



HISTORY OF THE CREOLE NATURE TRAIL

The Creole Nature Trail (CNT) began as an idea to encourage visitors to get off of the interstate. A local sportsman and outdoor writer named Jim Lester is credited with the original idea for the trail. The idea was put into action when it was proposed to the Greater Lake Charles Chamber of Commerce who elected to create a committee to make future plans for the trail.

The Creole Nature Trail Committee was comprised of seven members, including representation from the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury, Cameron Parish Police Jury and the Southwest Louisiana Convention and Visitors Bureau.

On May 23, 1975, Governor Edwin W. Edwards signed into law House Bill No. 128. This bill created the over 117 mile long Creole Nature Trail, consisting of portions of Highways 27, 82, 384 and 385 in Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes. The bill also provided authorization to the Department of Highways for the erection of informational signs and markers along the trail.

Initial funding for the signage and promotion of the Creole Nature Trail was secured through matching fund programs from the state and the Imperial Calcasieu Regional Development Commission. Match monies were provided by the Calcasieu and Cameron Parish Police Juries.

In 1993, the Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau and members of the Cameron Parish Tourist Commission worked to have the Creole Nature Trail designated as a State Scenic Byway. Senate Bill No. 242 was passed during the 1993 regular session and signed into law by Governor Edwin W. Edwards, officially designating the Creole Nature Trail as a Louisiana Scenic Byway. This legislation also returned portions of the Creole Nature Trail that had been inadvertently written into the Jean Lafitte Scenic Byway legislation during their designation process in 1992.

With state scenic byway designation, the Creole Nature Trail also added a section of highway to the original trail. This section, from Holly Beach west to the Louisiana-Texas state line, brought the total length of the trail to 140 miles.

As a designated State Scenic Byway, the Creole Nature Trail became eligible to apply for federal funding through the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA).

In 1994, the Louisiana Legislature passed Senate Bill No. 1212, forming a Creole Nature Trail Scenic Byway District. Consisting of nine commission members representing Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes, the district was charged with stimulating economic development and tourism along the trail.

In 1996, the Creole Nature Trail was chosen for a cooperative pilot program with the National Park Service. The Park Service, with assistance from Louisiana State University, provided technical documentation and the initial formation of a corridor management plan to define the future of the Creole Nature Trail Scenic Byway. This corridor management plan was utilized that same year to apply for and receive National Scenic Byways designation for the Creole Nature Trail through the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) National Scenic Byways Program.

Through the diligent efforts of the Creole Nature Trail District and its partners, such as the Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Calcasieu and Cameron Parish Police Juries and the three National Wildlife Refuges located along the trail, the CNT applied for and received several grants to enhance the trail for visitors through the FHWA's National Scenic Byway (NSB) competitive grant program.

In 2002, these groups formally submitted an application for All-American Road status for the Creole Nature Trail. All-American Road designation, the highest level available for byways, means that the road or highway must be considered a destination unto itself and provide an exceptional traveling experience so recognized by travelers that they would make a drive along the highway a primary reason for their trip. In the fall of 2002, the Creole Nature Trail was officially designated an All-American Road.

Since this designation, the Creole Nature Trail has applied for and received more than \$4,917,000 in grant funding through the competitive NSB program. In 2005, when Hurricanes Katrina and then Rita struck Louisiana, FHWA/NSB program officials and byways across the nation reached out to the Creole Nature Trail offering assistance for recovery. Due to the relationships formed, and the tremendous devastation incurred, the FHWA NSB program allowed the Creole Nature Trail to re-align more than \$430,000 in grant funding already awarded to recovery efforts for the trail.

The Creole Nature Trail All-American Road is considered a key player and model byway for the National Scenic Byways Program. District officers are called upon to assist with policies and plans for the program by serving on NSB boards and committees.

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