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## VOW

By Esther Ellis Sep 30, 2015



Picasa 2.7

Woodstock had Max Yasgur's Farm. Voice of the Wetlands has the Rouse family's field on West Parl Ave. in Houma. Festival-goers can expect a second stage, translating into more great music; a camping area; and Cajun food, crafts and art. Tab Benoit's throwing a party and the country is invited to visit and pay attention to our plight.

Coastal erosion is a subject that many in south Louisiana are passionate about and Tab Benoit is no

exception.

Each night, the Houma native and noted bluesman takes a moment during his stage show to talk about our region's disappearing coast and wetlands. In the glare of the white spotlight, Tab pleads with listeners in land-locked and surrounding states to consider their neighbors in the South. And each October, he invites the world to join us in Terrebonne Parish to see the problem firsthand in hopes that these new recruits will help spread our message.

"The goal has always been to celebrate the culture and coast of south Louisiana and to bring people from out of state and let them meet the locals and see that there are people that live south of New Orleans," Tab says with a chuckle. "They don't know about [our eroding coastline] until something happens on the news. My goal has always been to bring people down here to see it for themselves; have the locals and the land tell the real story."

This year the non-profit organization hosts its 12th annual Voice of the Wetlands Festival on Oct. 9-10 in Houma. After spending more than a decade at Southdown Plantation, VOW is moving to a new plot of land at 5403 West Park Ave. in Houma, which provides a greater opportunity for growth.

"This is where the original location was going to be but we weren't able to do it in the beginning," Tab says. "At this spot, we can do camping and go later than 11 p.m. It will allow us to grow and get bigger ... It's the biggest area of any festival in the south."

The 200-acre festival grounds allows festival-goers to stay closer to the action by camping on site, a enticing offer for those out-of-town visitors, giving them more reason to stay. Another first for the VOW fest is the addition of the Red Dog Saloon, a second stage. Visitors will enjoy continuous entertainment by local musicians from a variety of genres – Cajun, country, blues, jazz and rock.

Friday night showcases artists Tab Benoit, Randy Jackson, Bart Walker, Mia Borders and Lightning Malcolm. Saturday's lineup includes artists Josh Garrett Band, Honey Island Swamp Band, Raw Oyster Cult and more. After a Sunday filled with shows, the night will close out with the traditional performance by the VOW Allstars, a group of talented New Orleans area artists who make the final plea to bring awareness to the troubling issues of the coastal land. The group consists of Tab, Cyril Neville, Corey Duplechin, Johnny Vidacovich, Big Chief Monk Boudreaux, Johnny Sansone and Waylon Thibodeaux.

If music is the heart of the VOW, the food, art and culture represented are its soul. Visitors will enjoy

American fare and all of the Cajun classics: gumbo, shrimp etouffée, alligator sauce piquante and jambalaya.

The expanded fairground also allows for carnival rides. Attendees can see the culture through the eyes of artists and crafters, whose works are for sale, as well as educational and environmental exhibits.

“If the weather is good, the festival’s successful and it really just comes down to that,” Tab says. “Admission is free so there’s no real way of counting how many people we get, but usually it’s about 10,000 visitors. It’s all about awareness, celebrating the food and the music and not money. I do fundraisers to keep this free and I want to try to continue to keep it free to the public.”

The Voice of the Wetlands got its start in 2004 when Tab and a group of musicians, activists, and businesspeople came together in an effort to bring awareness about the coastal erosion of Louisiana. Festivalgoers were kept safe from remnants of Tropical Storm Matthew by a tent. Since then, VOW members have brought international attention to the cause, performing at political events and even being featured in a film, “Hurricane on the Bayou,” which was narrated by Meryl Streep.

Every day, Louisiana’s coast is whittled away by the elements. And every day, VOW renews its vow give voice to the ongoing threat in the hope that others will join in the effort to save our coast.

“The first place that I played music in front of people is gone,” Tab says. “It’s always been about educating the public outside of Louisiana. I have seen how they have learned about our area and I am amazed by what they take home with them. They’re out there, actively involved and telling the truth. Being a pilot and seeing the coast, I know more about anything than what a politician could tell me. That truth is indisputable and that’s what we need when making big decisions. Our future is at stake.”

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*For more information on the Voice of the Wetlands organization and festival visit [voiceofthewetlands.org](http://voiceofthewetlands.org).*

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## Voice of the Wetlands Lineup

### MAIN STAGE

**Friday, Oct. 9**

6-7 p.m. Mia Borders

7:45-9 p.m. Southern Cross w/Randy Jackson of Zebra

9:30-11 p.m. Friday Night Guitar Fights

*Tab Benoit, Mason Ruffner, Lightnin Malcolm, Randy Jackson, Albert Castiglia, Josh Garrett, Tyrone Vaughan and Bart Walker*

**Saturday, Oct. 10**

1-2:15 p.m. Josh Garrett Band

2:45-4 p.m. Mason Ruffner

4:30-5:45 p.m. Honey Island Swamp Band

6:15-7:30 p.m. Samantha Fish featuring Albert Castiglia

8-9:15 p.m. Raw Oyster Cult

9:45-11 p.m. Tab Benoit

**Sunday, Oct. 11**

1-2 p.m. Heath Ledet Band

2:30-3:30 p.m. Lightnin Malcolm

4-5 p.m. Mike Zito & The Wheel featuring Albert Castiglia

5:20-6:30 p.m. Royal Southern Brotherhood

7-8 p.m. Chubby Carrier & the Bayou Swamp Band

8:30-9:45 p.m. VOW Allstars

## Red Dog Saloon, Second Stage

**Friday, Oct. 9**

7-8:30 p.m. Johnny Sansone

10-11:30 p.m. Nonc Nu & Da Wild Matous

midnight Wetlands Ramble Jam Session

**Saturday, Oct. 10**

3 p.m. CC & the Mullets

5 p.m. Jenna Guidry

6:30 p.m. Dave Jordan & the Neighborhood Improvement Association

8:15 p.m. Indian Blues with Big Chief Monk Boudreaux, Johnny Sansone and John Fohl

10:30 p.m. Nonc Nu & Da Wild Matous

midnight Wetlands Ramble Jam Session

**Sunday, Oct. 11**

2:30-3:45 p.m. Raymond George & the Blue Flames

4:15-5:30 p.m. Honey Island Swamp Trio

6-7:30 p.m. The Fuzz Police Tribute

8-9 p.m. CC & the Mullets