

Habitat as Flood Protection

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Developing An Alternative Economic Model For Lower Coastal Areas: A Bird Watcher's Hostel On The Gulf Coast

Located immediately adjacent to one of the world's greatest shipping lanes at the mouth of the Houston Ship Channel, the east shore of Galveston Bay has one of the highest migratory bird counts in the nation. Each year thousands of bird watchers come here from all over the world. Few facilities exist for visiting ornithologists. This bird watcher's hostel meets this need while addressing additional issues. Aside from providing spectacular bird watching opportunities and access to wetland canoeing trails and hiking trails, this bird watcher's hostel is designed to withstand the dangerous winds and floodwaters associated with hurricanes. It serves as a place where local residents and visitors can go if their evacuation routes are flooded by "precursor" surge tide before evacuation orders are given. Additionally, in an area with few trees because of frequent saltwater intrusion, the tower incorporates nesting spaces for migratory and local birds that are safe from ground predators and hurricane winds. It incorporates observation areas and other accommodations (small cafe, restrooms and water) for visiting birders along with private rooms for two-dozen overnight watchers. An exterior walkway connects the wetland walkways, paths and boat dock with remotely located vehicle parking. This walkway wraps around the exterior of the tower mimicking the ascending flight-path that migrating hawks use to gain altitude before gliding across Galveston Bay on their way to Mexico. Finally, the tower serves as a marker in the vast wetland area to the east of Galveston Bay, locating an important new access point to an otherwise difficult to penetrate wilderness area.

Development of advanced networked eco-tourist opportunities will accomplish two purposes. It will develop an important new awareness of the natural wonders of the upper Texas Gulf Coast – an area until now only known for its abundance of oil and gas extraction and refining infrastructure. This will create economic opportunities for long time local residents and land owners who otherwise feel compelled to sell their land for real estate development, land located in vulnerable unprotected areas that are subject to rising seas and increasingly severe storm activity.

HABITAT



Located immediately adjacent to one of the world's greatest shipping lanes, the Houston Ship Channel, the west shore of Galveston Bay has the highest migratory bird count in the nation. Aside from providing spectacular bird watching opportunities and access to bays and fishing trails, the bird watcher's tower is designed to withstand the winds and floodwaters associated with hurricanes. It serves as a place where local residents and visitors can go if their evacuation routes are blocked.

