

Bayou Lafourche Band of Biloxi Chitimacha Indians

The Sovereign Horizon Initiative

**Climate Change Displacement Resistance
& Community Resilience**

**August
2026**



Figure x. Image of shrimping net in the sunset.

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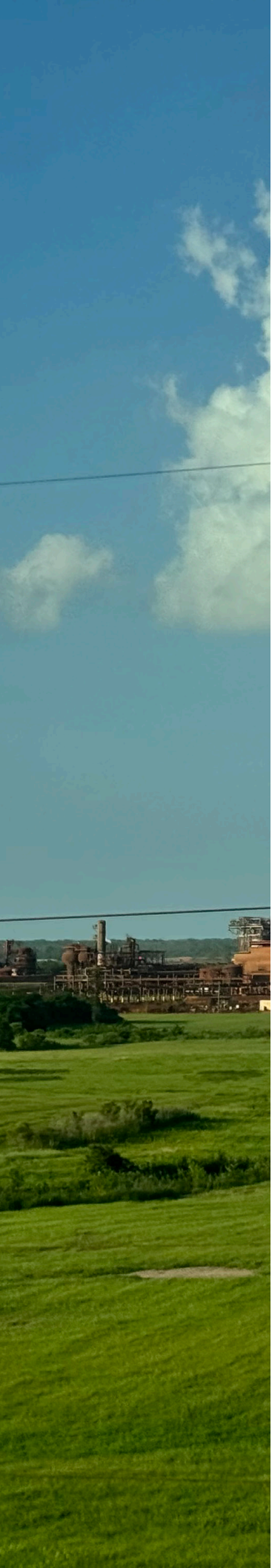
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Context

The Biloxi Chitimacha tribe have historically inhabited Isle de Jean Charles, right off the Gulf of Mexico in Southern Louisiana. The tribe relied on fishing, trapping, and hunting on the bayous for generations.

However, **since 1955, 98% of their ancestral land on Isle de Jean Charles has been lost, from 22,000 (8,900 ha) acres to just roughly 320 acres**¹. For comparison, this is equivalent to ~16,500 standard American football fields, the size of Manhattan, or the entire city center of Paris. **This loss can be attributed to a mix of human actions and natural forces, from saltwater intrusion, man-made canals, rapid subsidence, and rising sea levels linked to climate change**².

Today, members of the tribe live primarily in Lafourche Parish, Terrebonne Parish, and Grand Isle (in Jefferson Parish). Residents in these regions continue to face similar threats given their proximity to the coast.

¹ Jessica R. Z. Simms et al., "The Long Goodbye on a Disappearing, Ancestral Island: A Just Retreat from Isle de Jean Charles," *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences* 11, no. 3 (2021): 316–28, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13412-021-00682-5>.

² "The Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Community and Their Land," accessed July 27, 2026, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/biloxi-chitimacha-choctaw-community-and-their-land>.

Lafourche & Terrebonne Parishes and Grand Isle, Louisiana

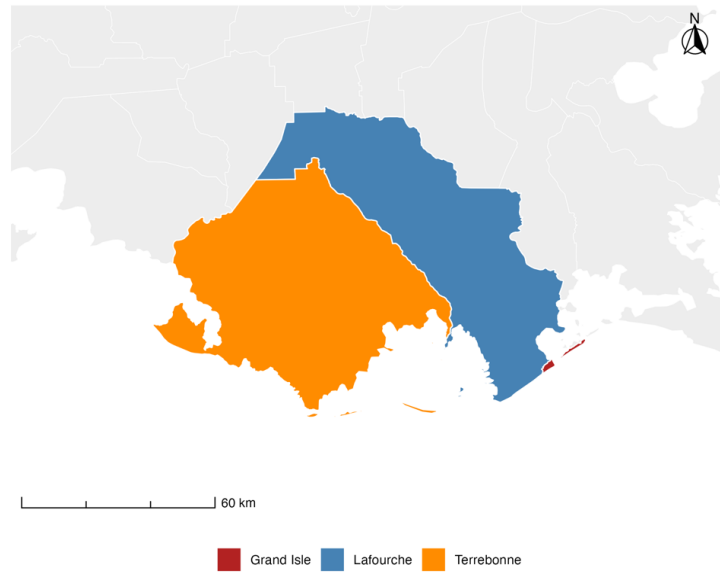


Figure 1. Map of Lafourche Parish, Terrebonne Parish, and Grand Isle in southern Louisiana. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau TIGER/Line Shapefiles (2024). Created using R. ³

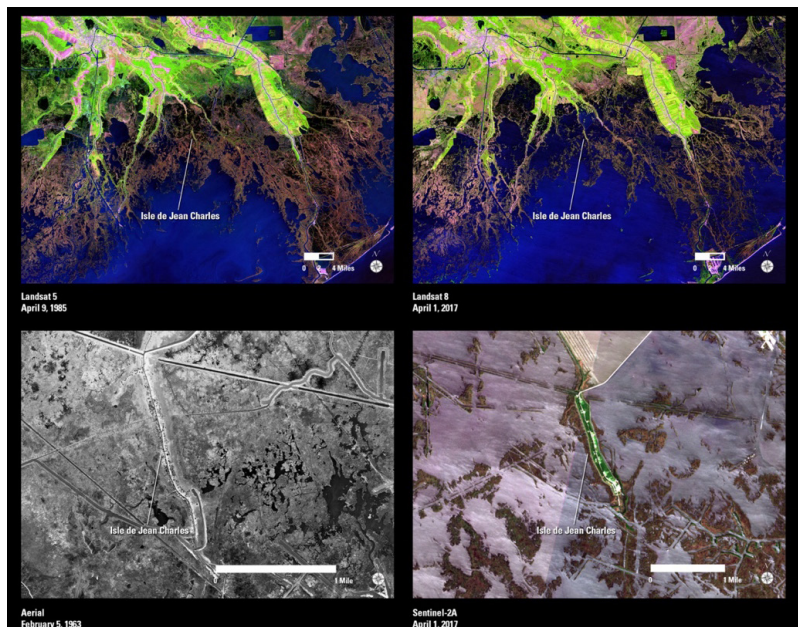


Figure 2. Aerial images comparing land loss in Isle de Jean Charles, Louisiana between April 1985 and April 2017. ⁴

³ US Census Bureau, "TIGER/Line Shapefiles," Census.Gov, accessed July 29, 2026, <https://www.census.gov/geographies/mapping-files/time-series/geo/tiger-line-file.html>.

⁴ "Isle de Jean Charles, Louisiana | U.S. Geological Survey," April 1, 2017, <https://www.usgs.gov/media/images/isle-de-jean-charles-louisiana>.



Economic Cost of Living

The Biloxi Chitimacha tribe is currently experiencing unprecedented escalating economic costs of living. According to 2024 census data, compared to the U.S. average, **all three regions have lower median household incomes (\$80,734 nationally vs \$43,333, \$63,135, and \$64,836), and higher rates of poverty (12.5% nationally vs 17%, 16%, and 36.5% vs 12.5%). These statistics are concerning because low-income households particularly vulnerable to any additional expenses, ultimately driving further displacement.**

It is important to note that while the median household income is higher in Lafourche and Terrebonne Parish than Louisiana, this paradox occurs due to severe income inequality between census tracts within each parish (Fig 5). In 2024, the census tract with the lowest median household income brought in just \$29,643, while the one with the highest median household income brought in \$101,702, or 4.1 times more.

Moreover, high regionality vulnerability to natural disasters further pushes low-income families into financial precarity (Fig 5) Between 2022 and 2024, median household income in the geographically lower census tracts, including Golden Meadow, Cut Off, Larose, Chauvin, Dulac, and Pointe-aux-Chenes, decreased dramatically. On the other hand, the median household income for a horizontal band of census tracts across Houma and Thibodaux, Terrebonne and Lafourche's parish seats respectively, rose consistently (Fig 5). This data indicates a selective out-migration pattern. A long trend of economic decline and coastal land loss compounded by the acute shocks of COVID-19 and Hurricane Ida have accelerated migration for those with the means to move inland, while aging, lower-income, and Indigenous peoples stay behind. For instance, the population in Dulac, Terrebonne, has fallen from 798 to 369 between 2020 and 2026, a -53.76% change ⁵. Similarly, the population in Chauvin, Terrebonne fell from 2,771 to 2,443, a -11.8% change ⁶.

⁵ "Dulac, Louisiana Population 2026," World Population Review, August 6, 2026, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/louisiana/dulac>.

⁶ "Chauvin, Louisiana Population 2026," World Population Review, August 6, 2026, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/louisiana/chauvin>.

	Median Household Income (\$)	Poverty Rate (%)
United States	\$80,734	12.5%
Louisiana	\$60,756	18.9%
Lafourche Parish	\$63,135	17%
Terrebonne Parish	\$64,836	16%
Grand Isle (Jefferson Parish)	\$43,333	36.5%

Figure 3. Table comparing median income and poverty rate (2026) between the U.S., Louisiana, Lafourche Parish, Terrebonne Parish, and Grand Isle (Jefferson Parish). ⁷

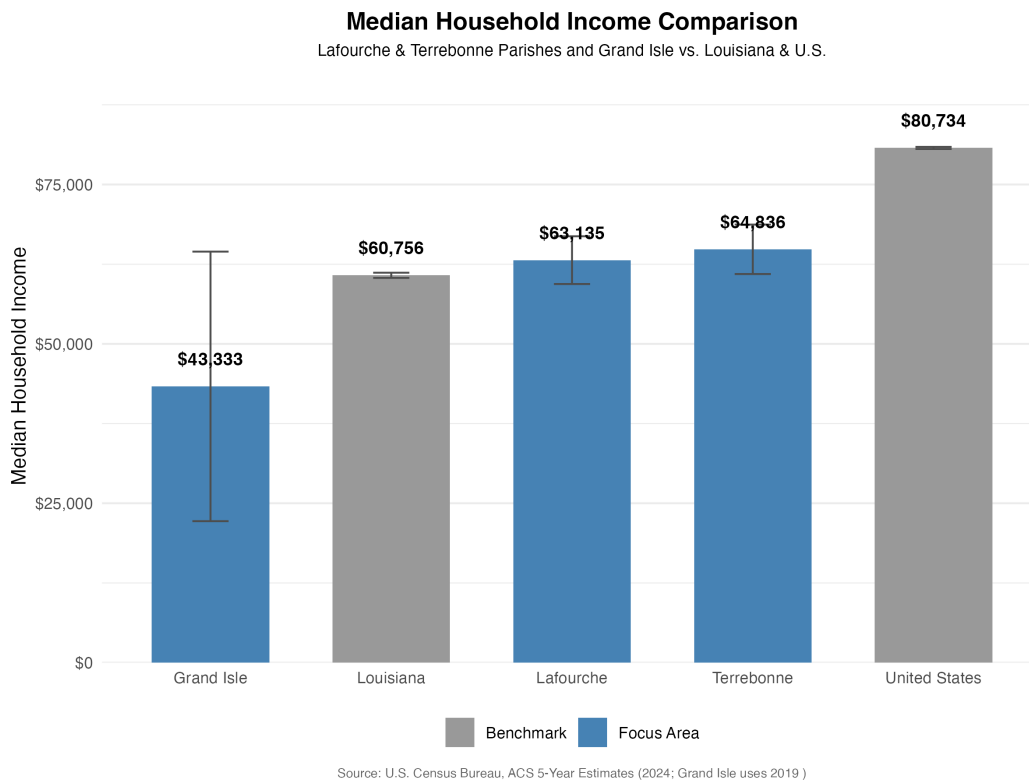
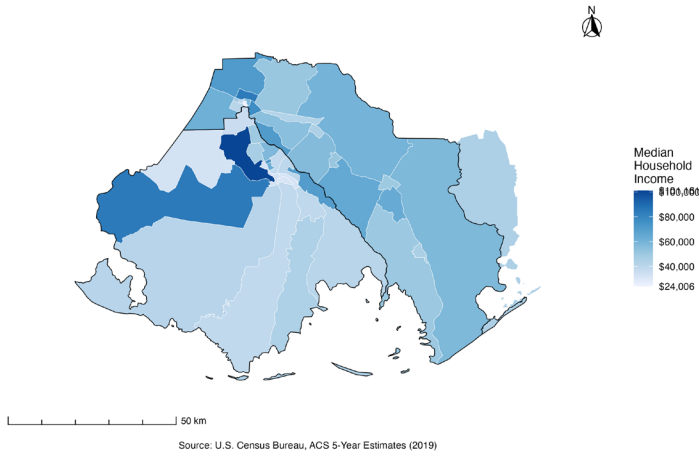


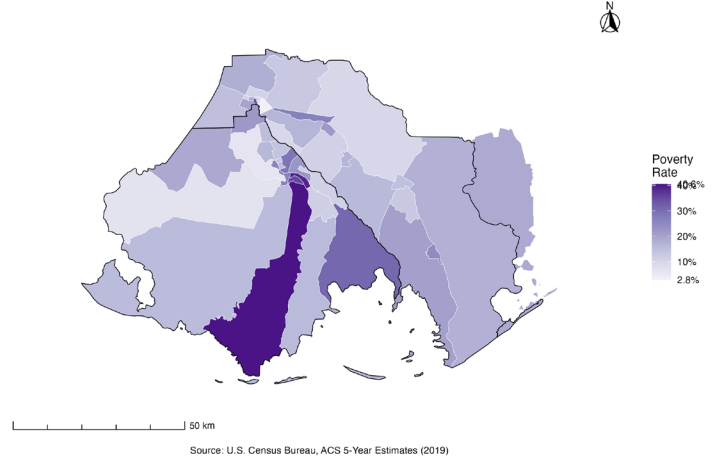
Figure 4. Bar graph comparing median household incomes (2022) in Lafourche Parish, Terrebonne Parish, Grand Isle (Jefferson Parish), and Louisiana. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau TIGER/Line Shapefiles (2022). Created using R. ⁸

⁷ US Census Bureau, "Supplemental Estimates," Census.Gov, accessed July 28, 2026, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>.
⁸ Bureau, "TIGER/Line Shapefiles."

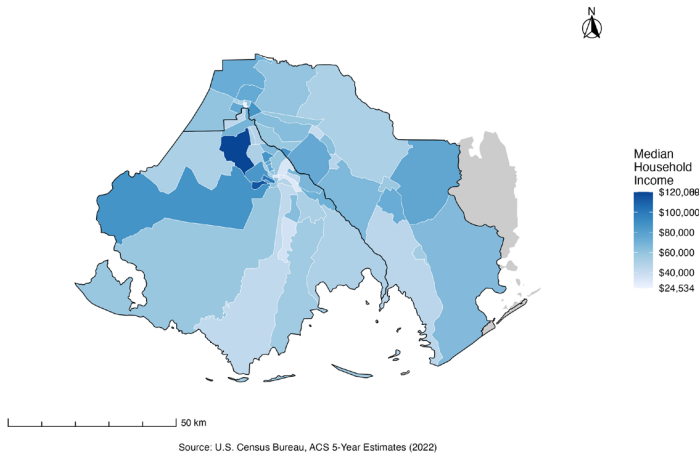
Median Household Income by Census Tract (2019)
Lafourche & Terrebonne Parishes and Grand Isle, Louisiana



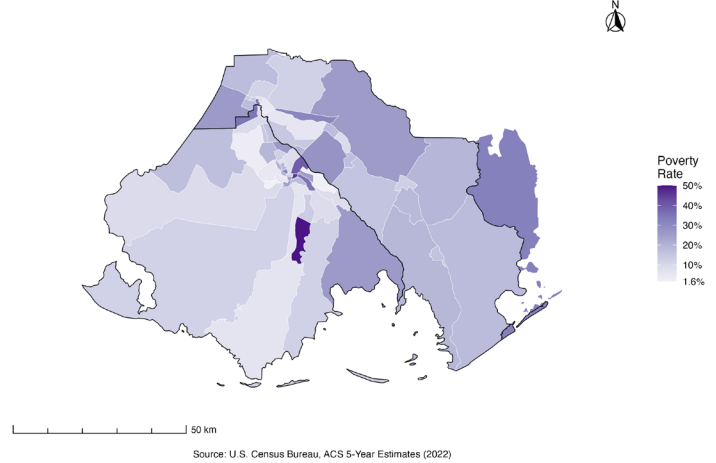
Poverty Rate by Census Tract (2019)
Lafourche & Terrebonne Parishes and Grand Isle, Louisiana



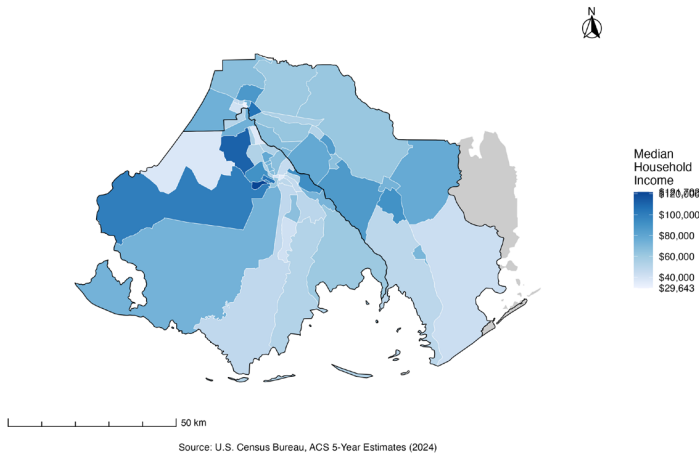
Median Household Income by Census Tract (2022)
Lafourche & Terrebonne Parishes and Grand Isle, Louisiana



Poverty Rate by Census Tract (2022)
Lafourche & Terrebonne Parishes and Grand Isle, Louisiana



Median Household Income by Census Tract (2024)
Lafourche & Terrebonne Parishes and Grand Isle, Louisiana



Poverty Rate by Census Tract (2024)
Lafourche & Terrebonne Parishes and Grand Isle, Louisiana

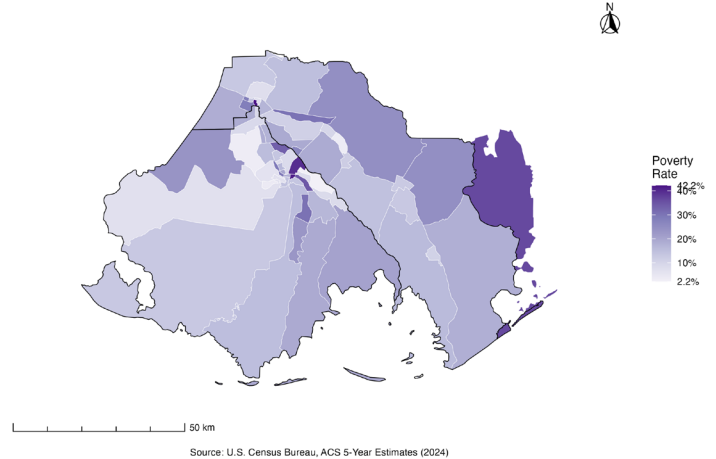
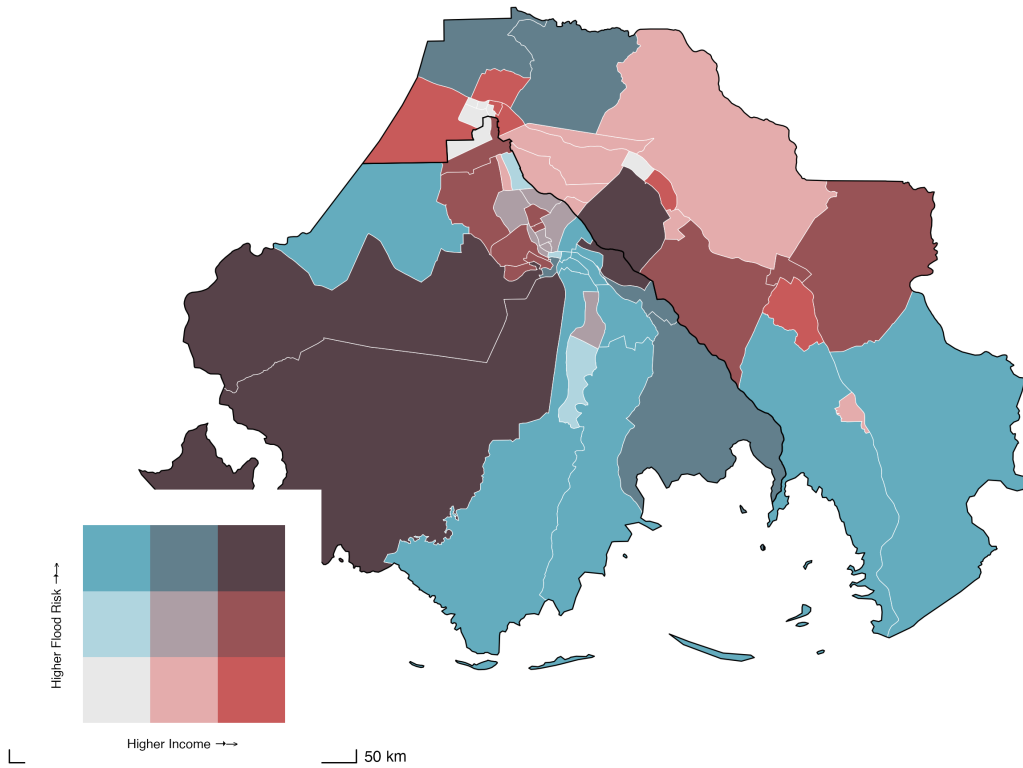


Figure 5. Map comparing median household incomes (2022) by census tract in Lafourche Parish, Terrebonne Parish, and Grand Isle in southern Louisiana. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau TIGER/Line Shapefiles (2022). Created using R.⁹

⁹ Bureau, "TIGER/Line Shapefiles."

Median Household Income vs. Coastal Flood Risk

Lafourche & Terrebonne Parishes, Louisiana (by Census Tract)



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Estimates (2020-2024); FEMA National Risk Index (v1.20, Dec 2025)

Figure 6. Map examining the relationship between median household income and coastal flood risk in by census track in Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes. Created in R. Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau TIGER/Line Shapefiles (2022), FEMA. ¹⁰

¹⁰ Bureau, "TIGER/Line Shapefiles."

This section explores in-depth the following factors along the Terrebonne-Lafourche corridor that further exacerbate these financial burdens.

1. Localized Inflation
2. Housing
3. Energy Costs

Localized Inflation in Louisiana

Localized inflation is the rise in prices within a specific geographic area or distinct market sector rather than across an entire country. It is important to examine localized inflation because national averages often mask regional cost disparities. Regional data provides more specific information about true costs of living, or what a household pays in their specific city or neighborhood. Some use cases for localized inflation include: (1) local leaders adjust regional economic strategies, and (2) guides people moving or living in high-cost areas to plan real purchasing power.

There are many ways to measure localized inflation, two of which being the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the cumulative inflation. The former, CPI, is released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics measures the average change over time in the prices paid by consumers for a

representative basket of consumer goods and services, including housing, food, transportation, healthcare, and other goods. Using this metric, the CPI estimated that between January 2021 and December 2024, average households in Louisiana were paying \$890 more per month for the same goods and services. This comes out to an average Louisiana household spending \$28,426 more due to inflation. Further, the latter metric reveals that within the same period, the cumulative inflation rose by roughly 20.5%, while nominal per capita personal income grew by 11.9% (from \$55,112 to \$61,667). This mismatch between inflation rates and income has decreased a typical household's buying power ¹¹.

11 "State Inflation Tracker - U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee," accessed July 27, 2026, <https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/republicans/state-inflation-tracker>.

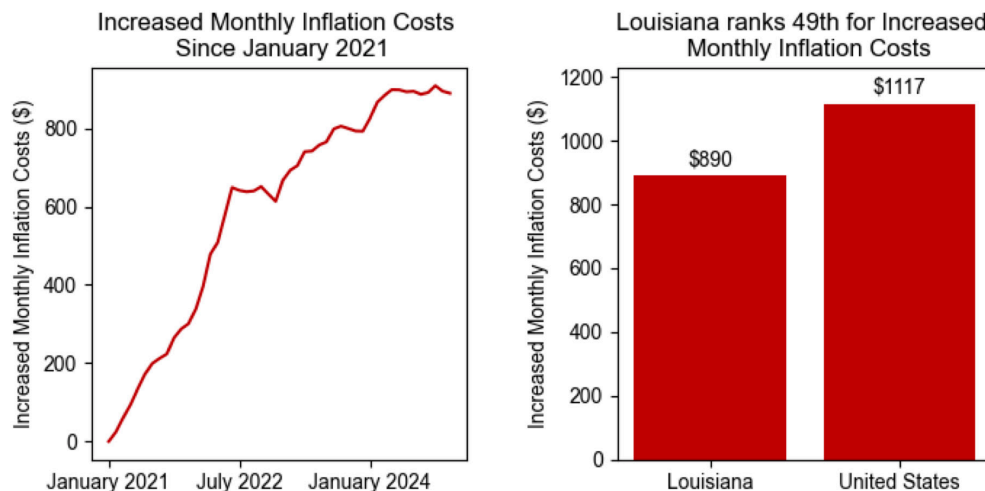


Figure 7. Left: Line graph tracking increased monthly inflation costs since January 2021 in Louisiana; Right: Bar graph measuring monthly inflation costs per household since January 2021 in Louisiana. Image Source: United States Congress Joint Economic Committee. ¹²

12 "Louisiana Inflation Update.Pdf."



Figure 8. Photo of shrimp trawler in a bayou in Louisiana.

As of July 2026, localized inflation has been exacerbated due to the recent war with Iran and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. This conflict has had reverberating impacts through the economy. Today, the average price for a gallon of gas across Houma-Thibodaux hovers around \$3.7260, compared to \$2.7560 just one year ago ¹³. The nearly \$1 jump has significantly increased transportation costs. One resident reported to WAFB9 that a full tank of gas is now \$80, up from \$50 a few years ago ¹⁴. Given that driving is the primary mode of transport in the region, whether for work, school, and otherwise, this has forced households working within a fixed budget to make tradeoffs between other bills.

Diesel prices have faced a similar fate. Currently, the average price for a gallon of diesel across the Lower Atlantic region is \$5.2550, compared to \$3.7460 just one year ago ¹⁵. The impact is palpable. The diesel costs for a typical shrimp trawler going on a two-day trip have gone from \$600-700 to nearly \$1,100-1,200 ¹⁶. The selling price of shrimp, however, has remained the same. As a result, this drastic change has squeezed shrimpers and fishers out of an

industry that already operates on slim margins ¹⁷. In the mid 1980s, Louisiana had nearly 20,000 shrimpers. Today, the figure sits right below 1,400. Instead, shrimpers are docking their boats and resorting to piloting rental vessels and “ferrying oil rig workers to and from the platforms that dot the Gulf” ¹⁸. Inflation costs are tangibly interfering with the community’s culture and way of living.

	July 2025	July 2026
Price of gas/gal (\$)	\$2.7560	\$3.7260
Price of diesel/gal (\$)	\$3.7460	\$5.2550

Figure 9. Table comparing gas and diesel prices one year apart, between July 2025 and July 2026 ¹⁹.

The financial strain has also been experienced at the grocery store. Nationally, the price of food has risen 33% from 2019 through June 2026, the largest jump in the past five decades. For context, prices only rose 6.4% in the seven and half years before that ²⁰. To measure this impact locally, The Journal of Consumer Research determined the states most

¹³ “Louisiana Inflation Update.Pdf.”

¹⁴ “AAA Fuel Prices,” accessed July 28, 2026, <https://gasprices.aaa.com/?state=LA>.

¹⁵ Parker Boyd, “Louisiana Gas Prices Reach Highest Level since Summer 2022, AAA Says,” <https://www.wafb.com/2026/07/25/louisiana-gas-prices-reach-highest-level-since-summer-2022-aaa-says/>.

¹⁶ Shreveport Times, “Lower Atlantic Region Diesel Price History,” Shreveport Times, accessed July 28, 2026, <https://data.shreveporttimes.com/diesel-price/lower-atlantic-region/R1Z/2026-07-27/>.

¹⁷ Thanh Truong, “Diesel Prices Push Louisiana Shrimpers to the Brink as Costs Soar,” <https://www.fox8live.com/2026/05/28/diesel-prices-push-louisiana-shrimpers-brink-costs-soar/>.

¹⁸ D et al., “Gulf Shrimpers Want Help from Congress as Fuel Costs Climb,” National, NPR, May 26, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/05/26/nx-s1-5831103/gulf-shrimpers-high-gas-prices-help-congress-cheap-imports>.

¹⁹ D et al., “Gulf Shrimpers Want Help from Congress as Fuel Costs Climb.”

²⁰ “AAA Fuel Prices”; Times, “Lower Atlantic Region Diesel Price History.”

cost-burdened by groceries by calculating the proportion of average annual grocery spending per household to their median household income. The average household in Louisiana spends \$8,303 in groceries, or 13.6% of their income, ranking them first in grocery cost burden. For perspective, this is 43% more cost-burdened than the typical American household ²¹. As a result, more than 756,000 people in Louisiana, or 16% of the state's population, rely on SNAP benefits and other charitable food assistance programs. About 53% of this figure are children or the elderly ²².



Figure 11. Photo of crab crawling on a shrimp trawler net.

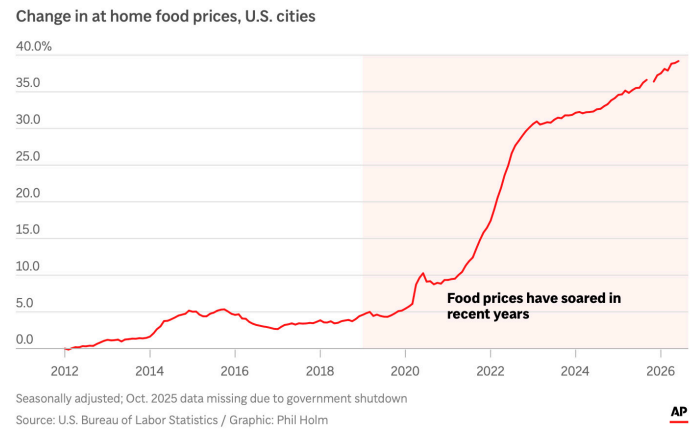


Figure 10. Line graph measuring change in at home food prices (%) between 2012 and 2026. Data Source: “Americans Rewire Their Grocery Shopping Routines Within Digesting the Biggest Price Jump in 50 Years” (Durbin) ²³.

The examples above are only three of the many ways residents are struggling with the increased economic cost of living in Louisiana. Ultimately, while the overall cost of living in Louisiana remains lower than the national average, and the significant income-to-expense gap indicates a widespread affordability crisis.

²¹ Dee-Ann Durbin, “Americans Rewire Their Grocery Shopping Routines While Digesting the Biggest Price Jump in 50 Years,” AP News, July 25, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/grocery-shopping-prices-food-affordability-8468c1d6532ca762bbcfa17e3c7707d1>.
²² “The Best and Worst States for Groceries 2026 | ConsumerAffairs®,” November 5, 2025, <https://www.consumeraffairs.com/movers/grocery-cost-report.html>.
²³ LSU Manship School News Service, “Louisiana Faces Higher SNAP Costs as Low-Income Families Feel More Strain • Louisiana Illuminator,” Louisiana Illuminator, March 10, 2026, <https://lailluminator.com/2026/03/10/louisiana-snap-2/>.

Energy Costs

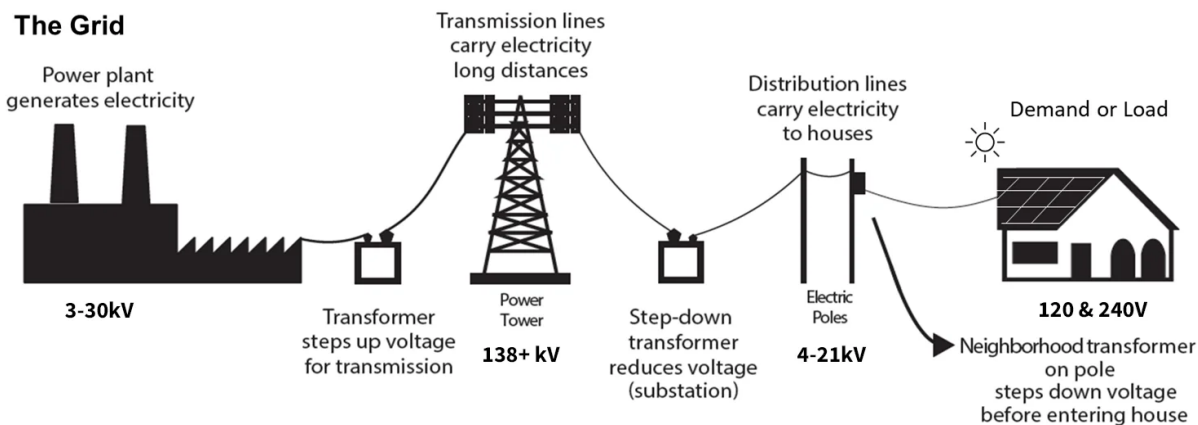


Figure 12. Diagram of the energy grid (Stanford).

According to a new report by the Pelican Institute for Public Policy titled “Shock to the System: Protecting Louisiana Consumers from Rising Electricity Costs,” “energy affordability now ranks as a top issue for families nationwide”²⁴. Typically, electricity bills are proportional to usage, meaning that increased consumption, especially during hot summer months, leads to higher bills. However, structural flaws in the region’s energy grid are adding another layer of cost burden²⁵. Federal data indicates that across the United States, electricity prices rose by 27% between January 2021 and January 2025, with an additional 11% increase occurring from January through September 2025 alone.

The average residential rate of electricity is 14.44 cents per kWh, which is roughly 31% below the national average. Still, Louisiana has not been spared from these changes. Between 2019 and 2024, base rates from the state’s largest utility provider increased by over 30%. Furthermore, federal data shows that from 2024 to 2025, “the average retail residential price per kilowatt-hour of electricity in Louisiana rose by 14.1%, more than doubling the nationwide average increase of 6.5% over the same period”²⁶. A 2026 Pelican poll found that 66% of voters

experienced noticeable increases in their utility bills this year, confirming energy costs as an urgent concern.

Understanding the energy grid

Before exploring the reasons for rising costs, it is helpful to understand the energy grid’s structure. Energy transmissions occur in three stages. First, a power plant generates electricity. Second, a utility company carries electricity long distances. Finally, the electricity reaches a household.

All expenses incurred by an energy grid developer can be categorized into two main areas: (1) grid infrastructure costs, and (2) generation costs. Grid infrastructure costs cover transmission systems, distribution networks, substations, and other hardware, whereas the general costs cover power production. Generally, grid costs are more fixed than generation costs. Before this cost is passed on to a consumer, they are also impacted by how utilities are structured, regulatory oversight, regional variations, and frequency with which the grid is stressed by heat waves or cold snaps²⁷. These factors ultimately determine the final cost paid by the common household.

²⁴ Durbin, “Americans Rewire Their Grocery Shopping Routines While Digesting the Biggest Price Jump in 50 Years.”

²⁵ “Shock to the System: New Report on What’s Driving Rising Electricity Costs in Louisiana,” Energy, Pelican Policy, March 31, 2026, <https://pelicanpolicy.org/reports/shock-to-the-system/>.

²⁶ “Shock to the System.”

²⁷ “The Grid: Electricity Transmission, Industry, and Markets | Understand Energy Learning Hub,” accessed August 5, 2026, <https://understand-energy.stanford.edu/energy-currencies/electricity-grid>.

FACTORS INFLUENCING AN ENERGY BILL

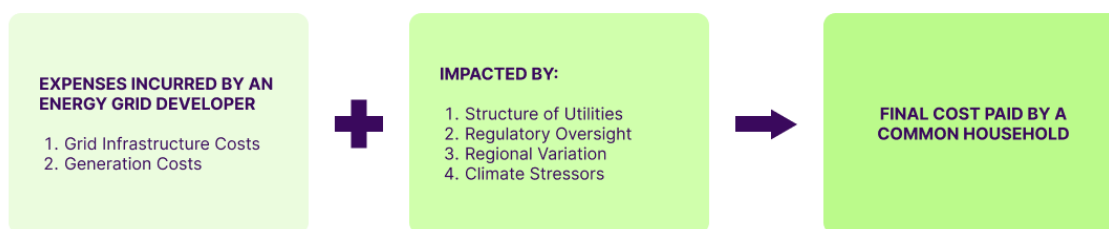


Figure 13. Diagram explaining factors influencing an energy bill incurred by a household.

Given the extensive list of variables, energy cost trends are varied from state to state and are largely place-based. For Louisiana specifically, drivers in rising energy costs include:

- a. Grid updates to mitigate extreme weather
- b. Susceptible to fuel price volatility
- c. Limited competition in utility procurement
- d. Slow Adoption of renewables
- e. Policies shifting long-term costs and risks onto ratepayers
- f. Potential data centers

Susceptible to fuel price volatility

Louisiana depends heavily on natural gas for electricity. According to May 2026 data collected by the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), natural gas accounted for 6,630.77 MWh out of 9,131.6 MWh, or approximately 72.6%, of Louisiana's net electricity generated. Notably, among the 86 operating power plants in the state, natural gas fuels 14 out of the 16 largest power plants by generation. However, the two outliers are primarily subbituminous coal power plants, supplemented by natural gas as a secondary source²⁸. Moreover, Louisiana is ranks third among the states for both

natural gas consumption (only following Texas and California), and total electricity consumption on a per capita basis. 24% of the natural gas consumed is directed towards electricity production. These two factors, (1) dependence on natural gas and (2) large scale consumption, translates to residential electric bills that are extremely susceptible to volatile gas prices.

Grid updates related to extreme weather

Extreme weather occurrences such as hurricanes, flooding, and extreme heat are becoming more frequent. According to data from the National Centers for Environmental Information, from 1980 to 2024, there were "265 confirmed weather/climate disaster events with losses exceeding \$1 billion each to affect the South Climate Region. These events included 28 drought events, 18 flooding events, 3 freeze events, 163 severe storm events, 32 tropical cyclone events, 8 wildfire events, and 13 winter storm events"²⁹. While the 1980-2024 annual average is 5.9 events (CPI-adjusted) however, the annual average for between (2020-2024) is 16.0 events (CPI-adjusted).

This matters because these disastrous phenomena push utility companies to execute multi-billion-dollar grid repair, hardening, and resilience plans, which are directly passed onto consumers in the way of surcharges on their bill.

²⁸ "Sponsored: A Stronger Grid Means a More Resilient Future | Powered by Entergy," NOLA.Com, June 25, 2026, https://www.nola.com/multimedia/sponsored-a-stronger-grid-means-a-more-resilient-future-powered-by-entergy/video_407d51f4-11b4-5e09-8046-af60b7826704.html.

²⁹ Adam B. Smith, "U.S. Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters, 1980 - Present (NCEI Accession 0209268)," NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.25921/STKW-7W73>.

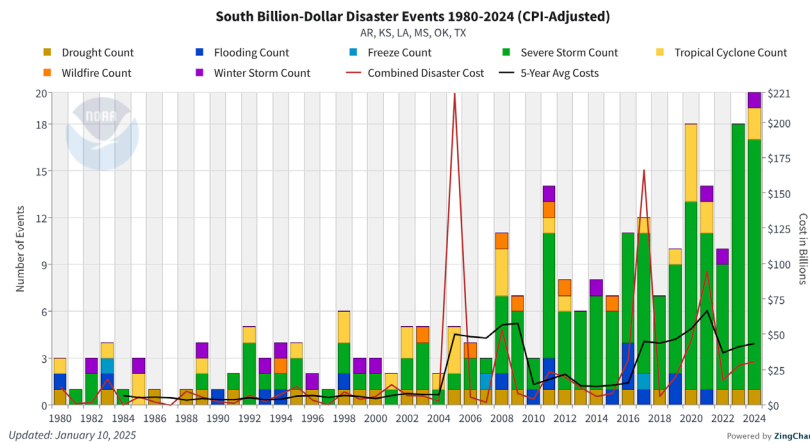


Figure 14. Bar graph of billion-dollar disaster events between 1980-2024 (National Center for Environmental Information).

Select Time Period Comparisons of South Climate Region (AR, KS, LA, MS, OK, TX) Billion-Dollar Disaster Statistics (CPI-Adjusted)

Time Period	Billion-Dollar Disasters	Events/Year	Cost	Percent of Total Cost	Cost/Year
1980s (1980-1989)	21	2.1	\$57.9B	6.1%	\$5.8B
1990s (1990-1999)	31	3.1	\$52.0B	5.4%	\$5.2B
2000s (2000-2009)	47	4.7	\$326.5B	34.2%	\$32.6B
2010s (2010-2019)	86	8.6	\$299.7B	31.4%	\$30.0B
Last 5 Years (2020-2024)	80	16.0	\$218.0B	22.9%	\$43.6B
Last 3 Years (2022-2024)	48	16.0	\$76.9B	8.1%	\$25.6B
Last Year (2024)	20	20.0	\$30.9B	3.2%	\$30.9B
All Years (1980-2024)	265	5.9	\$954.0B	100.0%	\$21.2B

Figure 15. Table of billion-dollar disaster statistics between 1980-2024 (National Center for Environmental Information).

For instance, in 2022, Energy went before the Louisiana Public Service Commission twice to request “the ability to recoup more than \$5 billion in restoration expenses” after hurricanes Laura, Delta, Zeta, and Ida. The approval resulted in an additional \$13 for 1250 kilowatt-hours of usage per month, or \$156 per year. Customers also reported that this figure increased for households with higher usage ³⁰. This disproportionately impacts low-income household’s that are already burdened with costs from natural disaster recovery.

Further, in October of 2024, the same commission voted 3-2 to approve Entergy Louisiana’s spending proposal for the first phase of its “Future Ready Resilience Plan”, passing another \$1.9 billion in upgrades ³¹. Entergy

Louisiana intends to harden 69,000 utility poles and structures across the state and has claimed a 9 to 1 benefit-to-cost ratio ³². However, many concerns have emerged from this decision. First, advocacy groups, such as the Alliance for Affordable Energy and Together Louisiana, and residents alike argue there has been an overall lack of transparency in this process. The Public Service Commission was requested to review the plan only four days after Entergy submitted their plan, leaving little time for the public to conduct a bill impact analysis, receive an explanation for the projects chosen and reliability metrics, or explore potentially lower-cost alternatives. Second, the plan also fails to diversify its resiliency efforts. Florida’s utility regulators cited that burying power lines underground led to 600% fewer outages during storms, vs. a 20% decrease through strengthening utility poles and other

³⁰ “Letter to Editor: Entergy’s Storm Costs on Bills Too High | The Sabine Index,” accessed September 2, 2026, <https://www.sabinetoday.com/articles/2023/03/08/letter-editor-entergy%E2%80%99s-storm-costs-bills-too-high>.
³¹ Wesley Muller, “Few of Entergy’s \$1.9 Billion in Grid-Hardening Projects Include Underground Power Lines • Louisiana Illuminator,” Louisiana Illuminator, April 24, 2024, <https://lailluminator.com/2024/04/24/few-of-entergys-1-9-billion-in-grid-hardening-projects-include-underground-power-lines/>.

³² Naveena Sadasivam Aldern Clayton, “What’s behind Your Eye-Popping Power Bill? We Broke It down, Region by Region.,” Grist, February 18, 2026, <https://grist.org/energy/power-bills-electricity-prices-state-by-state/>; Ryan Wiser et al., Factors Influencing Recent Trends in Retail Electricity Prices in the United States, n.d.

However, this arrangement also has its limitations. Five utility companies provide coverage to 79.7% of the state’s retail customers, and 87.5% of retail sales (MWh)³⁵. While there is the illusion of five companies, residents don’t have a choice between them, as they are region specific and protected. Second, whereas people in a deregulated choice market may decide between different options for their electricity generation, this choice is not granted to Louisiana residents. Instead, their energy source and thereby cost is automatically determined for them depending on their utility provider. This arrangement allows energy companies to price gouge its consumers. In the middle of the summer, electricity bills can reach as high as \$600. According to the Energy & Policy Institute (EPI), 19.4%, or 116.52 of that \$600, of an Entergy Louisiana bill is profit, up from 12.9% in 2021³⁶. This figure ranks #15 out of the 110 investor-owned utility companies that EPI has reported on.

Louisiana’s Top Five Utility Companies

Utility Name	Ownership	% State Retail Sales (MWh)	% State Retail Customers
Entergy Louisiana LLC	Investor Owned	63.4%	45.0%
Cleco Power LLC	Investor Owned	9.2%	12.0%
Southwestern Electric Power Co	Investor Owned	6.3%	9.5%
Entergy New Orleans, LLC	Investor Owned	5.9%	8.5%
Southwest Louisiana E M C	Cooperative	2.6%	4.756%
Total Top 5 Utilities (by retail sales)		87.5%	79.7%

Figure 17. Chart of Louisiana’s top five utility companies, ownership type, % of state retail sales (MWh), % of state retail customers (Nicholas Institute, Duke)³⁷.

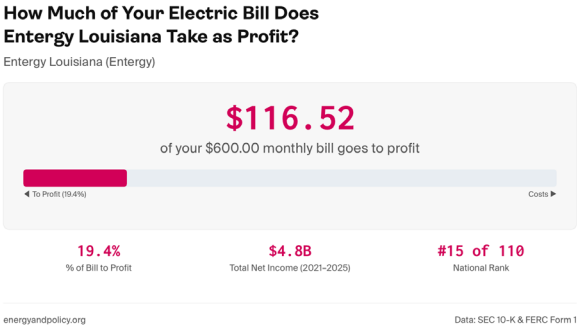


Figure 18. Statistics of Entergy Louisiana bill³⁸.

Shifting long-term costs and risks onto ratepayers

There are many costs and risks to investing in the development of the electricity grid.

- 1. *Phantom Load*: utilities building infrastructure designed to last 40 to 50 years based on surging demand shifts
- 2. *Market Shifts*: industrial power demand drops? Energy efficiency improves? New power plants become “stranded assets”

According to Columbia’s Center on Global Energy Policy, “Unlike a traditional commercial business, whose shareholders bear investment risk, regulated utilities can pass the costs of poor investment decisions onto ratepayers over decades.”

Slow adoption of renewables

Abundant natural gas and large utility providers has slowed down any the structural shift towards renewable energy, which includes biomass, solar energy, and hydropower. While Louisiana has deviated from coal-fueled electricity production, 18% to 4% between 2014 to 2024, the difference has been absorbed by the natural gas sector. The reasons for this are both political and geographical.

The primary challenge to solar energy adoption is legislative bill HB 459, signed by Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry, which established new regulations for renewable energy projects concerning batteries, wind energy, and solar power generation facilities. For solar proposals specifically, projects that operate on at least 75 acres of land must comply with these setbacks and sitting requirements³⁹:

- 1. *Residential Setback*: a 300-foot setback from any residential property lines, paired with a 35-foot new planting or 50-foot natural vegetative barrier

35 “LPSC - Utilities Map,” accessed August 6, 2026, https://www.lpsc.louisiana.gov/Utilities_Map.
36 “Louisiana,” accessed August 4, 2026, <http://nicholasinstitute.duke.edu/project/power-sector-competitiveness-dashboard/louisiana>.
37 Shelby Green et al., “Entergy New Orleans — How Much Profit Is in Your Electric Bill?,” Energy and Policy Institute, April 23, 2025, <https://energyandpolicy.org/utilityprofittracker/?utility=entergy-new-orleans&bill=250>.
38 “Louisiana.”

39 Green et al., “Entergy New Orleans — How Much Profit Is in Your Electric Bill?”

2. *Road and Water Setbacks:* 50-foot setback from public roads (with a 5-foot vegetative barrier), and 100-foot setback from natural or navigable waterways.
3. *Noise and Maintenance:* Noise cannot exceed 10 decibels above pre-construction levels at the property line.

While individual parishes may opt out of this bill through a resolution, this also keeps the door open for them to create even stricter restrictions. These barriers have made it more difficult for companies to invest their money into solar projects in Louisiana.

Solar panel misinformation spread by bots and neighbors have further exacerbated the impacts of HB 459, derailing projects across the state ⁴⁰. Many residents are led to believe that solar panels will decrease property values, cause fires, leach chemicals in the bayous that can cause cancer, or become “orphan wells,” referring to rigs left behind by fossil fuel companies rather than being properly decommissioned. These sentiments are particularly strong in farming communities, where there is an ongoing fear that solar energy will erase their unique identity, economic foundation, and lead to similar exploitation caused by oil and gas. In rebuttal, residents are opposing utility scale solar projects across the state. In Iberia Parish for instance, hundreds of residents chimed in on council meetings against the proposed Acadiana Solar Project, a \$175 million solar project on 1,000 acres of land. Opposition ultimately led to an ordinance passed in July 2025, on top of HB 459, that requires any solar projects in the community to be set back at least a half mile away from the nearest residential property line ⁴¹. This is the most restrictive setback in the state to date.



Figure 19. The 50-megawatt Sunlight Road Solar facility generates electricity for an estimated 11,500 homes in Washington Parish. (Entergy Louisiana).

Challenges to hydropower adoption are more logistical. Traditional large-scale hydropower requires significant a “head,” or a high vertical drop or a massive dam to create water pressure. However, Louisiana features very low relief and flat terrain, meaning major waterways like the Mississippi River drop only a fraction of a foot in elevation per mile as they approach the Gulf of Mexico. Moreover, Louisiana’s marshy shifting floodplains are not conducive for a safe nor effective dam. Ecological challenges include:

- *Wetland Degradation:* restricting the natural delivery of freshwater and life-sustaining sediment to fragile coastal marshes.
- *Wildlife Disruption:* blocking migration patterns and habitats for native fish, endangered species, and local flora/fauna
- *Salinity Shifts:* altering salt-water intrusion balances

As a result, the only major utility scale hydropower plant in the state is the Sidney A. Murray Jr. Hydroelectric Station located in Vidalia, Louisiana. For dams that move ahead with their proposals, it is critical to note that unequal protection for majority-Black neighborhoods that already experience frequent flooding. One example is a proposed dam in Pearl River in Mississippi, where residents have touted the project as a “development scheme with ancillary flood-control benefits” ⁴².

⁴⁰ “LA - HB459,” BillTrack50, accessed August 4, 2026, <https://www.billtrack50.com/billdetail/1882625>.

⁴¹ Delaney Nolan, “Unfounded Fears Hamper Louisiana’s Solar Boom,” The Lens, June 30, 2026, <https://thelensnola.org/2026/06/30/unfounded-fears-hamper-louisianas-solar-boom/>.

⁴² Nolan, “Unfounded Fears Hamper Louisiana’s Solar Boom.”



Figure 20. Hydroelectric plant at Texas end of Toledo Bend Dam (Heart of Louisiana) ⁴³.

Biomass, the process in which organic material is burned produce an electric current, presents as a relatively promising option. This method accounted for nearly half of the state's renewable electricity generation in 2024. Wood, wood waste, and sugarcane residues are abundant in the state, providing ample resources for the state's two major wood pellet manufacturing plants, and have a combined production capacity of about 1.26 million tons per year, representing 9.4% of total U.S. pellet production. Still, rather than explore electricity generation, wood pellet production in Louisiana has looked outwards. The two plants are operated by British energy company Drax, and \$800 million worth of pellets were shipped overseas to the United Kingdom and countries in the European Union in 2023 ⁴⁴.



Figure 21. Worker inspecting biomass pellet machine (Woodworking Network) ⁴⁵.

As a result, as of May 2026, renewables together accounted for only 438.58MWh out of 9,131.6MWh, or approximately 4.8%, of Louisiana's total electricity generation ⁴⁶.

Data centers

Four tech giants, Google, Meta, Microsoft, and Amazon, spent \$364 billion in 2025 to accelerate the construction of new data centers across the U.S. ⁴⁷. While capital investments typically generate job opportunities, tax revenue, and other economic advantages, however, data centers also demand substantial computing power, sometimes consuming more power than large cities.

Ari Peskoe, Director of the Electricity Law Initiative at the Harvard Law School Environmental and Energy Law Program, reports a hidden cost of data centers: increased utility rates for neighboring businesses. "First, the utility is building new infrastructure to provide energy to data centers and spreads those costs to all ratepayers. Second, certain energy prices that the utility pays are set through markets, and when demand goes up — and supply doesn't go up fast enough to meet it — prices go up" ⁴⁸.

Several articles indicate that the rise in energy costs cannot readily be attributed to the introduction of data center, given that developers are offering to bear the cost of infrastructure upgrades or build energy generation projects entirely. However, this stance should be approached with caution, given a lack of transparency between the public, utility regulators, and data centers. This confidentially allows utility companies to offer special deals to data centers

⁴³ Illan Ireland Press Mississippi Free, "With a Federal Plan to Dam the Pearl River Nearly Set, Fears Persist over Effects Downstream • Louisiana Illuminator," Louisiana Illuminator, June 1, 2026, <https://lailluminator.com/2026/06/01/dam-pearl-river/>.

⁴⁴ Dave McNamara, "Toledo Bend Reservoir a Louisiana-Texas Treasure," The Heart of Louisiana, December 23, 2021, <https://heartoflouisiana.com/the-toledo-bend-reservoir/>.

⁴⁵ JSLLC, "Louisiana Bill Aims to Boost State's Wood Pellet Industry," Rapides Parish Journal, March 20, 2026, <https://rapidesparishjournal.com/2026/03/20/louisiana-bill-aims-to-boost-states-wood-pellet-industry/>.

⁴⁶ Karen Koenig, "Drax Biomass Acquires Louisiana Pellets for \$35.4 Million," Woodworking Network, April 7, 2017, <https://www.woodworkingnetwork.com/wood/pricing-supply/drax-biomass-acquires-louisiana-pellets-354-million>.

⁴⁷ "Spending on AI Data Centers Is so Massive That It's Taken a Bigger Chunk of GDP Growth than Shopping — and It Could Crash the American Economy," accessed August 6, 2026, <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/spending-ai-data-centers-massive-150110727.html?guccounter=1>.

⁴⁸ Rachel Reed, "How Data Centers May Lead to Higher Electricity Bills," Harvard Law School, September 3, 2025, <https://hls.harvard.edu/today/how-data-centers-may-lead-to-higher-electricity-bills/>.

with near zero accountability or recourse. In addition, the longer-term impacts of data centers are difficult to extrapolate. For context, legacy infrastructure facilities built 30 years ago in the 80s and 90s are already struggling to keep up with current computing demands. Yet, global e-waste production has grown five times faster than formal recycling rates since 2010, reaching 62 million metric tons in 2022, sitting at 22.3% ⁴⁹. Without a proper sustainability plan, the responsibility of maintaining and decommissioning the data center may fall on residents after the contract ends, which usually between 3 and 15 years.

⁴⁹ Liz Cooper, "The Future of Data Center Sustainability Isn't What You Think," Human-I-T, March 7, 2026, <https://www.human-i-t.org/data-center-sustainability/>.