

Saving The Ghosts Within

Abstract: From Jean Lafitte and the Fifelet to the Rougarou of the Southeast Louisiana swamps, rich history and lore live in the waters of Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes. Through historical research, interviews and oral histories, this project will use a research poster and corresponding video to explore how these and other myths are in danger of vanishing along with the fragile coastline. As the salt water of the Gulf of Mexico creeps inland and the marsh lands disappear, so too does the culture of the Native American and Cajun people. Along with saving the land, we must save the ghosts within.

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Jean Lafitte and The Fifolet

The Legend: It has been said that Jean Lafitte would kill and bury one of his crewman with his treasure. This would permentantly tie their soul to the loot and create the fifolet.

One day, two men came upon the fifolet as a orb. They watched the orb dive into the ground, and they began to dig in that spot. They dug until they came upon treasure. Then, one man hit the other with his shovel in a effort to steal the treasure for himself. As he began to pull the treasure up, he began to sink into the ground. By this point, the other man wakes up, sees what is happening, and runs away. A few days later, he comes back to the spot, and it is undisturbed.



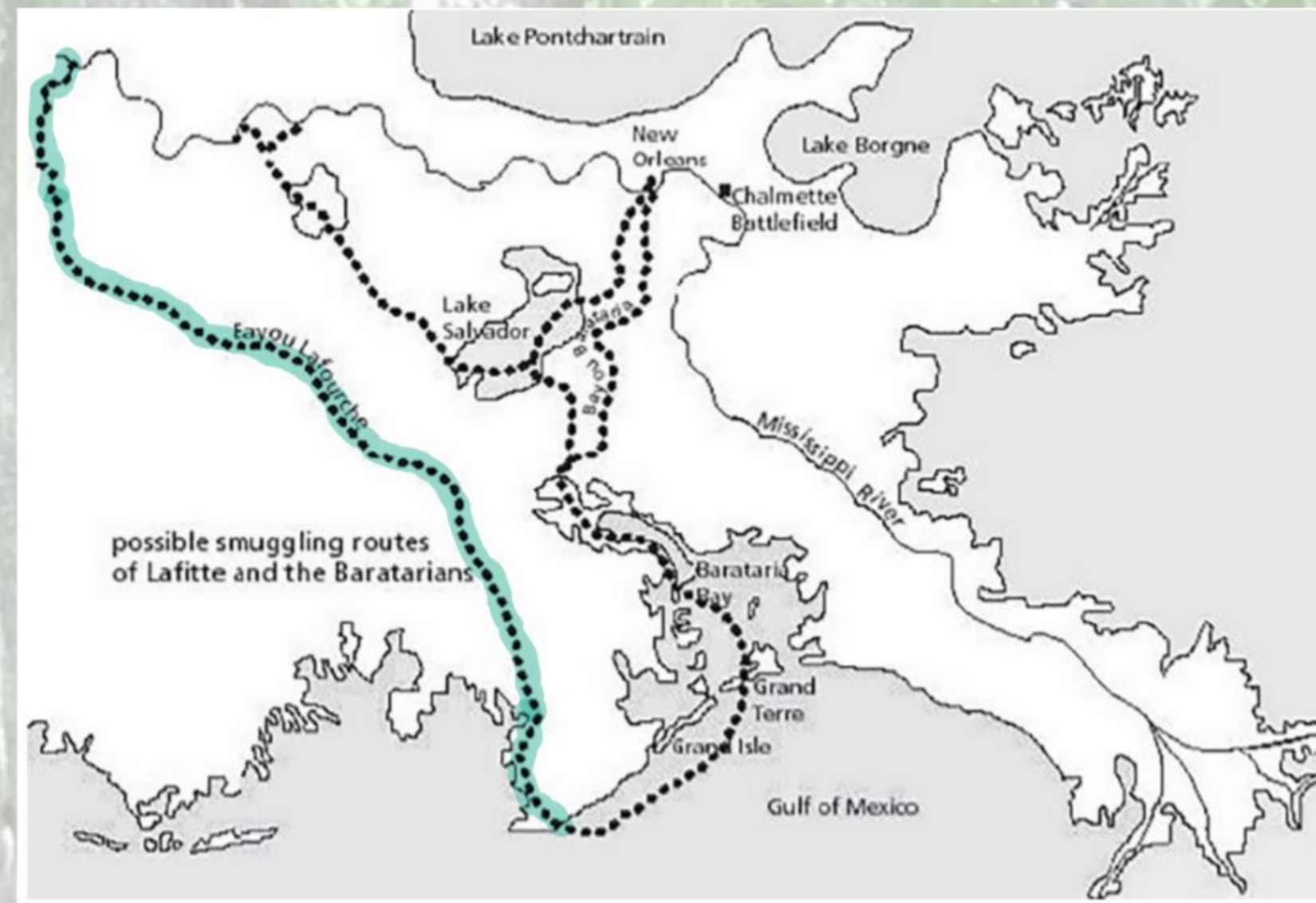
Jean Lafitte is one of the most famous people in New Orleans history, known as a pirate, a war hero and the namesake of many New Orleans landmarks.

The Reality: The truth is that it is highly unlikely that Jean Lafitte buried his treasure because most pirates spent all of their money. This idea of buried treasure is based on fiction. Also, the swamp system releases natural gasses, which causes the light orb known as the fifolet.

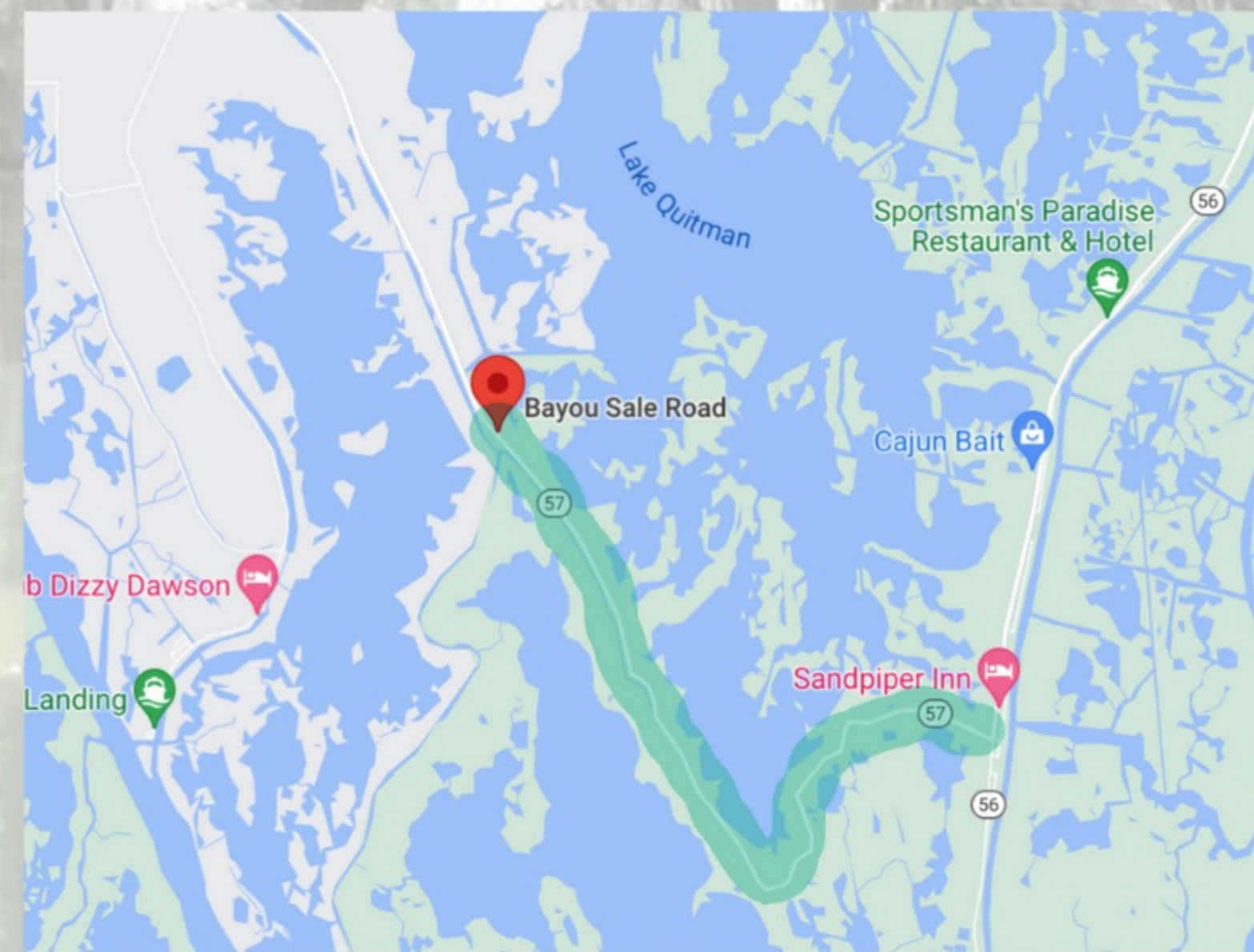
Bayou Country

About 60 miles southwest of New Orleans lies the Bayou Country of South Louisiana. Both the Jean Lafitte and Rougarou legends reside here.

Jean Lafitte's Alleged Route



The Rougarou's Home



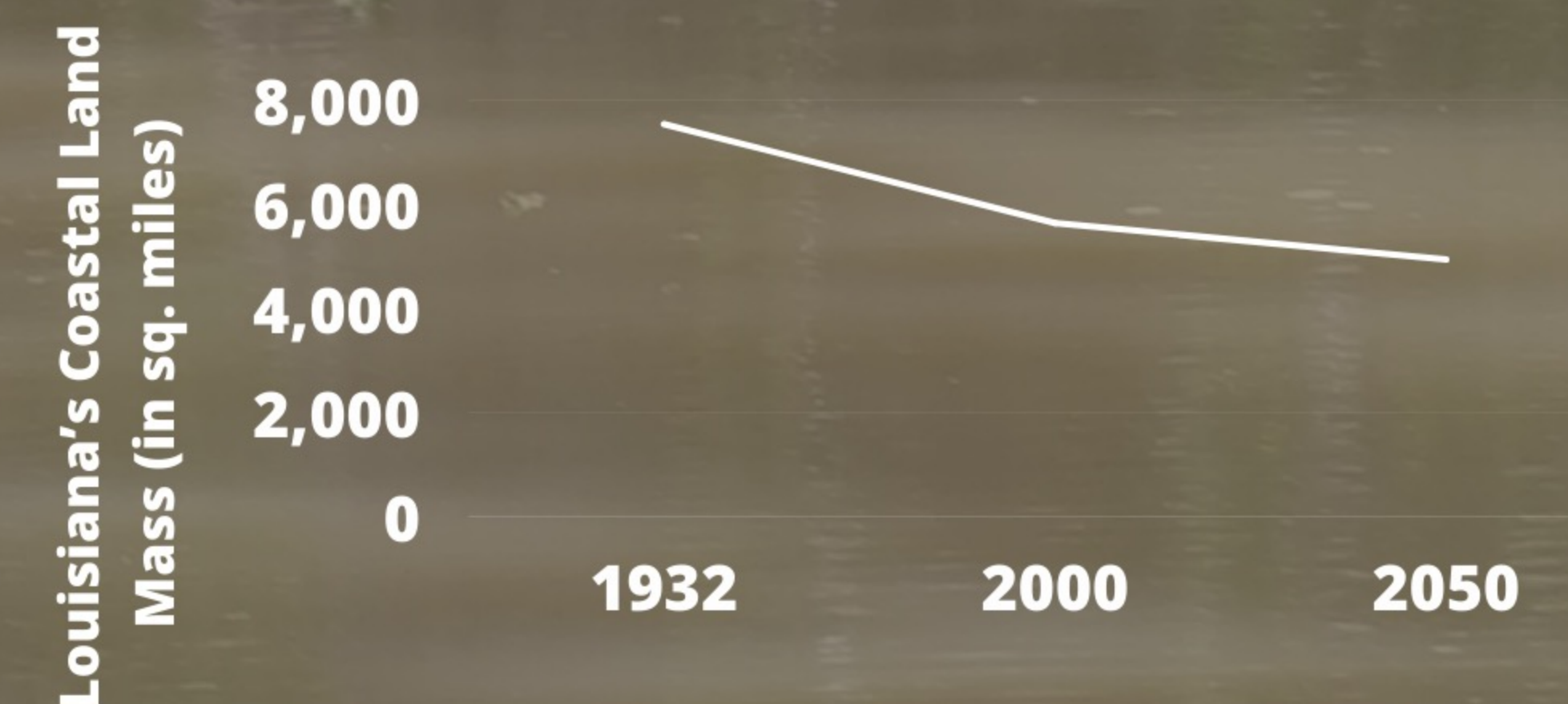
The Rougarou

The Legend: It has been said that the Rougarou is a half human/half wolf creature living in South Louisiana's cane fields and swamps. Some say that the beast goes after Catholics who do not follow Catholic Lenten traditions. Others say the beast is under a spell for 101 days and is then transferred to the person the beast attacks.



The Reality: In every iteration, the Rougarou is used by people to scare others. Parents used the Rougarou as a threat to keep their children in line, and people used the creature to keep others out of the swamp. The Rougarou is now seen as a “protector of the swamp” according to the Executive Director of SLWDC Johnathan Foret. If he loses his territory, then we lose ours. He encourages us to take care of our coast and restore it. The Rougarou is now the hero of South Louisiana as opposed to the villain, which is why there is an entire festival honoring him and the culture he protects.

The Impact: Both of these stories are tied to Louisiana's coast, which is rapidly disappearing. It is reported that every 90 minutes, Louisiana loses a football field of land. National Park Ranger Allyn Rodriguez states that "There's a difference between listening to the story and living it. It's devastating. You're not just losing land; you're losing the people and their stories and their cultural ties." Our stories and culture are so closely intertwined with our coast, and without it, we risk losing those stories forever. Jean Lafitte is such a well-loved figure because he worked around oppressive laws, which were forcing the Acadians farther down the bayou into unfit farmland. As a result, they had to adapt in order to survive just like Jean Lafitte did. The Rougarou is such a well-known figure because of the the role that he played in South Louisiana culture. Parents would tell their children Rougarou stories to make them behave, and now the Rougarou is a symbol of wetland protection. Louisiana's coastal land loss along with The Rougarou Fest have played a major roles in this identity shift. The Rougarou Fest is a place where students can learn about the land loss issue and understand the importance of maintaining their culture. These stories are connected to our coast and our culture, and they encourage us to protect both.



Sources: Mrs. Allyn Rodriguez, Mrs. Angela Rathle, Mr. Jonathan Foret, onlyinyourstate.com, Author Lyn Gibson , USGS.gov