

Levee shaping up in south Slidell

Project to protect 3,000-4,000 homes

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St. Tammany bureau

Work has begun to raise an earthen berm on Slidell's southern edge in an effort to provide increased flood protection to the neighborhoods between U.S. 11 and the tracks owned by the Norfolk Southern Pacific Railroad.

Crews will raise the berm, south of First Baptist Church, from roughly 6 feet to 12 feet to create a 2,000-foot-long levee. The \$1.2 million project will help to reduce storm surge for 3,000 to 4,000 surrounding homes, though it will not provide protection against a Category 5 hurricane.

The levee will help to lessen the tidal surge for a minor to moderate storm, such as the kind occurring every 50 years or so. Officials hope to provide storm surge protection in the event of a 100-year storm when other phases of the larger project to build a network of protective levees in the south Slidell area are complete.

"I am very pleased to begin phase one of this project," St. Tammany Parish President Kevin Davis said. "With this first phase providing storm surge protection to 4,000 homes, this is a good start to what will eventually be a comprehensive protection package for much of this area of our parish."

Leon Lowe and Sons Inc. is expected to complete the south Slidell levee project in 110 days, weather permitting.

The parish, the city of Slidell and the state financed the project, with the most significant costs being the construction and land acquisition.

Hurricane Ike threatened in 2008 to flood the homes in the Yester Oaks neighborhood behind First Baptist when the levee suffered a 150-foot breach. City employees scrambled to repair the breach with clay while diverting the marsh water to a nearby pumping station.

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