

HISTORICAL HUMAN IMPACTS UPON THE BELLEFONTAINE COAST, MS.
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As part of a broader study conducted by the MS Office of Geology and the Bureau of Marine Resources in 1992, historical settlement patterns and landuse impacts on Mississippi's Bellefontaine headland were investigated. By means of archival research, interviews, and field surveys, it was found that human interference with coastal processes is relatively recent. In spite of archeological evidence of aboriginal usage, Indians occupied the region only temporarily during oyster- and shellfish-gathering periods. Similarly, the eighteenth-century French settlers—notably J.B. Baudreaux and his descendants, who acquired title to the property—resided on the coast only seasonally. The first permanent coastal inhabitants arrived in the nineteenth century, but settlement directly upon the storm-prone shorefront remained sparse until the 1950s. In spite of the 1947 hurricane which destroyed the few existing beachfront homes, a "beach subdivision era" began in the late 1950s. This coastal urbanization, mostly along what is now called Bellefontaine Beach, was accompanied by increased structural modification of the beach environment. A jetty/terminal groin was built at the west end of the Bellefontaine Beach Subdivision, and following Hurricane Camille in 1969 sand-trapping groins became more numerous. Field surveys in May 1992 identified 35 piers, 25 groins, and 35 bulkheads along the Bellefontaine headland (excluding the riprap bulkhead at the public fishing pier near Pointe aux Chênes). Preliminary evidence indicates that these structures have not effectively halted shoreline erosion but have assisted in further degrading a naturally erosive shoreline.