



America's Fishery Managers help Louisiana crabbers rebuild



Photo by Laura Westbrook for the Southern Foodways Alliance

“It’s a help - the actual equipment costs about \$2 thousand, which is a lot when you’ve lost everything and are trying to get things back together.”

-Pete Gerica
Speaking of the restoration effort

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Who

Pete and Clara Gerica, longtime Louisiana residents and commercial fishers, who lost both home and business to Hurricane Katrina.

What

Dr. Bill Hogarth, Director of NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service will lead a group of fishery managers in this volunteer effort. The group will construct a new crab-shedding system for the Gerica family, replacing the one lost in the storm.

Why

Crab-shedding systems are key to producing soft-shell crabs, but every system east of the Mississippi River was destroyed by hurricane Katrina. Experienced fishermen know when the crabs are ready to shed. They harvest the crabs and place them in shedding tanks until molting occurs. The crabs are then refrigerated and sold.

When:

Wednesday, May 9, 2007
1:30 p.m.

Where:

19761 Chef Menteur Highway
New Orleans, LA



Media Release

Fishery Managers to construct soft-shell crab sheds

“We tend to get caught up in our day-to-day lives, forgetting that so much destruction remains, and so much more is needed to rebuild the fisheries infrastructure and the communities here in Louisiana and along the Gulf Coast. It’s time to walk the walk. We hope that our work on this one small project will be a reminder - an inspiration - to others to continue to contribute to the myriad rebuilding efforts.”

- Dr. Bill Hogarth
Director, NOAA’s NMFS

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Federal fishery managers on Wednesday, May 9, will gather to construct a new crab-shedding system for Pete and Clara Gerica, longtime Louisiana residents and commercial fishers devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

On August 29, 2005, Pete Gerica watched his daughter get swept away as his house collapsed around him. He managed to pull his mother to safety, tying her to a tree to prevent her from drowning. He then rescued his daughter who he found clinging to a door, afloat in the rising water. It wasn’t until six hours later that Gerica spotted his wife, Clara, atop a floating mass of debris left in the storm’s wake. She had drifted about a quarter mile from their house.

That day, the Gericas lost everything.

“He and his wife are still struggling to get back into the industry they love - they lost their house, vessels, and all of their fishing gear,” said Mark Schexnayder, Hurricane Programming Coordinator, Louisiana Sea Grant.

Nearly two years have passed since Katrina, and the Gericas still live in and work from two FEMA trailers that sit near where their house once stood. They continue moving forward with the recovery process - not only for their own family, but also for their community.

“Pete has long been a vocal advocate for the Commercial fishermen in Louisiana and an invaluable asset since the storms,” said Schexnayder.

Since Katrina, Gerica and his wife have worked hard at rebuilding, meeting with various boards and groups to help get the Crescent City Farmer’s Market back up and running and to ensure local tax dollars are allocated to recovery. Gerica has personally helped to build several crab-shedding systems for other local fishermen.

“It’s a help - the actual equipment costs about \$2 thousand, which is a lot when you’ve lost everything and are trying to get things back together,” said Pete Gerica.

The Gericas now find themselves at the receiving end of a volunteer effort led by Dr. Bill Hogarth, Director, National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Hogarth and members of the eight Fishery Management Councils will team up to build a new crab-shedding system for the Gericas.

“We tend to get caught up in our day-to-day lives, forgetting that so much destruction remains, and so much more is needed here in Louisiana and along the Gulf coast - it’s time to walk the walk,” said Hogarth.

“We hope that our work on this one small project will be a reminder - an inspiration - to others to continue to contribute to the myriad rebuilding efforts,” he added.

Louisiana is one of the primary soft-shell crab producing states. The state also produces 35 – 40% of the nation's domestic seafood.

“Louisiana is a very important state, nationwide, when it comes to seafood production,” said Gulf Council member Harlon Pearce.

According to a 2003 report “The Economic Benefits of Fisheries, Wildlife and Boating Resources,” commissioned by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the 2003 total economic effect for Commercial Fisheries in the state of Louisiana totals \$2,608 million.

Katrina wiped out every crab-shedding system east of the Mississippi River. The system the Gerica's will receive is one of 10 covered by a \$20,000 Kellogg grant, which is being administered by marketumbrella.org, with the help of Louisiana Sea Grant and the LSU Ag Center.

Crab-shedding systems allow fishermen to produce soft-shell crabs, a delicacy among seafood lovers. Experienced crabbers, like Gerica, can tell when the crabs are preparing to shed. After they are harvested, the crabs are held in the shedding tanks until molting occurs. They are then refrigerated and sold.

“I can't think of a better way for fisheries leaders from around the country to get first-hand knowledge of our spirit and need to rebuild than by them helping in a way that will put more of this first class project back on the plates of the nation,” said Karen Foote, Gulf Council member from Louisiana.

The rebuilding project begins at 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, May 9, 2007 at the Gerica's property – 19761 Chef Menteur Highway, New Orleans. The system is expected to be operational by 6:00 p.m.

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Louisiana Seafood

QUICK FACTS

LOUISIANA'S COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

Louisiana Commercial Fisheries' National Rankings (2005)

- ◆ Louisiana is second only to Alaska in total commercial fisheries production.
- ◆ Louisiana is the country's number one producer (in pounds) of blue crab, crawfish, shrimp and oysters.
- ◆ The dockside value of shrimp is ranked number two among all states.
- ◆ The dockside value of blue crabs is ranked number two among all states
- ◆ The retail value of Louisiana oysters ranked number one among all states.
- ◆ The retail value of Louisiana crawfish ranked number one.

Louisiana Commercial Fisheries Industry (2003)

- ◆ Commercial fisheries provided a total economic benefit to the state of \$2.6 billion.
- ◆ Commercial fishing supported 29,245 jobs.
- ◆ Commercial fisheries produced \$1.96 billion in retail sales revenue and generated \$100 million in sales tax revenue for the state.

Seafood Consumption

- ◆ Demand for seafood in the U.S. has increased by 25% since 1980 and it continues to rise. Per capita annual consumption is up to 16.6 pounds.
- ◆ America's top-ten favorite seafoods are shrimp, tuna, salmon, pollock, catfish, tilapia, crabs, cod, clams, flatfish.
- ◆ Louisiana produces five of the top 10.

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries/National Marine Fisheries Service data, as reported by Southwick Associates in *The Economic Benefits of Fisheries, Wildlife and Boating Resources in Louisiana*, 2005.



Contacts and Resources

FOR MORE
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Louisiana Sea Grant
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Louisiana Seafood Board
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Louisiana Oysters
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Louisiana Shrimp
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White Boot Brigade
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*Member of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council