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Coastal Planning After Katrina: Experiences on the Mississippi Gulf Coast

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ABSTRACT

The 42 km Mississippi Gulf Coast between Pass Christian and Biloxi, Mississippi was devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Plans to rebuild following the storm have encompassed a broad spectrum of ideas. At one extreme is the vast armoring approach as illustrated by the recent Corp of Engineers preliminary proposal. In the middle are those who simply want their towns back, just the way they were prior to the storm. In this group are many who cannot afford the structural upgrades proposed by regulators. At the other extreme are those who feel that the natural model of the stabilized beach and coastal maritime forest offers the best hope of protecting the maximum amount of habitable coastal areas. This group includes those who advocate an "intelligent retreat" from vulnerable areas. The large amounts of money currently being made available to the affected area and the leveling of large tracts of land by the storm provide an unusual opportunity to reassess how humans interact with their coastal areas. This opportunity will not persist indefinitely, however, and absence of a clear vision may result, by default, in a response in which structural upgrades are largely voluntary and little else changes.

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