



## Transcripts of Coastal Stories

Lesson 1 > Changing Louisiana



### ***Coastal News Roundup: An Update on Isle de Jean Charles***

Article link: <https://www.wwno.org/post/coastal-news-roundup-update-isle-de-jean-charles>

By Tegan Wendland

It was big news in 2016 when the state was awarded \$48 million to relocate people from the disappearing island of Isle de Jean Charles. But the process has not been smooth; permanent relocation hasn't happened yet, and a Native American tribe blames that on the state.

New Orleans Public Radio talked with Chantel Comeradelle, tribal secretary of Isle de Jean Charles band of the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw.

**Tegan Wendland:** *Back in 2016, when you first got the money from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, I spoke with you and with Chief Albert Naquin and you guys were so happy and excited. So now you've issued this statement saying the state has "erased" the tribe's role in the whole project - what happened, since 2016?*

**Chantel Comeradelle:** So at the beginning this was a tribal resettlement, so we were resettling an entire tribe and community. Since then, the state has slowly taken this from a tribal resettlement and made it into more of an individual-based, geographical-location resettlement, negating the tribe. Actually, in their last press release about the land purchase the tribe is nowhere mentioned. So that goes to show you that they have erased the tribe from the resettlement.

**What you're saying is that rather than this sort of ground-up-approach, listening to the tribe, the state is kind of dictating how the project will work?**

Yes.

**And the tribe and the state really worked together to submit the initial application for this relocation project, then the idea was that the state would manage the \$48 million and help the tribe buy land and build new housing - so the state has purchased the land, and the state seems to be moving forward - where's the disconnect?**

The easiest way to explain it is - the state works five days a week in their office, and this is what they do - they work and work and work and then they come back and they say 'okay do you like these three options we did?' instead of sitting there saying, 'these are things some things that we looked at, do you have any more ideas?,' or sitting down and working with us and working on it. We know we don't have anybody there who can work full-time with them, instead of them working and then coming back and asking us our preferences - co-creating and co-designing this project.

**What do you wish the state would have done differently?**



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In an ideal world – I wish the state would have actually hired some tribal folks to work on the project, to help co-design this. And even have more than just meetings and a few design workshops with folks – actually sit down with folks for a set amount of time and work on this project. When we worked on this application we did a series of meetings where we got together for several hours a couple of nights in a row and just worked on things and went through drawings and designs. So we actually labored on this ourselves – whereas now it’s more like picking preferences.

**The state says part of the problem is that the tribe wants a bigger buildout than the state can afford, partly because you’d like to use this relocation as an opportunity to reunify the tribe and bring back some families that have already moved away. But the state says they can’t afford to do that. So are those demands reasonable?**

I think they are – the tribe envisions this as a three-phase project. We understand that we want to get the people who are most vulnerable into the resettlement NOW, but we would like to see a larger plan that the tribe can, after this \$48 million project is done, take it upon themselves to build out for future generations.

**Have you seen the plan? Have you been on the property? What does it look like?**

The property is beautiful. I’ve seen the plan because I was on the steering committee that helped make this master plan. I saw an initial version. We have not seen or been privy to seeing the completed master plan or any updates.

**Some outlets have reported that the tribe has actually decided NOT to move at this point – is that true? Where does the project stand?**

I do think there are several folks who have decided not to move individually, I think as a tribe we are hopeful that we can endorse this project on a tribal level – but in the manner that it is right now, it’s culturally inappropriate for the tribe to endorse the tribe moving there as a whole.