

Resources Conservation Service Plant Materials Program

Golden Meadow Plant Materials Center



Making an Impact on Coastal Louisiana

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http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/lapmc

Established: 1989 Size: 93 acres

PMC Operation: NRCS

Land Ownership: The Greater Lafourche Port Commission

Lease Duration and expiration date: 25 years Expires 31 March 2015

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OVERVIEW

The Golden Meadow Plant Materials Center (GMPMC) in Galliano, Louisiana has been a leader in coastal wetland ecosystem restoration and technology development. The PMC is located within the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary, one of the largest and most productive estuarine systems in the United States.

Currently, Louisiana accounts for 90% of the nation's annual coastal wetland loss. Land loss occurs as marginal erosion and interior marsh deterioration. Causes are attributed to; loss of sediment delivery to marshes caused by navigation and flood controls on the Mississippi River; salt-water intrusion into previously fresh and brackish coastal marshes; dredge and fill activities; and natural geological subsidence.

Coastal wetland remediation, restoration, and enhancement with plants released by the PMC have proven effective in converting open water to new marsh. This reduces soil erosion, and promotes reestablishment of emergent and submerged aquatic vegetation. The Center develops plants and procedures to reverse this loss of coastal wetlands in Louisiana, Texas, and Mississippi. The GMPMC has released eight (8) improved conservation plants for ecosystem restoration across the northern gulf coast.

SERVICE AREA

The Golden Meadow PMC service area of responsibility includes the coastal area of Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas to Galveston Bay. The area's depth inland varies as to the extended reach of the coastal marshlands from as little as one mile to as much as 40 miles. The Major Land Resources Areas are as follows:

Texas ______150 B, Gulf Coast Sabine Prairie Louisiana _____151, Gulf Coast Marsh

Mississippi 151, Gulf Coast Marsh &

152 A, Eastern Gulf Coast Flatlands

RESOURCE CHALLENGES

Resource Challenge 1: Identify and evaluate species for coastal erosion control, marsh restoration and dune stabilization (2009-2015)

- Identify and collect emergent and submersed aquatic plants species from fresh, brackish, and saline
 marsh ecosystems for the revegetation of coastal zones damaged by intense wave and wind energy
 caused by storm events
- Identify and collect species to enhance diversity of coastal dunes and barrier islands
- Identify and collect fresh water species that have heightened salt tolerance for areas where subsidence and saltwater intrusion is a problem
- Develop and evaluate plant propagation and establishment technology to support revegetation efforts along the northern gulf coast

Resource Challenge 2: Provide plants and technology to assist commercial growers in addressing coastal resource concerns (2009-2015)

- Maintain foundation quality planting stock of releases for distribution to growers
- Provide training to growers on efficient propagation techniques
- Publish and distribute technical notes and bulletins on propagation and establishment of plant releases
- Cooperating with state, federal, and local governments to develop studies for future plant releases for coastal restoration
- Investigate advanced technology for maintaining and monitoring genetic integrity of vegetative propagated materials (e.g. DNA fingerprinting)

Resource Challenge 3: Provide educational opportunities and access to all segments of the community to the Golden Meadow Plant Materials Center Program (2009-2015)

- Cooperate and provide access to community action groups such as New Orleans City Park and Bayou Rebirth in support of local rebuilding initiatives
- Provide on site instruction and technical literature on the establishment and management of plant materials for various ecosystems in the PMC service area
- Support youth groups and teachers discussing and demonstrating the importance of the coastal barrier islands, saline and fresh water marshes, and Chenier habitats for sustainable coastal ecosystems
- Cooperate with other federal, state, and local governments on projects that involve problems of ecosystem restoration

FACILITIES

The Center has continued to expand and improve in its capabilities to conduct plant materials studies. The center has acquired other facilities and equipment to propagate and grow wetland and upland plant materials for a variety of conservation uses. Facilities acquired to date include:

Structures	Completed and Operational	Available Space
Office/Conference Facility	April 1991	2,016 SF
Machinery Storage Facility	November 1991	3,000 SF
Pesticide Storage Facility	March 1992	135 SF
Greenhouse No. 1	December 1992	1,800 SF
Greenhouse No. 2	April 1995	1,800 SF
Headhouse	May 1995	1,800 SF
Greenhouse No. 3	August 1999	2,040 SF

In additional to the above facilities, a seed storage cooler, propagation area, shade house structures, and a tree nursery area are available.

CURRENT PROJECTS

Submersed Aquatic Vegetation and Planting Techniques for Restoration in Coastal Louisiana

The importance of SAV to Louisiana coastal ecosystems includes the minimization of storm damage by reducing wave action, stabilization of sediments, improvement of water quality by absorbing nutrients and contaminants, and provide critical habitat for wintering waterfowl and many commercially important fish species. Very little is known on the status of SAV throughout the coastal region of Louisiana. Unlike seagrasses, which include few species and inhabit very limited areas of the gulf coast in typically clear marine waters, the estuarine species that are spread out throughout the multitude of ponds and bayous of coastal Louisiana are more numerous. These areas are often in locations



difficult to access, difficult to view in the murky waters, and occur in the entire range of different habitat types. Because of the lack of understanding of these species, the common recognition of the need to sustain and restore SAV communities in coastal Louisiana, and the lack of restoration techniques available, it is necessary to begin to develop the necessary means by which to carry out successful SAV restoration projects.

Evaluation of Selected Plant Materials and Installation Techniques to Stabilize and Control Erosion along the South Lafourche Hurricane Protection Levee.



Hurricanes represent a formidable threat to the Louisiana coastal zone. Statistically, the state will experience a hurricane once every four years and about once every eight years for a major hurricane (Category 3, 4, or 5). When hurricanes strike land, the storm surge accelerates erosion of barrier islands, floods fresh marsh and swamps with salt water, and rips holes in wetlands.

The continued degradation of Louisiana's coastline has resulted in an increase in the effort to strengthen and heighten hurricane protection levees across Louisiana.

The dredge-fill materials used to build many of the hurricane protection levees in the state consist of heavy clay soils from nearby borrow canals along these levee systems. In recent years due to salt-water intrusion, salt concentrations in dredged soils from these canals have caused problems with establishing vegetative cover to these levees. Without the protection of desirable vegetation, the levee system becomes venerable to soil erosion due to rain, wind and storm surges. The establishment of desirable vegetation to these levees is essential in the effort to protect personal property and lives.

This evaluation will address the Hurricane Protection Levee designed to protect the area from Larose to south of Golden Meadow, LA from category three hurricanes. This evaluation will help find cost effective solutions in establishing and restoring vegetative cover to existing and newly constructed levees. Factors that will be considered are:

- 1. Species useful for the re-vegetation of levees
- 2. Planting techniques and bioengineering practices helpful in restoring vegetative cover
- 3. Soil enhancement techniques to reduce compaction and improve soil health
- 4. Development of publications and guidelines

Chitimacha Indian Tribe of Louisiana - Re-establishment of River Cane on Tribal Lands

Conservation of an ancient cultural tradition motivated the Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana in their request for PMC assistance. They are the oldest recognized and indigenous tribe in Louisiana and have used rivercane (*Arundinaria sp.*) for woven baskets and mats since the era of the Mississippi mound-building culture, a tradition dating back to the Middle Ages. *Arundinaria* is also known as giant cane, switchcane and bamboo.

The Chitimachas dedicated most of their efforts to cultivating the soil, fishing, and developing the domestic arts. They display the greatest skill through the art of weaving basket and their basketry reached such a degree of development that it might be placed among the higher arts. The Chitimacha's craft threatened by a shortage of native rivercane populations. In addition, prior to this research, there were no rivercane populations growing on the Chitimacha Reservation itself, which has shrunk to one-fourth of its established area in the mid-1800s.

The objective of this project is to evaluate the re-introduction and establishment of rivercane (*Arundinaria sp.*) native to Chitimacha tribal lands to help sustain ancient cultural tradition.



RELEASES

Since the release of 'Vermilion' smooth cordgrass in 1989, the Golden Meadow Plant Materials Center has produced seven additional releases used for coastal restoration.

Release Name	Common Name	Scientific Name	Release Year
'Vermilion'	Smooth Cordgrass	Spartina alterniflora	1989
Pelican Germplasm	Black Mangrove	Avicennia germinans	1994
Fourchon Germplasm	Bitter Panicum	Panicum amarum var. amarum	1998
Brazoria Germplasm	Seashore Paspalum	Paspalum vaginatum	1999
Caminada Germplasm	Seaoats	Uniola paniculata	2001
'Gulf Coast'	Marshhay Cordgrass	Spartina patens	2003
Timbalier Germplasm	Gulf Bluestem	Schizachyrium maritimum	2006
Bayou Lafourche	California Bulrush	Schoenoplectus californicus	2007
Germplasm			



Bayou Lafourche Germplasm California bulrush -

recommended for erosion control along shorelines, canal banks, levee banks, and other areas of soil-water interface. When planted as vegetative barriers across open water, California bulrush has significantly reduced ponds fetch and wave energy permitting other aquatic plants to grow in an otherwise unfavorable environment (NRCS, LSU 2000). California bulrush maybe used in the creation and restoration of wetlands, to improve water quality, and reduce suspended sediments. It is not known to cause navigation problems (Tarver, 1988) along watercourses. Plantings provide habitat for mammals, birds and fish that visit the sites and promote establishment zones for many submerged aquatic plants

'Gulf Coast' marshhay cordgrass - recommended for conservation planting in coastal areas of the north central Gulf of Mexico basin. 'Gulf Coast' is a facultative halophyte that can be successfully planted in brackish and salt marshes, marsh ridges, coastal beaches, barrier islands, and restored marsh where dedicated sediments are used. 'Gulf Coast' has proven effective for marsh restoration, shoreline and levee stabilization, and coastal beach and barrier island sand dune enhancement and stabilization.





Brazoria Germplasm seashore paspalum - an effective pioneering species used on shorelines, dunes, canal banks, mudflats, dredge materials, and other bare and ephemeral soil deposits. Brazoria spreads rapidly and can form dense stands within two growing seasons from planting. It is used successfully on fresh to brackish soils in areas up to approximately 10 ppt of salts. Brazoria is adapted to low-elevations at or slightly above normal water levels. Preferred sites are bare, saturated-to-moist soils, with little-or-no other vegetative competition. Brazoria will grow out into water. Culms and stolons will float or persist slightly submerged.

Fourchon Germplasm bitter panicum - intended for use on coastal beaches and barrier islands of the north central Gulf coast, primarily Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. Fourchon bitter panicum is an early

colonizing species that grows best on the crest and windward slope of the fore dune where few other species compete with it. The windward side of the fore dune is the harshest habitat of the dune system, subject to salt spray, occasional inundation, high temperatures, low soil moisture, low fertility, sand abrasion and smothering by drifting sands. Bitter panicum shows greatest plant vigor where blowing sand accumulates around the plant. Bitter panicum is an ideal dune species. The above ground portion of the plant reduces wind velocity causing sand to drop out of the wind stream and accumulate.





Pelican Germplasm black mangroves - important to coastal ecosystems by stabilizing soils with their extensive root systems, contributing biomass to the detridal cycle, providing valuable habitat for brown pelicans and other shorebirds. Black mangroves are the most cold hardy of the North American mangroves and they are the only mangrove species found growing in Louisiana. Black mangroves can be found growing in the intertidal zone of Louisiana's salt marshes, protected shallow bays, and barrier islands east of Atchafalaya Bay. Black mangroves are distinguished by aerial roots known as pnuemataphores. Black mangroves are facultative halophytes, which can persist in strongly saline habitats.

'Vermillion' smooth cordgrass - used primarily for erosion control along shorelines, canal banks, levees, and other areas of soil-water interface. In addition, smooth cordgrass is an effective soil stabilizer used on interior tidal mudflats, dredge-fill sites, and other areas of loose and unconsolidated soils associated with marsh restoration. When established in conjunction with shorelines, smooth cordgrass provides an effective buffer that dissipates energy, reduces shoreline scouring, and traps suspended sediments and other solids. Dense stands of smooth cordgrass are efficient users of available nutrients, producing significant amounts of organic matter. The cumulative effects of organic matter production, sediment trapping, and erosion control not only provide shoreline



protection but also accelerate sediment accumulation and near-shore building. Consequently, smooth cordgrass is a sustainable and renewable restoration resource, and when properly established and in the appropriate habitat, will persist and potentially remain effective indefinitely.



Timbalier gulf bluestem - intended for use on coastal beaches and barrier islands of the north central Gulf of Mexico basin. Timbalier performs best when planted on the leeward side of the primary dune and the more protected areas behind the primary dune. Timbalier is an

excellent planting component to increase species diversity and back dune stabilization when planted in association with *Panicum amarum*, *Uniola paniclata*, *Spartina patens* and other herbaceous species. Timbalier can be successfully planted with proven persistence and performance on beaches and barrier islands of the Mississippi and Louisiana coast.

Caminada Germplasm seaoats - intended for use on coastal beaches and barrier islands of the north central Gulf Coast. Caminada performs best when planted on the crest and Gulf side of the primary dune. Sea oats is exceptionally tolerant of harsh conditions associated with coastal beach environments such salt spray, short inundation of saltwater from storm surges, strong winds, xeric soil conditions, and rapid sand accretion. It is considered an excellent pioneering species because its ability to rapidly establish and colonize on fore dunes and dune crests, and a climax species because of its ability to persist in these extreme coastal beach conditions. The attributes found in sea oats makes this species and excellent dune builder and sand stabilizer.



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