



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WEST BANK OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST PARISH ENDANGERED

Edgard, LA - The entire West Bank of St. John the Baptist Parish was added to the National Trust for Historic Preservation's list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places this week. Since 1988, the National Trust has used its list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places to raise awareness about the threats facing some of our nation's greatest treasures.

Plans for industrial development threaten the last untouched section of Louisiana's "German Coast," an area which all Louisiana students learn about in their state history class. At risk of loss are not only a local population with a rich and complex culture, but also 300 years of agricultural tradition, historic sites, archaeological records, existing film and tourism industries, and a delicate natural ecosystem.

The region that is now the West Bank of St. John Parish was settled by Europeans as a farming community in 1724 and known as the Second German Coast. Its unique history has been preserved through its agriculture, rural landscape, urban form and collective cultural memory and traditions. In fact, the survival of early New Orleans can be attributed to the German immigrant farmers who took their produce down the river to market each week.

The three historic villages of Lucy, Edgard (parish seat) and Wallace contribute to the interwoven, linear community along the Mississippi River. There are numerous historic sites located within this stretch, including Whitney and Evergreen Plantations, both of which are nationally renowned for their interpretation of the experience of enslaved persons. The village of Wallace was founded immediately after the Civil War by Black soldiers who joined the Union Army to gain their freedom and afterwards, returned home to their families. This area is still overwhelmingly populated by descendants of persons who were enslaved at local plantations.

The latest threats to the way of life in west St. John Parish come from several sources. If permitted, a proposed grain terminal by Greenfield Louisiana, LLC would be the same size as the Louisiana Superdome and located adjacent to the village of Wallace. Assisting Greenfield is the Port of South Louisiana, whose 30-year Payment in lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreement established the tax-exempt state agency as the landowner and Greenfield as the lessee of the development. This agreement would allow Greenfield to avoid paying just over \$200 million in property taxes over that time period. The permit application for the grain terminal is under review by the US Army Corps of Engineers to determine potential impacts to nationally-significant historic sites nearby.

A diverse group of advocates opposes construction of Greenfield Terminal. The West Bank is recognized as a local historic district by St. John Parish and as a LA Cultural District by the state, and the 11-mile linear stretch of river is currently being studied by the National Park Service.

Opponents of the Greenfield terminal are asking the US Army Corps of Engineers to deny the permit for the proposed development because of numerous potential impacts.

Louisiana Economic Development lists four other large agricultural sites in west St. John Parish as available for industrial development. A port facility at any of these locations would open the West Bank of St. John Parish to heavy industry and result in a loss of people, existing industries and culture. Brian Davis, executive director for the Louisiana Trust, says, "If a port and industrial sites are allowed to get a foothold in the West Bank of St. John the Baptist Parish, this distinctive

culture, its historic record and what the people can teach us will be lost within the next twenty years. When your family has existed for generations in a rural setting, you don't want your kids to live entrenched in the noise, pollution and bright lights of an industrial zone."

In 1988, the *Washington Post* broke a story about high miscarriage and cancer rates concentrated in the village of St. Gabriel. Since then, this 85-mile stretch of the Mississippi River has been known as "Cancer Alley" because of the millions of pounds of toxic pollutants released into the atmosphere each year. The West Bank has remained agrarian, with fields and houses on the high ground closest to the river, just 15 feet above sea level. From the levee, land descends to bayous and cypress swamps that flow into Lac Des Allemands (*Lake of the Germans*), an important seafood habitat and sport fishing destination.

Katherine Malone-France, Chief Preservation Officer for the National Trust, says, "The West Bank is a remarkable and profoundly important cultural landscape, with historic villages, plantations, cultivated fields, and archeological sites that are integral to telling the full history of our country. The potential construction of Greenfield Terminal threatens to dramatically harm this place and the multi-faceted community and culture that are inextricably tied to it. We stand with local and national advocates, including the descendants of people enslaved in the area, to draw national attention to this place, its centrality to the identity and culture of those who call it home, and the potential it represents for all Americans to come together to protect our shared history."

Also included on the list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places this year is the Holy Aid and Comfort Spiritual Church in New Orleans' 7th Ward. This 1880 building was first home to the Perseverance Benevolent and Mutual Aid Society, with its main hall doubling as a jazz venue, during the genre's formative years. Impacted by repeated hurricane damage, the remaining portions of the building are threatened with collapse. Working in partnership, the pastor and congregation of Holy Aid and Comfort and the Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans are seeking funding and support to stabilize the remaining historic fabric and reconstruct the rest of the building for congregational and community use. To support the renovation of Holy Aid and Comfort Spiritual Church, visit PRCNO.org.

The Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation was founded in 1979 with the mission to advocate, preserve and protect historic buildings and sites in all 64 parishes. The West Bank of St. John Parish was added to the Louisiana's Most Endangered Places List in 2022. For more information about programs, resources, membership and how you can help west St. John the Baptist Parish, visit LTHP.org.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation was founded in 1949 to support the preservation of America's diverse historic buildings, neighborhoods, and heritage through its programs, resources and advocacy. For more information or to become a member, visit savingplaces.org. All three organizations are member-supported non-profits.

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West Bank of St. John the Baptist Parish – Images and additional information for press

Photos and B-roll (credit Louisiana Trust):

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/p6id9n5fne7fucs/AAADe-4Y-xjk-5kYeTde_vRsa?dl=0

Proposed Greenfield Louisiana Terminal:

ProPublica whistleblower – Cultural Resources study: <https://www.propublica.org/article/louisiana-enslaved-grave-sites>

<https://www.wvno.org/coastal-desk/2023-01-03/200m-tax-break-for-st-john-grain-terminal-raises-concerns-over-legality-of-loophole>

Environmental/Industrial:

Environmental Protection Agency – Toxics Release Inventory search (by parish): <https://www.epa.gov/enviro/tri-search>

<https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/united-states-seeks-preliminary-injunction-against-denka-performance-elastomer>

ProPublica “The Most Detailed Map of Cancer-Causing Industrial Air Pollution in the U.S.” – Updated March 15, 2022

<https://projects.propublica.org/toxmap/>

<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/marathon-petroleum-posts-bumper-first-quarter-profit-2023-05-02/>

Historic sites of west St. John Parish listed on the National Register of Historic Places:

Whitney Plantation – the History and Legacy of Slavery: <https://www.whitneyplantation.org/>

<https://www.crt.state.la.us/dataprojectsVS/NRHP/PublicForms/ViewProperty/777?>

Evergreen Plantation: <https://www.evergreenplantation.org/>

<https://www.crt.state.la.us/dataprojectsVS/NRHP/PublicForms/ViewProperty/771?>

Sorapuru House – 1825 – Free People of Color – owned by same family since construction:

<https://www.crt.state.la.us/dataprojectsVS/NRHP/PublicForms/ViewProperty/1101?>

Haydel-Jones House - 1815 : <https://www.crt.state.la.us/dataprojectsVS/NRHP/PublicForms/ViewProperty/1316?>

E.J. Caire Stores – 1855 and 1897: <https://www.crt.state.la.us/dataprojectsVS/NRHP/PublicForms/ViewProperty/1180?>

Bacas House – 1840: <https://www.crt.state.la.us/dataprojectsVS/NRHP/PublicForms/ViewProperty/767?>

Dugas House – 1810: <https://www.crt.state.la.us/dataprojectsVS/NRHP/PublicForms/ViewProperty/769?>