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Community

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The Woodlands Conservancy Preserves An Endangered Ecosystem

By [EVE ABRAMS](#) (/PEOPLE/EVE-ABRAMS)



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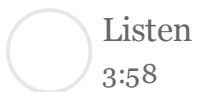
http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wwno/files/styles/x_large/public/201312/Woodlands_Conservancy-1176.jpg

Deep into the Woodland Conservancy's forest are cypress and bottomland hardwood trees.

Josh Brasted

[Woodlands Conservancy](http://www.woodlandsconservancy.org/) (<http://www.woodlandsconservancy.org/>) is creating a legacy for future generations by preserving and developing an ecosystem of coastal hardwood forest dedicated to public use.

Katie Brasted, the Executive Director at the [Woodlands Conservancy](http://www.woodlandsconservancy.org/) (<http://www.woodlandsconservancy.org/>), took us on a walking tour. The following is a transcript of the tour, and her thoughts on why the Conservancy is so important.



The Woodlands Conservancy Preserves An Endangered Ecosystem

We're within a 609-acre forested wetland. This is in Plaquemines Parish.

My name is Katie Brasted. I'm the Executive Director at [Woodlands Conservancy](http://www.woodlandsconservancy.org/) (<http://www.woodlandsconservancy.org/>). It is, I think, one of Greater New Orleans's best kept secrets.

Driving, we're about 8 miles from the CBD.

Now, we all understand how we're in the center of a bowl. So the deeper you go into the forest, you're going toward the lower lying area. There are more cypress the further you go back. We have also a lot of box elder, water oak, a lot of hackberry, a lot of elderberry, there's some ash and persimmon, mulberry, which the birds really like.

There are three otters live right over there. If you're here early enough in the morning, you can see the otters. I've seen a mink. There are Bald Eagles. So it's a pretty unique habitat to be so close to a metropolitan city. And if we don't preserve that as contiguous, then you'll lose that habitat for the wildlife. The species will drop out.

There's more canopy the farther back. Because I think what happens is the hurricane sheers off at the edge of the forest.

US Fish and Wildlife Service tells us that within the next 35-50 years, this will be one of the largest land masses between open water and the city of New Orleans.



http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wwno/files/201312/Woodlands_Conservancy-1148.jpg

There are more than 10 miles of established trail at Woodlands Conservancy.

Credit Josh Brasted

With the continual rate of wetland loss and relative sea level rise, this is a very important natural sponge to protect this community, and it is a substantial wind buffer to lessen the strength of storms.

Open land has a real value. I think there are those who see open land as a development or a commercial area that hasn't happened yet.

I'll show you our centennial tree. Honestly, even though this is the alive-in-1812 tree, it sadly is also way to teach people about subsidence and what happens to a bottomland hardwood forest when you put it under pump. Typically, this is where the soil would be. So you can see that the soil in this area has subsided like three to four feet.

See how it's already leaning? I imagine another hurricane will probably just take it away.

If you look at this forest now — when we say, "Oh this is one of the last stands of bottomland hardwoods" — it's not going to be a bottomland hardwood forest forever because of the pumping. Sometimes you'll see some regenerating, and you'll see a few seedlings, but then they die out. It doesn't have that alternating wet and dry periods that cypress need to survive. So, the ones here will probably be the last ones here.

Our motto is creating a legacy for future generations. If we're not proactive and set aside green space like this, then it won't be there for the enjoyment of our children and their children. And that seems sort of selfish not to do that, doesn't it?

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