

# Researchers study coastal community bounce back

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Two LSU researchers are taking what might be the most comprehensive approach ever to determine how some coastal communities bounce back from disaster.

The end goal of the project, which is in the early stages of a two-year grant, is to be able to develop and use an index of coastal community resilience to educate and inform decision and policy makers about ways to increase resilience in weaker areas.

“Right now, we’re focused on Louisiana, but once the index is developed it could easily be applied to any other coastal communities in the world,” said Nina Lam, professor and chair of environmental studies at LSU and one of the primary researchers involved in the study.

Margaret Reams, associate dean of the School of the Coast and Environment at LSU, and Lam have teamed together with financial support from the United States Minerals Management Service to develop an index of coastal community resilience. But, unlike most other studies, Reams and Lam are factoring in the full spectrum of economic and environmental causes.

“Our first step is to develop an index, something to provide us with useful baseline information,” said Lam. “How do we measure resiliency” There are very complex linkage issues and so many variables to consider.”

Applying a variety of statistical- and Geographical Information System-based analytical techniques, the researchers will look at data from 1970 – 2000 to see trends and consistencies that might have a place in the index.

“When we look at a particular area, how do we tell which one will be able to bounce back after something like Katrina?” asked Lam. “You can speculate, but you can never know. But science is built by little bits and pieces of findings. This study will provide some of those answers.”

The resulting social-ecological resilience index will include measures of environmental conditions, socio-economic attributes, patterns of political participation and population movement within Louisiana communities.

“Once we have an integrated index measuring social-ecological resilience, it becomes easier to identify those factors that explain variation in levels of resilience,” Reams said. “Some of those factors may well respond to wiser management choices by public and private decision makers.”

Source: Louisiana State University

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