People living in "resettlement zones" could be on their own in coastal master plan

Updated: 7:19 PM CDT Nov 2, 2016
NEW ORLEANS —

Louisiana’s coast has been sinking at a fast pace, mostly due to rising sea levels and coastal erosion. As part of the state’s 2107 Coastal Master Plan, people living in some low-lying areas are being asked to voluntary relocate or resettle somewhere else.

Some residents in flood prone areas or where coastal erosion is happening said they are aware of the risks, but advocates for coastal protection said the state has a responsibility of alerting those residents they may be left to fend for themselves.

LJ Cazaux has become accustomed to flooding in his Venetian Isles subdivision.

"I see coastal erosion, and I see how fast the land is sinking away and the water is coming up. I see it all the time in the boat," Cazaux said.

His home took in 10 feet of water during Hurricane Katrina and is now raised 17-and-a-half feet off the ground.

The Gulf Restoration Network compiled resettlement zone maps by using data from state and federal officials. They show that thousands of Louisiana residents currently
live in resettlement zones and predict that if no protective action is taken, hundreds of thousands of people will live in these zones within 50 years.

According to the maps Cazaux’s neighborhood would be a state designated resettlement zone by 2062.

"You’d probably need a boat to get here by then. It’ll be under water," he said.

According to the state, if an area would flood more than 14 feet during a storm, that area is deemed unsafe and is a so called resettlement zone.

This includes parts of lower Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes, and parts of Houma, Thibodaux, Kenner, Metairie and New Orleans.

The state has said it will not invest in assisting people with flood risk reduction in those areas. Instead, it’s suggested anyone living there voluntarily relocate.

GRN spokesperson Johanna de Graffenreid said under the coastal master plan to be approved next year, there is no money allocated for voluntary relocation or buy outs, which puts already vulnerable neighborhood even more at risk.

"If community members are going to be safe they need to be told directly what their flood risk is in a clear and understandable way and then they need to be provided with the options necessary in order to elevate or to move," she said.

Cazaux said he understands the risks, but right now he is staying put.

"If I need a boat to get to my house, I may rethink this," Cazaux said.

In a 2015 report by the Louisiana Office of Community Development, resettlement is described as painful, but in parts of Louisiana it is necessary because of the increasing threat to vulnerable areas of the coast.