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Hurricane Katrina levee breach sites floated for National Register of Historic Places

Published: Thursday, May 26, 2011, 11:30 PM



By Bruce Egger, The Times-Picayune

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A local organization is asking the public to get involved in its effort to have the sites of two levee breaches during **Hurricane Katrina** placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Levees.org announced in August that it had nominated the breach sites at the 17th Street Canal and the east side of the Industrial Canal for inclusion on the register. The levee breaches led

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Brett Duke, The Times-Picayune archive

The 17th Street Canal breach was photographed Sept. 3, 2005.

to the flooding of most of the city.

The group said Thursday that the two sites, in the 6900 block of Bellaire Drive in Lakeview and the 2400 block of Surekote Road in the Lower 9th Ward, have been determined to be eligible for addition to the register. That is an intermediate step before they can be officially added.

In April, it said, the Louisiana State Office of Historic Preservation confirmed that Levees.org's 28-page documentation of the historical significance of the two levee breaches

has been placed in a public file that federal agencies must consult before authorizing any activities in the vicinity of the sites that involve federal money or permits.

Levees.org founder Sandy Rosenthal said her group also has posted the draft nomination on its website and is soliciting public comments and digital letters of support that it will forward to the state.

Because the group is hoping the state review board will consider the nomination request at its August meeting, the deadline for comments on the nomination documents is June 10, and the deadline for letters of support is Aug. 11. They should be emailed to Levees@Levees.org.

The documents can be found at levees.org/levee-breach-nomination/#ixzz1NVC7ZTe3.



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Ellis Lucia, The Times-Picayune archive

The Industrial Canal breach site was photographed Sept. 15, 2005.

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Levees.org was founded after the storm to push for an independent investigation of the failures of the Army Corps of Engineers' local levees and to advocate for better protection in the future.

The National Register of Historic Places, established in 1966, is the nation's official list of districts, sites, buildings and objects deemed worthy of preservation. Listing does not guarantee protection of the property and is mostly symbolic, but it might provide some financial benefits to owners in the form of historic rehabilitation tax incentives.

The levee breach sites are public property, but Rosenthal said she hopes that their official designation as historic would help ensure their preservation.

There are more than 1 million properties on the National Register, with 80,000 listed individually and the rest situated within designated historic districts.

Levees.org last week unveiled a plaque near ground zero of the London Avenue Canal breach site in Gentilly. A similar marker was placed last year at the 17th Street Canal breach site.

Levees.org produced the documentation for its nomination in conjunction with a Georgia consultant, Mark Barnes. It said the information may be used by private individuals interested in the history of New Orleans' water and levee systems, and the events surrounding the breaching of the levees during Katrina.

Bruce Egger can be reached at begger@timespicayune.com or 504.826.3320.

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May 27, 2011 at 5:42AM

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Why this is a dumb idea.

This is a working floodwall that provides protection to thousands of people; do we really want to hamper the Levee Board or the Feds from being able to do maintenance or upgrades to the floodwall to ensure we are protected?

If the site is placed on the National Register, it becomes harder for the Levee Board to do maintenance on the wall. It becomes harder for major repairs or changes to be made by the state of the federal government.

In Dallas a portion of an earthen levee that was over 50 years old and was determined to be eligible for the National Register. The City was not allowed to make major changes to the site that would improve the level of protection for the people living behind the levee because their changes would alter the look of the historic site. Additionally, Corps was designing a upgrade for the levee and had to do additional investigation to determine the historic value of the levee. Consultations with the Historic Preservation Officer and Historic Preservation Council were required. These investigations and consultation have delayed the project for at least a year.

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May 27, 2011 at 8:12AM

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You may be under the impression that we are nominating the levees and floodwalls under Criterion C - engineering significance. In fact, it's the historical site of the levee breach events that is being nominated, not the levees and floodwalls themselves.

Further, the levees and floodwalls at the breach sites, in an emergency appropriation post-K, were replaced with good strong expensive T-walls, and currently they are the strongest links in the entire levee system.

Sandy Rosenthal, wife, mom, whodat and founder of Levees.org

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tuffcookie

May 27, 2011 at 1:20PM

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Since you base your entire argument on the fact that this historical designation would impede future attempts to make flood protection improvements to these levees, I ask, would you, if you were shown that this is not correct and that this designation would not prevent any flood protection of levee improvements, am I correct in saying that you would in fact SUPPORT these designations? (or would you then move on to a new reason to be against it?)

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Gimmee

May 27, 2011 at 7:08PM

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I would wholeheartedly support a designation of this area so long as there is no chance that future maintenance or replacement of the floodwall would be impeded in any way. I believe we should retain our memories of Katrina since it is forever now part of our lore.

The Trinity River project in Dallas has been held up for over a year due to an issue that came up over the eligibility of the levee as a historic site. We just need to make sure that we don't create a problem for ourselves.

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SandySays

May 27, 2011 at 8:17AM

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Listing the levee breach sites on the National Register will preserve history by ensuring that the facts about the breach events - how and why they occurred - will be recorded truthfully.

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rigrigrig

May 27, 2011 at 9:38AM

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Keep telling yourself that your radical crusade against the Corps means something. If you say it enough, you'll eventually believe it and won't have to say it anymore.

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May 27, 2011 at 1:40PM

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piggigspig, what's with playing the race card above? Then there's all this other shameless and insupportable drive-by misnomer that you slander about below? What's up wit'dat?

Levees.org has been completely, publicly supportive of the Corps during the current flood crisis. They've stated so in every article that I've heard them consulted on for advice.

Go back to Clue School yourself.

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May 28, 2011 at 7:50AM

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Whats not mentioned is the role that politicians and Orleans Levee Board played, for their failure to protect and maintain the Pre Katrina levee system.

By not mentioning the politicians and Orleans Levee Board the facts about the breach events - how and why they occurred - is not recorded truthfully.

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May 27, 2011 at 9:32AM

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New Orleanians deserve these plaques and historic place registration. Thanks Levees.org for making this happen. It is hugely appreciated.

To me, this is about vindication and respect for the dead and the hundreds of thousands of citizens that lost so much and have to just suck it up as best we can without normal due process after an engineering disaster. We've been ruthlessly slandered and blamed for all kinds of stuff and it is a near certainty most history books will credit either mother nature or New Orleanians for our deaths and destruction. That is not fair. At least we will have the plaques and historical registration documenting the truth.

It would be really nice if we saw the Corps reformed to the point where their engineering was reliable and transparent and honest enough that we could trust their structures. They investigated and reformed NASA & MMS after their engineering disasters, but we've so far been unsuccessful in our efforts to get an investigation in order to get the Corps reformed so that we might get reliable engineering we could trust with our lives, property and the future survival of our city.

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rigrigsrig

May 27, 2011 at 9:37AM

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Ruthlessly slandered and blamed?

LOL. You're one for the hyperbole. The only thing New Orleanians got blamed for was looting and creating social problems where we were scattered to. And anyone who's honest knows these criticisms were justified.

Getting a levee breach recognized as a historical place is beyond ridiculous. The residents of Lakeview didn't want to gates at the canal's end, so the Corps reluctantly put up those flimsy walls. Why don't you go knock on the doors of the people who protested closing off the 17th St Canal? I don't see you complaining about the Corps protecting the city during this historic river flood. Why not?

Here's an idea for you propagandists who are so filled with hate that you have to find someone to blame for everyone: go back to school. Get a civil engineering degree. Learn how to build levees. And start building levees.

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tuffcookie

May 27, 2011 at 1:09PM

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teehee...rigs, yall almost got away with it. You almost got away with building miserable excuses for flood protection, then passing off it's failure as the the fault of mother nature. You certainly got the jump on the truth. When those who speak the truth were grasping their last breaths of air in the peaks of their attics, before as the water rose, the Corps was blaming it on overtopping. When those who speak the truth were sleeping in stadiums around the country trying to find their loved ones, trying to get a roof over their heads, those who spin that truth were blaming the local authorities and the citizens for the failures. Much the same way you are doing here to the floks of lakeview.

You are still doing it. You create this false story about the people of lakeview not wanting the gates at the canals. Show me come documentation proving that. BUT even if we

were to believe you and your version of the truth, according to YOU and YOUR version of the truth the Corps intentionally (but reluctantly!) built flimsey walls!!!!

Well those who speak the truth have recovered. We are back in our homes. We will not allow you to pass off your miserable failures to mother nature. Your response here lets not only know that "We are winning" (at getting the truth out), but also that you are losing. I find that more and more, our citizens around the country now 'get it' and know that it wasn't a storm that destroyed new Orleans and killed hundreds of it's citizens, but it was the immune-from-liability US Army Corps of Engineers.

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May 27, 2011 at 6:45PM

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The Corps is not immune per see, it is the entire federal government that is immune from liqability. Immunity was put in place by a law written and enacted by Congress.

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May 27, 2011 at 7:11PM

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Gimme, I counter your misdirection "per se".
The term is not "per se", it is "by law". The Corps of Engineers is immune from responsibility for their incompetence By Law, specifically, By Name in the Flood Control Act.

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May 27, 2011 at 1:14PM

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rigs you said; I don't see you complaining about the Corps protecting the city during this historic river flood. Why not?

Here's why...every day, millions upon millions of people go out and perform their job and they do it well. Engineers design and build bridges, buildings etc. We expect them to do their work and for their prodcuts to perform as well, that doesn't make news. BUT when the Corps' work performs as it is expected however, it makes news, that's because of the track record that their work and performance has.

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underdike

May 27, 2011 at 1:33PM

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I already have an engineering degree. Do you?

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