

Tribe will move from shrinking island to farm in Louisiana

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Louisiana officials have chosen a sugar cane farm as the next home for residents of a tiny, shrinking island—a move funded with a 2016 federal grant awarded to help relocate communities fleeing the effects of climate change.

Dozens of Isle de Jean Charles residents are to be relocated about 40 miles (64 kilometers) to the northwest, in Terrebonne Parish, Nola.com/The Times-Picayune and The New Orleans Advocate report.

The state is negotiating to purchase the 515-acre (208-hectare) tract, which is closer to stores, schools and health care—and which is less flood-prone than the island, which has been battered by hurricanes and tropical storms.

Louisiana's Office of Community Development expects to finalize the purchase in the coming weeks.

"Everybody seems to think it'll be a pretty quick property negotiation," said Mathew Sanders, the community development office's resilience program manager.

Construction on the new settlement could begin in late 2018 or early 2019, meaning island residents likely will have to endure at least one more hurricane season before moving.

Last year, Isle de Jean Charles became the first community in the U.S. to

receive federal assistance for a large-scale retreat from the effects of climate change. About \$48 million was allotted to purchase land, build homes and move the island's approximately 80 full-time residents.

Isle de Jean Charles is home to members of the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw tribe. It has lost 98 percent of its area since 1955. Causes include erosion, sinking of coastal land, and Mississippi River levees that block replenishing river sediment.

Climate change-triggered sea-level rise is expected eventually to drown the island.

Owned by Acadia Agricultural Holdings, the sugar farm is valued at \$19.1 million, but the actual purchase price may be about half that, Sanders said.

Albert Naquin, the tribe's chief, said he looked at the site two years ago and it was immediately his favorite.

"It's in the best part of the parish; it's the highest area," he said. "I pushed for that one."

A master plan for the new development being created by the consulting firm CSRS will include not just houses but also community spaces and maybe even features such as crawfish ponds.

"We want to move the people on the island in such a way that the community can sustain itself," Sanders said. To that end, officials may try to attract some businesses, including retail.

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