

# Woodlands Conservancy buys wetlands

*Land will be preserved by group*

By **Andrea Shaw**  
Staff writer

With the properties it manages standing between the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico and the city of New Orleans, Woodlands Conservancy has acquired 190 acres of bottomland hardwood wetlands in Lower Coast Algiers to preserve it from development and to protect the habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife.

Conservancy leaders said it took 12 years to complete the transaction during the announcement Friday on the property outside English Turn.

"We're creating a legacy for future generations," said Heidi Poche, president of the Woodlands Conservancy board.

The conservancy already manages 600 acres of forested wetlands that straddle a 10,000-acre peninsula formed by Orleans and

Plaquemines parishes.

The Algiers property's location makes the purchase even more significant when one considers the rapid loss of wetlands, said Ray Herndon of the Conservation Fund, which has provided legal support to the Woodlands Conservancy throughout the process.

"In the '80s, a lot of ditching and drainage of wetlands that occurred eliminated about 19 million acres across the country," Herndon said before the announcement. About 5 million acres remain and every bit counts, he said.

"This is a significant parcel," he said.

The purchase from the Archdiocese of New Orleans cost \$500,000 and was paid for by a businessman, who wants to remain anonymous, said Woodlands Conservancy Executive Director Katie Brasted. The Algiers property is parallel to the Woodlands Trail and Park in Belle Chasse, which is managed by the group. It is also near the Audubon Center for the Research of Endangered Species, which will begin construction on

a 1,000-acre breeding facility in conjunction with San Diego Zoo Global later this year.

New Orleans City Councilwoman Kristin Palmer, who represents Algiers, called the purchase "one of the most important things that has happened in this region, in this city in a very long time."

Palmer said she hopes to connect a bike path under construction along the levee in Algiers to hiking trails on the Woodlands Conservancy's property.

"It's a tremendous gift we can give all of our children," she said.

To help the Woodlands Conservancy with its mission, Shell contributed \$35,000 to the group.

Brasted said the U.S. Wildlife and Fisheries Service will visit the property next week and assist the group with developing a management plan.

She predicted the first task will be to tackle the invasive species that threaten to choke out native hardwoods. The forest of cypresses and tupelos must contend with the Chinese tallow, privet and chinaberry trees that exploded in the area

after Hurricane Katrina.

Sean Anderson, a professor at California State University Channel Islands, which has been assisting the Woodlands Conservancy, said not only do the heartier cypress and tupelo trees create a more densely populated and diverse habitat of animals, birds and insects, but they also serve as a stronger barrier to wave action.

"It's like toothpicks versus two-by-fours," Anderson said of the invasive trees.

Poche asked supporters attending Friday's announcement to spread the word about the Woodlands Conservancy's work. "It's just the beginning. We need your help," she said.

Referencing the Martin Luther King Jr. national holiday Monday, Poche said she has faith in Brasted's plan.

"We have bought into this vision," Poche said. "Martin Luther King said you don't have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step."

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