

La. levee dangers identified in 1846

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Warnings about the ecological and geophysical dangers of the levee system in Louisiana date to engineers working in the state 160 years ago.

State Engineer P.O. Herbert recognized in 1846 that the levees, which cause the land to sink by preventing silt from building up banks and settling on landscapes, could do long-term harm to the land, the Christian Science Monitor reported Thursday.

"Every day, levees are extended higher and higher up the river -- natural outlets are closed -- and every day the danger to the city of New Orleans and all the lower country is increased," Herbert wrote in a report. He said Louisiana should "endeavor to reduce this level, already too high and too dangerous, by opening all the outlets of the river."

Herbert's successor, A.D. Wooldridge, wrote four years later that "I find myself forced to the conclusion that entire dependence on the leveeing system is not only unsafe for us, but I think will be destructive to those who shall come after us."

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