



Commercial Seafood Industry Unites to Rebuild After Katrina

by Sr. Agents Joel Crump and Louis Burnett

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the vast majority of Louisiana's coast, along with a thriving seafood industry. The state lost about 70 percent of the seafood industry as a result of both storms.

As wildlife agents, we recognized it was going to be a tough task to help rebuild our multi-billion dollar industry and get back to some sort of normalcy. With the seafood docks destroyed, boats sunk or blown ashore, we had very little to work with to start the rebuilding effort. It was up to the entire seafood industry to rebuild together. Fishermen, seafood dealers and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' Enforcement Division began pulling together as a team to give our industry a chance.

As we worked in the wake of devastation left by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, we saw boat after boat and vessel

after vessel that would normally have been on the water shrimping, fishing, crabbing or harvesting oysters now sitting on roadways, on levees or even in the middle of what used to be a community. Our waterways were devastated with debris from houses, forests and marsh.

We lost shrimp packing plants, crab picking plants, oyster shucking plants and crawfish ponds, not just in Louisiana but also along the entire Gulf Coast, a region that had previously worked cooperatively to sell our precious resources. Our state also lost our most valuable asset—people to consume the seafood. Over 1 million people evacuated. Probably every one of them loved seafood in some form or fashion.

Slowly, but surely people began to return to Louisiana's coast. The displaced fishermen, dock owners and enforcement agents returned

to places they called home, only to see great destruction not only to houses and businesses but also to their way of life. If the fishermen were fortunate enough to have operable boats to fish from, they would have no docks to sell their catch. If the docks reopened, they had no fishermen from whom to buy. Just imagine the kinds of issues these situations created for everyone in the commercial seafood arena.

It wasn't very long after the storms, however, until the hum of generators became a common sound all up and down the coast. Soon fishermen were arriving at docks asking what they could do to help them rebuild, so they could start working again. Docks were rehaving truckloads of ice brought in to keep seafood fresh. The Enforcement Division was spreading the word as to which docks were open

and where to go to buy and sell seafood.

Hit especially hard were Leeville, Grand Isle, Venice and Cameron, which are major ports for the red snapper industry. Fishermen had only one dock available to sell to in that region. So dock owners put usual differences aside and began to work out of unified locations. Each dock that normally bought only a few species of seafood was working with other dock owners and buying numerous species of seafood. The industry is still a renot where it used to be before the storms, but with a lot of hard work and cooperation from all parties of the industry, it will be back.

We hope it won't be long before visitors and residents alike can start eating the blackened fish, oysters Rockefeller, boiled crawfish, seafood gumbo and jambalaya we are so famous for in Louisiana. ■