to find affordable housing, but it's hard."⁷

Matthew and Shawn Cherie Dupre have lived in a tent for five months in Venice, Louisiana, without electricity while waiting for a FEMA trailer. "We lost everything in the storm. And living in a tent has been really hard," Matthew Dupre said in a recent interview.⁸

And at a recent hearing of the Senate Disaster Recovery Subcommittee that examined the federal government's response to the hurricanes, Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu complained that Mississippi received more Community Development Block Grant funding than it needed while Louisiana is struggling for housing dollars.⁹

"We have a very popular southern saying," Senator Landrieu said. "You can put lipstick on a pig, but it's still a pig.' Well, you can put an air conditioner and a patio and a porch on a trailer, but it's still a FEMA trailer."¹⁰

Congressman William Jefferson, who represents New Orleans, said transitional housing is the key need in his district. "Housing citizens in trailers is acceptable on a very short-term basis, maybe a month or so," Jefferson said. "However, in a disaster of Katrina's magnitude, long-term housing in trailers is unacceptable."¹¹

"A stable and sustainable housing program is an essential backbone to Louisiana's recovery," Senator Landrieu noted in another recent release announcing a hearing later this month to investigate a potential budget shortfall in the State of Louisiana's "Road Home" housing program.¹²

⁷ Cain Burdeau. "Housing aid for Katrina, Rita victims will go to '09," Associated Press, April 27, 2007.

⁸ Sandy Davis, "Refugees not allowed to talk with reporters; Katrina survivors still in tents as FEMA trailers sit empty," The Advocate, July 16, 2006.

⁹ Gerard Shields. "FEMA shorted state in housing aid, official says," The Advocate, April 25, 2007, Page 1A; <http://www.theadvocate.com/news/7178836.html?showAll=y&c=y>

¹⁰ Landrieu release, April 24, 2007; <http://landrieu.senate.gov/~landrieu/releases/06/2007424D26.html>

¹¹ Gerard Shields. "La. delegation complains of lingering storm issues," The Advocate, May 11, 2007, Page 16a; <http://www.theadvocate.com/news/politics/7454596.html>

¹² Landrieu release, May 7, 2007; <http://landrieu.senate.gov/~landrieu/releases/06/2007507B28.html>

If budget shortfalls exist that are preventing Louisiana residents from accessing housing, scarce resources that could alleviate this problem should not be diverted to non-essential projects such as the proposed visitors center.

The Cost of the Proposed Visitors Center Is Unknown

Neither the WRDA bill nor its accompanying report authorize a specific amount or provide an estimate of the cost for the study, design, or construction of the regional visitors center near Morgan City, which would be paid for by the federal government.

While the bill does specify that the federal government is not responsible for the cost of upgrading the visitors center, an estimate of these upgrade costs is not provided either.

Morgan City-- Location of Proposed Visitors Center-- Lacks Services for Displaced Hurricane Victims

The visitors center would be constructed in the vicinity of Morgan City.

Morgan City, according to its official website, is conveniently located "*right in the middle of everywhere*" approximately 70 miles west of New Orleans, 60 miles south of Baton Rouge and 60 miles east of Lafayette on scenic Highway 90. Known worldwide for fishing, hunting and fine Cajun cuisine, Morgan City is the gateway to the Gulf of Mexico for the shrimping and oilfield industries.¹³

Morgan City is also the location of one of the many FEMA trailer parks in the state set up for those who lost their homes as a result of the hurricanes.

FEMA said it spent \$8.7 million on the Morgan City trailer park. Add in all the other costs-- trailers, installation, grounds maintenance and security-- and the tab runs to a \$15,368,269.¹⁴

Morgan City Mayor Timothy Matte was recently quoted as saying he was surprised at the lack of services at the FEMA trailer park. "I'm sure it's hard on those who live there that there aren't any services."¹⁵

¹³ <http://www.cityofmc.com/>

¹⁴ "FEMA's \$15 Million Trailer Park Houses Few," WDSU.com—New Orleans, LA, May 19, 2007; <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18601299/>

For a time, it was difficult to know the actual conditions that these displaced families were living in or what services they may be going without because FEMA prohibited journalists from having unsupervised interviews with Hurricane Katrina victims who have been relocated to FEMA trailer parks, according to a report in the *Baton Rouge Advocate*.

The Advocate report, by reporter Sandy Davis, describes two separate attempts to talk to people displaced by Katrina that were halted by the intervention of a FEMA security guard.

In the first incident, in a Morgan City, Louisiana camp, an interview was interrupted by a guard who claimed that residents of the camp are “not allowed” to talk to the media.

Mayor Matte expressed surprise that FEMA limited the free speech of disaster victims. “You would think the people would have the same freedom there as everyone else has,” he said.¹⁶

FEMA has reversed the policy and Hurricane victims in government trailer parks may now be interviewed by the media.¹⁷

Morgan City Already Has Two Visitors Centers and Several Museums

While the displaced families in Morgan City living in the FEMA trailer park go without services, the WRDA bill would provide an undetermined amount to provide services—not to assist storm victims—but to construct a visitors center for tourists.

Morgan City already has a “Tourist Information Center & Visitors Bureau” located at 725 Myrtle Street.¹⁸

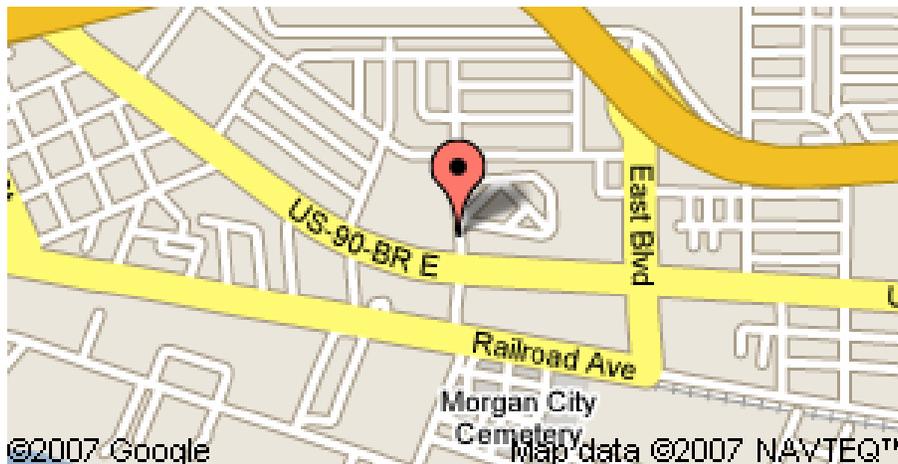
¹⁵ Sandy Davis, “Refugees not allowed to talk with reporters; Katrina survivors still in tents as FEMA trailers sit empty,” *The Advocate*, July 16, 2006.

¹⁶ Sandy Davis. “Hundreds of FEMA trailers stand empty,” *Baton Rouge Advocate*, July 16, 2006.

¹⁷ WorldNetDaily.com . “FEMA lifts reporter ban, July 26, 2006;

http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=51241

¹⁸<http://www.google.com/maps?hl=en&q=visitors+center&near=Morgan+City,+LA&radius=0.0&cid=29699167,-91206667,17016677569285581331&li=imd&z=14&t=m>



Location of the Tourist Information Center & Visitors Bureau in Morgan City, Louisiana

After several months of speculation and anticipation, another visitors center-- the Rig Museum's Visitor Center—has opened on Front Street in Morgan City. Located on the historic Atchafalaya¹⁹ waterfront, the center occupies one of the oldest buildings in the Historic District, the Goldman Building, circa 1910.

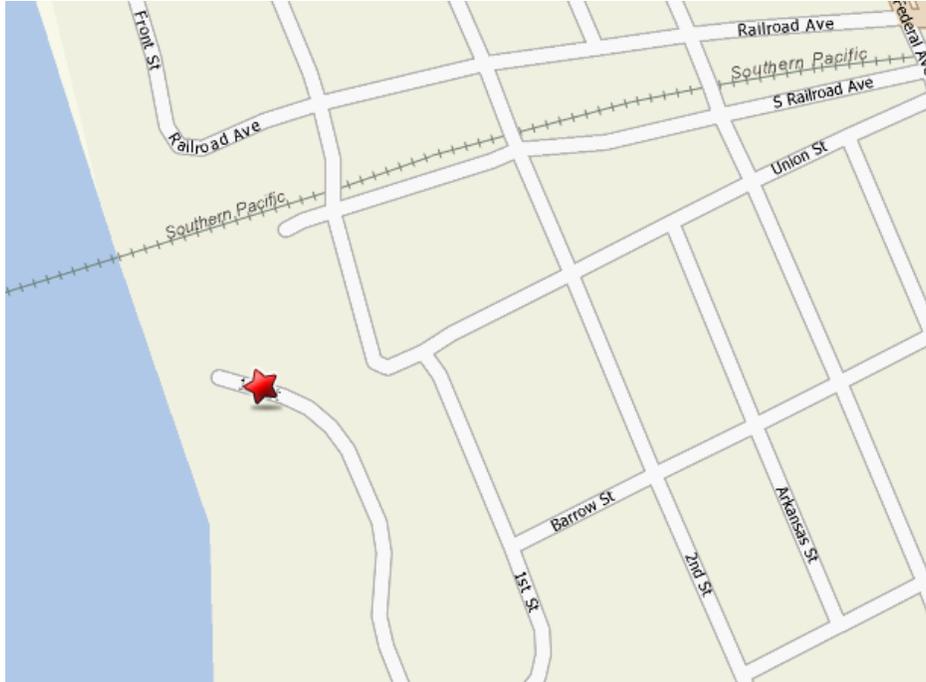
According the website of the non-profit corporation that operates the center:

"Visitors to the Front Street Area can now obtain travel information, literature, maps, hot coffee, and Southern Hospitality. Several industry items are on display, as well as photos, historic documents and a billboard size mural depicting offshore life.

"Opening the Visitor Center represents the beginning of Phase II expansion of the museum project. A major reason for the museum being located in Morgan City was to help the redevelopment of the old downtown. With the Rig Museum's ability to attract visitors to the area, and the appeal of being on the waterfront, it was a great mix for success."

¹⁹ "Atchafalaya" is the French spelling of an Indian word. In French "ch" is pronounced as "sh" is in English. Thus "tch" is used in French to denote the English "ch" sound. Therefore the pronunciation of Atchafalaya is as though it were spelled "achafalaya."

Source: <http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/oldriver.htm>



Location of the Rig Museum's Visitor Center in Morgan City, Louisiana

Also located in downtown Morgan City is the Cypress Manor and Mardi Gras Collection Museum at 715 Second Street.²⁰



Photograph of Morgan City's Mardi Gras Museum²¹

²⁰ <http://www.louisianamardigras.com/>

²¹ <http://travel.webshots.com/photo/1202348946054961537rdvdMy>

Nearby is the International Petroleum Museum and Exposition located on the banks of the Atchafalaya River at the intersection of the Intercoastal Waterway in Morgan City.²²

This museum is run by a non-profit corporation established for the purpose of educating the general public on the significance of the offshore oil and gas industry and its affect on the local area, the state, the nation, and the world. Tours are available Monday through Saturday.²³

An Atchafalaya Visitors Center Was Opened Less Than Three Years Ago

And while Morgan City has a number of visitors centers, the Atchafalaya basin which is the intended focus of the new visitors center, likewise, already has an existing center.

“Smack dab in the center of the Atchafalaya Basin,” according the center’s website, “is a very welcoming site for those traveling on Interstate 10.”

The Atchafalaya Welcome Center is open seven days a week from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The center is located off Interstate 10 at exit 121.

According to the center’s website, “This first-class facility ... is quite impressive with plenty of historical information within the walls of this beautifully designed Acadian-style cottage and museum. On the outside, wildlife and natural will take you back in time.”

This visitors center is relatively new having been completed in June 2004.²⁴ The complex include boat launches, a children’s fishing pier, and nature trails. The approximately 7,000 to 8,000 square foot

²³ <http://www.rigmuseum.com/>

²⁴ <http://dnr.louisiana.gov/sec/atchafalaya/wcenter.ssi>

facility cost \$5 million and was paid for with federal funds provided by the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).²⁵

The visitors center is only 77 miles northeast of Morgan City.



The Atchafalaya Welcome Center, only 77 miles away from Morgan City, was completed in 2004.

Adding Another Visitors Center Is Not Listed as One of Morgan City's Priorities

The city's website lists a number of ongoing capital projects, including a museum and a new cultural center. The projects listed include the Atchafalaya Basin Nature & Culture Interpretive Center (scheduled to begin in winter 2006 with an estimated cost of \$15 million) and Cypress Manor Museum Rehab. (scheduled to begin Spring 2004 with an estimated cost of \$20,000)²⁶

There is no mention of a new visitors center in the city's economic development activities, but it does mention hosting a housing Economic Development Study Group.

²⁵ <http://dnr.louisiana.gov/sec/atchafalaya/projects/054.htm>

²⁶ "CITY OF MORGAN CITY CAPITAL PROJECTS,"
http://www.cityofmc.com/city_projects_update_6_04.html

The city site also notes that city officials traveled to Washington, DC—not to request a new visitors center—but rather “to request proper funding for the 20' Atchafalaya River Channel maintenance and request funding for 35' Channel and river fluff removal dredging.”²⁷

Construction of the Visitor Center Has Been Authorized for Two Decades, But More Urgent Needs of Residents Should Be Addressed First

The visitors center is part of a larger Corps project that involves acquiring 338,000 acres, which is “the largest land acquisition project within the Corps of Engineers.”²⁸ The recreation features consist of several boat launching ramps, campgrounds, and the visitors center.

The project was first authorized by the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1986 (Public Law 99-662) and funding to initiate acquisition of the real estate features was made available by the Energy and Water Resources Development Appropriations Act of 1988 (Public Law 100-202).²⁹

WRDA 1986 authorized the Corps to construct the visitors center and WRDA 2000 amended the law by locating the center in the vicinity of Morgan City, Louisiana.

The visitors center, however, has never been built.

The authorized visitor's center would be a Type B facility. The City of Morgan City is seeking Congressional Authorization to reclassify the proposed center from a Type B to a Type A.³⁰ Type A interprets the Region while a Type B interprets a project.³¹

²⁷ “City of Morgan Jobs & Economic Development,”

http://www.cityofmc.com/city_projects_update_6_04.html

²⁸ http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/pd/02fundingprog/2003/MissRiver&Tributaries/ABASIN_FLOODWAY.htm

²⁹ http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/pd/02fundingprog/2003/MissRiver&Tributaries/ABASIN_FLOODWAY.htm

³⁰ <http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/pd/projectsList/home.asp?projectID=82&directoryFilePath=ProjectData>

³¹ <http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/pd/projectsList/faq.asp>

Under the current WRDA bill, “the non-Federal share of the cost of upgrading the visitors center from a type B to type A regional visitors center shall be 100 percent.”

The Federal government, however, would still be responsible for the study, design, and construction of the type A regional visitors center.

With other much more urgent needs of Louisiana residents still recovering from Hurricane Katrina unmet, now is not the time to spend much needed resources to plan and construct a visitors center.

One in Four Projects in WRDA Bill for Louisiana

Twenty-five percent of all the projects in the nation in the WRDA bill are for Louisiana, according to Senator Landrieu.

This includes \$3.6 billion in coastal restoration, hurricane protection, flood control, and navigation projects in Louisiana in addition to the visitors center.³²

Therefore, delaying the planning and construction of the visitors center will not unfairly impact Louisiana’s exceptionally large proportion of the funds authorized under this bill.

³² Office of Senator Mary Landrieu. “Senate Begins Debate on Water Bill; \$3.6 B for La.,” press release, May 10, 2007; <http://landrieu.senate.gov/~landrieu/releases/07/2007510D57.html>

Setting Priorities:

Housing for Louisiana Residents, or...



A Visitors Center for Tourists?



Sketched Interpretations of Proposed Visitors Center³³

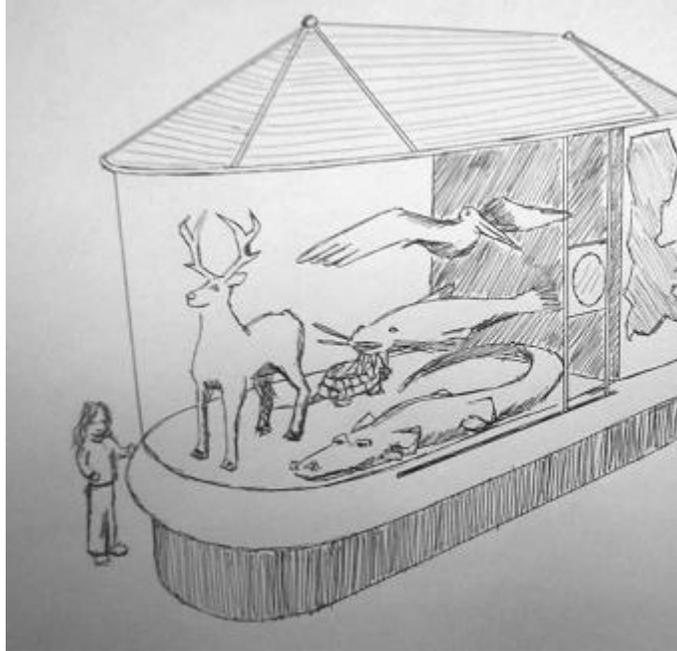


Interpretive Center Possibilities



Title: Rendering of lobby
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Date: 3/22/2005

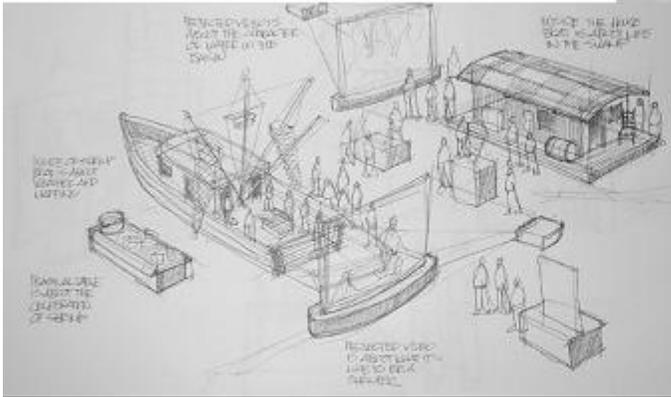
³³ <http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/pd/projectsList/photos.asp>



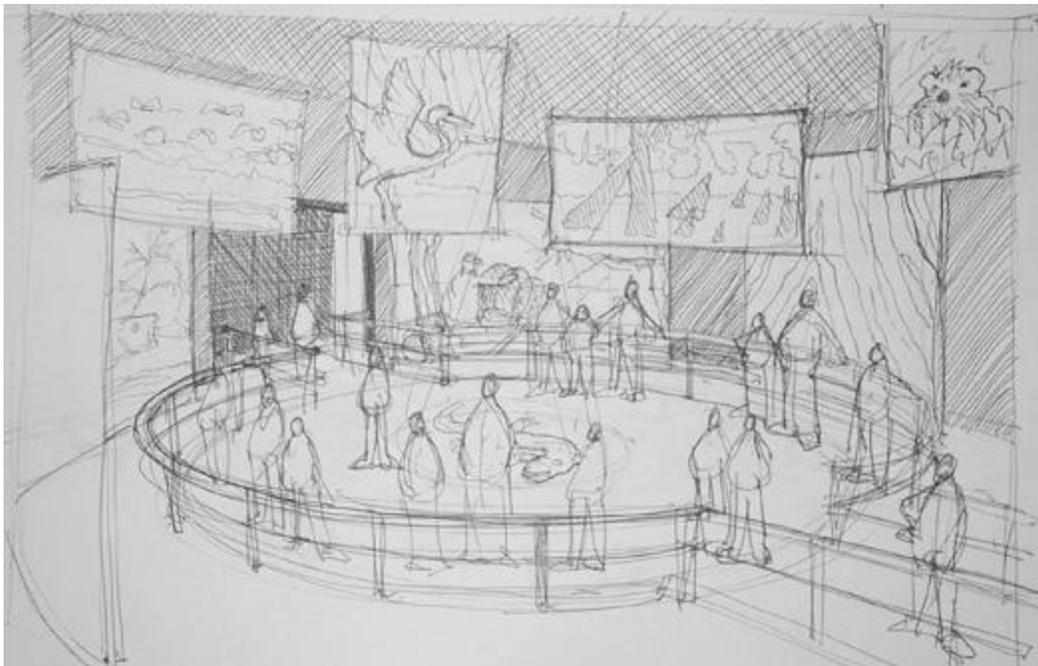
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Description: Concept Rendering
Date: 3/22/2005



Title: Rendering of billboard displays
Description: Concept Rendering
Date: 3/22/2005



Title: Rendering of boat display
Description: Concept Rendering
Date: 3/22/2005



Title: Rendering of lobby display
Description: Concept Rendering
Date: 3/22/2005



Many victims of Hurricane Katrina still reside in FEMA trailer parks like this one

SOURCE: http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=51241

This page is located on the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's
Homes and Communities Web site at
<http://www.hud.gov/news/release.cfm?CONTENT=pr07-051.cfm>.



News Release

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Thursday April 26, 2007

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Donna White
(202) 708-0685
www.hud.gov/news/

HOUSING ASSISTANCE EXTENDED FOR GULF COAST HURRICANE VICTIMS FOR ANOTHER 18 MONTHS

WASHINGTON - Federal Coordinator for Gulf Coast Rebuilding Donald E. Powell, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Alphonso Jackson and FEMA Administrator R. David Paulison announced today that the temporary housing assistance programs for Gulf Coast hurricane victims have been extended by 18 months until March 1, 2009. The current FEMA extension ends on August 31, 2007.

HUD and FEMA are also working on a plan whereby HUD would take over management of the rental housing program on behalf of FEMA beginning on September 1, 2007. GCR, HUD and FEMA are working on the mechanics of the new arrangement and will consult with Congress on the most appropriate structure for transferring management responsibilities.

Beginning in March 2008, individuals in both the rental housing and travel trailer and mobile home programs will pay a portion of the cost, which will begin at \$50 per month and incrementally increase each month thereafter until the program concludes on March 1, 2009. In addition, beginning immediately, FEMA will allow residents of its mobile homes and travel trailers to purchase their dwellings at a fair and equitable price. Seniors and the disabled whose primary source of income is Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or other fixed income that make them eligible to receive assistance under existing HUD programs will be protected. HUD will actively work to transition these individuals into its properties or programs for seniors and the disabled.

"We understand the importance of minimizing uncertainty for Gulf Coast residents who have endured this unprecedented tragedy," Powell said. "This coordinated, 18-month extension will provide stability to residents while providing effective incentives and assistance to help them transition into long-term housing solutions."

"The overwhelming scale of this human tragedy has meant that families have been displaced for an unprecedented period of time. Such a reality calls for an unprecedented, compassionate response," said Secretary Jackson. "As disaster housing needs continue and move into a longer-term program, HUD is working to ensure the affected families will continue to get the housing assistance they need as well as the individual services that will help them rebuild their lives."

"This extension allows FEMA and our partners to be responsive in developing innovative, flexible and compassionate solutions to help disaster victims get back on their feet," said Administrator Paulison. "While we are proud of the tremendous progress we've made, we won't be satisfied until every disaster victim has successfully navigated the road to recovery."

Under the proposed parameters of the FEMA-HUD Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP), local public housing agencies (PHAs) would administer the program under Stafford Act authority. FEMA would provide resources to HUD to extend rental assistance to up to 40,000 hurricane-affected families who are already living in rental units paid for by FEMA. Families are expected to experience a seamless transition under the new program.

DHAP would provide much-needed stability to individuals and families affected by the storms, and would lengthen the potential for some to receive housing assistance for up to three-and-a-half years following the 2005 storm season. In addition to housing assistance being made available, under the proposed program, PHAs would also work with individuals and families under this new program to provide access to job training, housing counseling and other forms of support that would better enable disaster victims to regain independence and self-sufficiency.

Between now and September 1, 2007, FEMA plans to provide HUD with a list of its current renters so that HUD can assume their rental assistance. Under the proposed program, beginning on March 1, 2008, HUD would use a transitional approach to help families continue along the path to self-sufficiency. For example, starting on that date, the level of assistance would be reduced by \$50 per month successively, with the goal of leading the family closer to complete housing independence at the end of the 18-month extension. For example, if a family has an \$850 rental apartment, they would be required to contribute \$50 toward their rent starting in March 2008, which would rise to \$100 in April 2008; \$150 in May 2008, etc. In addition, beginning on March 1, 2008, families in FEMA travel trailers and mobile homes would begin to pay a share of the monthly costs, which will also incrementally increase until the program reaches its conclusion on March 1, 2009.

To the extent allowable by law, seniors and the disabled who qualify would continue to receive the full subsidy required to pay their rent (either in an apartment or in travel trailers and mobile homes) throughout the duration of the extended 18-month program.

HUD plans to continue to work closely with local PHAs nationwide to administer the new DHAP vouchers. These PHAs also administer HUD's regular Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8), which gives them the business knowledge required to manage this new program, and will allow for a smooth transition for families. PHAs also have the necessary expertise in working directly with families with sensitive needs, which puts them in a better position to coordinate extensive case

management to address each family's specific goals-be it job training, financial education and other valuable services that help lead these families to self-sufficiency.

FEMA will continue to manage its mobile home and travel trailer operations throughout the Gulf, and also will continue to engage HUD, as well as state and local officials, on a collaborative effort to identify alternative housing solutions for those in mobile home and travel trailer residents. As with the HUD program, beginning on March 1, 2008, individuals in the trailers and mobile homes will pay a small portion of the cost, beginning at \$50 per month; FEMA will increase the amount of rent charged incrementally on the travel trailers and mobile homes until the family reaches its ability to pay, according to a FEMA formula based on income.

Beginning immediately, FEMA is setting up a process to allow victims of Katrina and Rita who have been living in travel trailers and mobile homes to purchase those units at a reduced cost. The adjusted fair market cost will take into account FEMA's monthly expenses for maintaining the units and its standard cost for deactivating the units. This initiative will allow those residents who have been unable to move on to purchase their own units, thus facilitating their return to self-sufficiency.

SEC. 3051. REGIONAL VISITOR CENTER, ATCHAFALAYA BASIN FLOODWAY SYSTEM, LOUISIANA.

(a) Project for Flood Control- Notwithstanding paragraph (3) of the report of the Chief of Engineers dated February 28, 1983 (relating to recreational development in the Lower Atchafalaya Basin Floodway), the Secretary shall carry out the project for flood control, Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System, Louisiana, authorized by chapter IV of title I of the Act of August 15, 1985 (Public Law 99-88; 99 Stat. 313; 100 Stat. 4142).

(b) Visitors Center-

(1) IN GENERAL- The Secretary, acting through the Chief of Engineers and in consultation with the State of Louisiana, shall study, design, and construct a type A regional visitors center in the vicinity of Morgan City, Louisiana.

(2) COST SHARING-

(A) IN GENERAL- The cost of construction of the visitors center shall be shared in accordance with the recreation cost-share requirement under section 103(c) of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 (33 U.S.C. 2213(c)).

(B) COST OF UPGRADING- The non-Federal share of the cost of upgrading the visitors center from a type B to type A regional visitors center shall be 100 percent.

(3) AGREEMENT- The project under this subsection shall be initiated only after the Secretary and the non-Federal interests enter into a binding agreement under which the non-Federal interests shall--

(A) provide any land, easement, right-of-way, or dredged material disposal area required for the project that is owned, claimed, or controlled by--

(i) the State of Louisiana (including agencies and political subdivisions of the State); or

(ii) any other non-Federal government entity authorized under the laws of the State of Louisiana;

(B) pay 100 percent of the cost of the operation, maintenance, repair, replacement, and rehabilitation of the project; and

(C) hold the United States free from liability for the construction, operation, maintenance, repair, replacement, and rehabilitation of the project, except for damages due to the fault or negligence of the United States or a contractor of the United States.

(4) DONATIONS- In carrying out the project under this subsection, the Mississippi River Commission may accept the donation of cash or other funds, land, materials, and services from any non-Federal government entity or nonprofit corporation, as the Commission determines to be appropriate.