

Floodwall breach sites to be nominated to historical registry

Danny Monteverde, The Times-Picayune

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With the five-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina a little more than three weeks away, Levees.org, a grassroots activist group formed in the storm's wake, is working to nominate two floodwall breach sites for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

17th_street_canal_levee_breach.JPGView full sizeDavid Grunfeld, The Times-Picayune archiveConstruction of this elevated house on Stafford Place, just 100 yards from the site of the 17th Street Canal floodwall breach, was nearly complete when this photo was taken in February 2009.

Sandy Rosenthal, the organization's founder, said the 17th Street Canal and the northern Industrial Canal breach sites are the first two locations her group hopes to have listed in the register.

Future nominations will include, but may not be limited to, the breaches of the London Avenue Canal, the west side of the Industrial Canal, the south portion of the Industrial Canal's east side and the St. Bernard Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet levees.

"It's going to take time to do this," Rosenthal said. "The amount of paperwork and documentation (for the nominating process) is frightening."

Rosenthal said the decision to nominate the breaches as historic sites came from her organization's mission, "which is education about the levee failures."

"It's a fine and fitting thing for us to do," she said. "It ... preserves history and honors history."

It's unusual for a site or property without several decades of history behind it to be listed in the National Register.

 industrial_canal_levee_breach.JPG View full size Alex Brandon, The Times-Picayune archive The repaired breach in the Industrial Canal floodwall, and the barge that caused it, were photographed Sept. 12, 2005. But the state's Division of Historic Preservation has thrown its support behind the project. And while it can't guarantee the breaches will be listed -- that decision lies with the National Park Service in Washington, D.C. -- the division will "do everything possible" to assist the group with the listing process, according to a letter from Nicole Hobson-Morris, director of historic preservation, to Rosenthal.

No one from the state division returned messages for comment Wednesday. Ultimately, listing the breaches on the National Register "is a great honor," according to their website.

"This status can be very useful in helping to save historic buildings and sites because people typically hold Register properties in high regard and think twice about insensitive alteration and demolition."

Rosenthal envisions transforming the breach sites into park settings that would educate the public about the floodwall collapses.

She pointed to the Johnstown Flood National Flood Memorial in South Fork, Pa., as a model for the parks.

That memorial, which is included in the National Register, marks the site of the South Fork Dam, which burst in May 1889, sending 20 million gallons of water rushing through the southern Pennsylvania countryside. The torrent obliterated towns and villages in its path and killed more than 2,000 people.

"If you substitute levee for dam, you have the same story," Rosenthal said.

The group hopes to have the breach sites' nominations ready for a federal review by Nov. 18.

"Even though the work is daunting and the amount of documentation tedious, it nonetheless has been an exciting and rewarding experience to work on this," Rosenthal said. "It's very rewarding to know we're preserving history."

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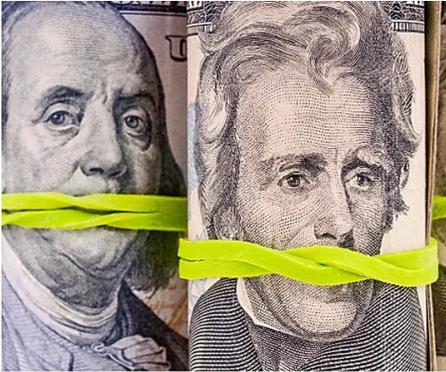
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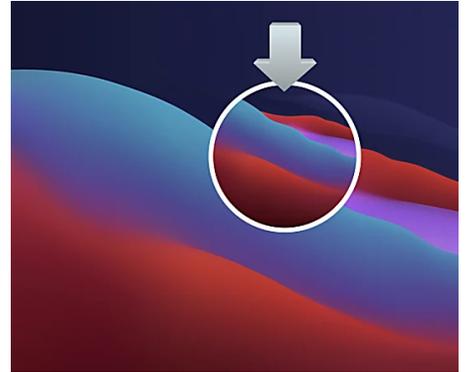
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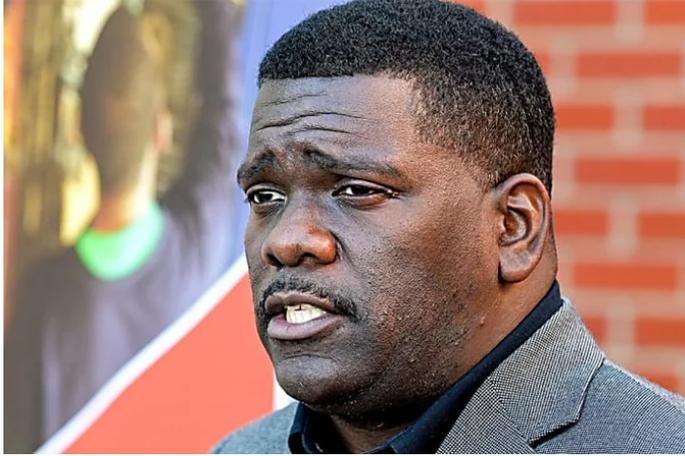


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