

On-site lesson on wetlands

■ **LI educators work on restoration in Louisiana**

■ **Goal to have knowledge brought back for use here**

BY TED PHILLIPS

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Educators who spent Presidents Week restoring Louisiana wetlands are bringing that knowledge back to Long Island, to work with local groups to organize wetland preservation and restoration projects here.

"What's going on there is really dire because the wetlands are being lost so quickly, but it's going on here, too," said Meghan

Marrero, president of the New York State Marine Education Association, a nonprofit that promotes marine education and research and co-organized the trip.

Marrero said many people do not realize how much of Long Island, Brooklyn and Queens used to be marshes and how much we rely on what's left. "We're really trying to bring the wetlands back to what they once were because they're really important to catching pollution and preventing flooding," Marrero said.

The New York Sea Grant, a joint federal and state program run by Stony Brook University's School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences and Cornell University, was the other organizer.

The U.S. loses about 60,000 acres of wetlands each year, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Construction, dredging, pollution and farming are major causes. Hurricanes, such as Katrina, and other natural causes, can also be factors.

Fourteen educators, mostly from Long Island and the New York City area, traveled last month to New Orleans and a federal conservation center in Galliano. Together, the volunteers planted more than 1,700 plants, and they potted grasses and other vegetation for eventual planting.

"It was a good opportunity for them to see the problem down there to really become inspired

to do work up here," said Larissa Graham, outreach coordinator for the Long Island Sound Study at the New York Sea Grant. Some volunteer projects that are likely to be organized on Long Island include planting native species in wetlands and pulling up invasive species, she said.

Elizabeth Platt, a science teacher at Smithtown High School West who went on the trip, said she wants to involve her students in a project to restore the tidal flow in Sunken Meadow State Park. "When they see how much effort it takes to try to restore something, that makes us more sensitive to disturbing things in the first place; and to be more concerned about protecting it," Platt said.

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