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A TALE OF TWO CITIES FACING THE RISING TIDE

New Orleans and Ho Chi Minh City share strategies on living with water

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam -- A half day apart on opposite sides of the world, experts from the U.S. and Vietnam learned of the challenges faced by two river cities, Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) and New Orleans, as DELTA2013:VIETNAM continued, an international conference sponsored by the America's WETLAND Foundation of Louisiana, Viet Nam National University and the government of the Netherlands.

New Orleans, which has endured hurricanes and manmade disasters like the BP oil spill, is surrounded by a deteriorating ecosystem as wetland loss continues to increase its vulnerability. Ho Chi Minh City shares an extremely high rate of sea level rise and subsidence like its American counterpart and views increased storm activity as an omen for the future.

Both cities are seeking greater protection and resiliency for urban populations and the need for adaptation strategies has planning experts searching for ways to better live with water and the natural processes of the rivers.

David Waggoner of Waggoner and Ball Architects of New Orleans, said, "We cannot fight nature because nature will have its way. Our vision for New Orleans is to build a water city – to start at the roots of the city, founded as a port. We are now an island city surrounded by a great wall. We stay dry but we lose ground," Waggoner said. "The real opportunity for New Orleans is its outfall canals. We should not bury the treasure, but use the canals to allow water to be part of the city."

In Ho Chi Minh City, with a population of 10 million, climate change is evident with increased flooding, more intense storms, and rain now occurring at different times of the year than the norm, according to Vu Thuy Linh, Vice Manager of the Climate Change Bureau for Ho Chi Minh City. "Through an MOU with the Dutch, we are able to involve more stakeholders, learn from the local perspective, and build capacity to address the impacts," she said.



Dutch water experts are working on adaptation plans for the city at a time when decisions are being considered to protect the population with large dykes. Frits Dirks of the Dutch firm of Royal Haskoning DHV and project leader for the Flood and Inundation Management Programme in Ho Chi Minh City, said, "We are working on an integrated flood management plan to reduce flood risk hazards and vulnerabilities and to incorporate strategies to cope with the impacts of flooding. We include "no regret" measures, like immediately reducing groundwater extraction and upgrading the city's drainage system," Dirks said.

David Hoeflerlin of Washington University in Saint Louis, MO, recently completed a series of design charrettes in which architects and planners looked at the Mississippi River around Illinois and Missouri and envisioned scenarios for allowing the river to be a resource, not a threat. "It's about the long term. It's about living with rivers. Water is the most politicized commodity on earth but water itself is not political – it flows where it wants. We have a chance now for delta urbanism to get the fundamentals right. We can no longer continue to dominate the landscape with hard structures," Hoeflerlin said.

The Mississippi and Mekong Deltas face urgent decisions based on new projections that sea level rise is outpacing predictions, with these two coastal regions at the highest ends of the predictive scales for rising waters.

Considering the presentations and charrette discussions during the conference, R. King Milling, chair of the America's WETLAND Foundation, said, "Unfortunately, we don't enjoy the luxury of time in addressing these issues. Only consider the rise of insurance rates in South Louisiana and you realize we can't afford to keep doing what we have been and expect different results."

The goal of the exchange among conference participants is to offer a Communiqué' of Cooperation to be embraced by delta regions worldwide.

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Please arrange interviews or pose questions through the following contact:

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The America's WETLAND Foundation manages the largest, most comprehensive public education campaign in Louisiana's history, raising awareness of the impact of Louisiana's wetland loss on the state nation and world. DELTAS2013VIETNAM is a unique gathering of global representatives from the many sectors and political circles that converge in watershed management, especially in the intricate trans-boundary dynamics of the Mekong. International delegates will discuss solutions to some of the most acute challenges facing Vietnam and its delta, the broader Mekong River system, and major deltas and watersheds worldwide. For more information visit www.americaswetland.com and www.deltas2013.org.