

Navigating change on the bayou



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The Southern US has an area of rich deep forests with complex waterways running through. It's called a bayou, and the best known is at the mouth of the Mississippi River. About 2 million people live in and around the region, but their way of life is under threat. NHK World's Izumo Naoki has the story.

Southern Louisiana is often referred to as Bayou Country. It's one of the most extensive coastal wetlands in the US. At more than 12,000 square kilometers. That's about 10 times the size of Los Angeles. Theresa Dardar has made her living fishing here for more than half a century.

The bayou is our waterway, our highway, to get to work. And it also feeds us.

The bayou used to support other industries like farming and hunting, but those are harder and harder to sustain because of an invasion of sea water.

Here by the powerline, that used to be land and now it's all open waters. The sunlight had a problem comin', shining through because trees were so thick.

More than 98% of land and one region of the bayou has sunk into the sea. Most of the residents have left, but Dardar says her ties are too strong.

We know that the next generation will not see what we see now and it's painful and a lot of people you ask say, "Oh why do you stay?" It would be like abandoning our ancestors. This is our community. And we are planted deep like the oak tree.

Experts say climate change is one factor driving the rising sea levels and disappearing land. And storm surges from hurricanes are further eroding the coast. 5,200 square kilometers have been lost over the past century. One expert says that's unprecedented anywhere in the world.

It would be one American football field every 100 minutes.

You know, Louisiana has what we call a working coast, blue collar communities. And those are the people whose communities are being lost. They're being forced to relocate.

Disappearance of wetlands has an impact beyond the human cost.

We have a lot more gators today than what I've seen in the past. There's just too many of them out there.

Hurricane Ida hit the area 4 years ago with massive storm surges. It washed away the alligators' habitats, so they were forced to move into places that people live.

My name is Captain Jason. We do gator hunts. Gator huntin' by nature.

Toombs and his family have been hunting alligators for generations.

Very intelligent animals.

They've seen the hunting season extended from 2 months of the year to 4.

Now they end up in people's backyards. It's a clash of who's going to live where.

The situation poses a grave danger. An alligator attack in August killed a 12-year-old boy. Toombs says it's a result of the changing landscape.

I have both sides of the story when it comes to those gators. I have a soft spot in my heart for alligators. I love my alligators. But at the same time, we know that a certain number of alligators must be taken out of the ecosystem every year through hunting.

He and his fellow hunters make sure none of the animal goes to waste. Alligator meat is put on dining tables and the skin is made into products like shoes and handbags. Both ways help to support people in the bayou make a living.

It's part of growing up. We all done it ever since we were kids, our grandpas, our fathers, and my kids will be soon when they get old enough. They'll be out here hunting and doing the same exact thing.

He says the changes to the area that he's seen in his lifetime are extreme, but the bayou will be in his blood forever.

Source: (NHK World News)

Now discuss the questions with a partner.

1. If your home was in such a situation do you think you would move or try to adapt to the changing environment?
2. Does Japan have any similar problems with changing environments?
3. Have you ever heard of the bayou? Do you know anything else about it?
4. Do you think the government should support people to move away from such areas? Do you think the government should require them to move?
5. Are any traditional jobs disappearing in Japan?