

Lake Borgne Surge Barrier Now Protects New Orleans

Nov. 6—In Summer 2011, the IHNC (Inner Harbor Navigation Canal) Lake Borgne Surge Barrier was completed, to protect the city of New Orleans from storm surge flooding. It is the largest single civil works project ever carried out by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; it performed to perfection in its first use, August 2012, when Hurricane Isaac hit the Gulf Coast.

The structure consists of a 1.8-mile-long barrier wall, with gigantic gates (seen in the middle distance), situated at the upper end of Lake Borgne (east of Lake Pontchartrain), at the confluence of the Intra-coastal Channel. The barrier, made of concrete and steel, is shown here, with a view of the Seabrook Floodgate in the foreground.

Locally, the barrier is referred to as “The Great Wall.” It forms the first line of defense to protect against tidal surge from the Gulf of Mexico moving inward through Lake Ponchartrain. The Great Wall protects the parishes hit so badly in 2005—the Lower Ninth Ward and St. Bernard Parish.

The Corps reports that the project took “enough steel to construct eight Eiffel Towers, enough concrete to fill one football field, 94 feet deep ... [and] involves 160 miles of piles.”

The photo shows the massive gates,

during installation in May 2011.

The concept of surge protection for New Orleans—long proposed—was finally acted upon after the deadly impact of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. As of 2006, upgraded flood defense systems were mapped out for the entire city region—much of it below sea level—including new floodwalls, pumping capacity, and other logistics—amongst which, the Lake Borgne Surge Barrier was a centerpiece. In 2008, the the Corps awarded a \$1 billion design-build contract to Shaw Environmental & Infrastructure, Inc.—the largest such contract in Corps history. Under Corps supervision, Shaw finished the barrier and gates in an unbelievable time of two years and two weeks.

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