



## LWV Gulf Coast Convening Report

Thank you everyone who attended the Gulf Coast Convening on Saturday February 8, 2025. This event was an important waypoint in our League journey to becoming engaged in local community and statewide, and regional issues related to climate effects.

League of Women Voters members from Alabama, Florida, and Louisiana gathered at the Weeks Bay Reserve in Fairhope Alabama for the very first LWV Gulf Coast Convening. Attendees heard from an expert Panelists and Moderator including: Ms. Cindy Lowry, League member and Executive Director of the Alabama Rivers Alliance; Mr. Kyle Crider; Program and Policy Director for Alabama Interfaith Power and Light and the People's Justice Council; Ms. Donna Pilson; Executive Director of Rebuild Bay County, Florida; Ms. Cece Pless; Major Donor Advisor of Mobile Baykeeper. The [Gulf Coast Convening Panel](#) discussed the multitude of worsening climate impacts that Gulf Coast communities are facing; the difficulties of recovering from repeated climate related disasters; the need for Resilience and Readiness to be prepared for the next disaster; and the challenge of ever-increasing costs which are making it difficult for people to afford to come back to their homes. Our [lunch keynote speaker](#), Ms. Carletta Davis, shared her environmental justice perspective through stories that illustrated how these climate, resilience, and affordability impacts devastate poorer coastal communities because their health, infrastructure, and environment have been neglected.

After lunch League members brainstormed to identify five priority topics based on what we had learned from the experts and keynote. These topics were explored further in a world-cafe style small group discussions to identify State, Local, and Individual actions, as well as inter-LWV collaborations.

The five priority topics discussed during the afternoon are:

1. Readiness
2. Filling the resource and regulatory gaps facing communities
3. Voter Education – to raise awareness about what’s going on in their communities
4. Utility rates – Public Service Commissions; water; Southern Company; In NewOrleans Energy Regulated by City government.
5. Bringing more youth membership – for example, through environmental civics; Envirothon

The Findings and Recommendations for each topic are included in Appendix 1 at the end of this report.



This convening was a wonderful opportunity for local leagues along the Gulf Coast in neighboring states to develop relationships and friendships that will make them stronger and even more effective as they work together on shared interests and issues.

This event is just the beginning of the southern League journey to increase our advocacy on climate effects, resilience, and related issues.

*Deepest thanks* to the following individuals for their dedication and hard work to make this important event a reality: Christian Green, President League of Women Voters of Louisiana; Cindy Lowry, member of the Greater Birmingham LWV and Executive Director Alabama Rivers Alliance; Cecile Scoon, Co-President League of Women Voters of Florida; Freya Sonenstein, President League of Women Voters of Baldwin County; Kathy Jones, President League of Women Voters of Alabama and League of Women Voters of Alabama Education Fund; Angela Underwood, Manager of the Weeks Bay Reserve and her entire team

Funding for this event is provided by: League of Women Voters of Alabama Education Fund; the League of Women Voters of the United States; and the Alabama Rivers Alliance (for sponsorship of the panelists and keynote speaker).



**Photos:**





## **Appendix 1: Afternoon World Café Discussion Groups – Findings and Recommendations**

### **Table 1: Readiness**

- Call on local governmental leaders to be aware of resources like libraries, schools, churches and other institutions in the community that can provide trusted, bilingual information and resources in advance of environmental and climate effects
- Create a local, bilingual Emergency Preparedness flyer with a checklist and resources (these used to be provided in newspapers at the beginning of Hurricane Season. Emergencies are now year-round.)
- Use social media and AM radio to spread the word about resources (this was the main way to reach folks in the mountains after Hurricane Helene)
- Suggest a "Have a "Go Kit" Ready"--what to include and resources for help with transportation, cash and important documents and where to go with pets, kids, elderly, special needs, etc.
- Have an "Awareness of NOAA Weather Radio" campaign--where to buy, cost, how to program, etc., for folks who do not have cell phones or if power goes out, etc.
- Strengthen local zoning and building codes and retrofit older (grandfathered) homes, if remodeling (for adaptation to and mitigation of effects of the climate crisis)
- Build neighborhood storm shelters for Mobile Home and RV Parks
- Encourage folks to "wear a helmet" (bike, construction, etc.) during Tornado Warnings
- Lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina:
  - : have pre-arranged shelters for pets and folks with differently abled or special needs
  - : Identify those who don't have transportation or can't evacuate

### Added later by the Table coordinator:

Just to "put a bow" on our LWV Convening, I was trying to figure out a practical step that we can do individually and as an organization that can "move the needle" on our advocacy, education and outreach. I first looked up the Environmental Defense Fund website for ideas: [www.vitalsigns.edf.org/story/can-we-still-fight-climate-pollution-under-trump](http://www.vitalsigns.edf.org/story/can-we-still-fight-climate-pollution-under-trump) is one article with good ideas and [www.zeroenergyproject.com](http://www.zeroenergyproject.com) supports cities and counties having a Climate Action Plan. That is something the whole LWV can advocate for, if you can "put that in the suggestion box!" Thank you to everyone who attended and participated.



**Table 2: Filling the resource and regulatory gaps facing communities**

1. League Member Preparation—
  - A. Continue training League members on regional, state, and local environmental issues. Special emphasis should be placed on new league members who come from outside the area.
  - B. Leagues could develop a speaker's bureau with sample talks. References for facts should be included.
  - C. In addition, have regular gatherings (unhappy hours) in which members could discuss problems. The Indivisible organization uses this technique to support members.
  - D In addition, each state league can work to enhance the work of environmental committees
  - E. Encourage the use of the Alabama Channel by individual members.
2. The content of a League's communication.
  - A. Environmental laws that are adequate but not enforced  
Example Trains are parked in Birmingham all day requiring children to climb under cars to go to schools.
  - B. Identify where new regulations might be needed.  
Example Landowners in most state must stop clear cutting forests fifty feet from waterways to prevent soil erosion and raising the temperature of the waterways. Alabama does not require landowners to leave a fifty-foot forest buffer.
  - C. League members should strive to link the economic consequences to inadequate environmental regulations.  
Example The effects of onsite disposal of dredging waste on commercial and recreational fishing  
The possible damage to Mobile Bay and the Delta if a storm ruptures the unlined coal ash pit.
  - D. Discuss how readiness preparation can soften the impact of disasters on individuals and communities.  
Example –Encourage individuals to secure deeds to property to be able to access FEMA funds if a disaster occurs.
  - E. Create a list of actions that individuals and companies can execute to improve the environment  
Example Local nurseries stock native species and people plant native species in their yard decreasing the monoculture of grass.
  - F. Publicize prefilled bills that target the environment and bills which become law. (good or bad)  
Recognize legislators and government officials that work to improve the environment through regulations, laws, statues, or enforcement practices.
3. The leagues can reach out to various communities.
  - a. Minority or marginalized communities



- b. Voters who have recently registered
  - c. Unions, GWIMS groups (Medical and Science groups) Schools, Nonprofit organizations, Libraries, Head start centers, CAP,
  - d. Community philanthropist who has a particular environmental interest
  - e. Business groups, Women's groups
  - f. Youth in high school, college, and in the community
4. Design an outreach plan for each specific community.
- A. Ask members of the minority community for suggestions. Identify minority and Hispanic radio stations to cultivate. Use a Spanish speaker to speak with the Spanish community.
  - B. obtain a list of voters at regular intervals and send a postcard to each new voter.
  - C. Use social media to reach the wider community.
  - D. Identify places youth and young adults congregate and hold events at those sites. Also, use social media to communicate with young voters.
  - E. Establish a vigorous observer committee and publicize the results.
  - F. Encourage LWV members to get on local committees.
5. The interstate group should consider insurance regulation for disaster victims.
6. Each state league can encourage historic preservation while developing sustainable future development.
7. Local leagues should evaluate disaster readiness plans. Consider establishing special centers powered by solar panels in urban centers called Lighthouses for use in weather and disaster related events.
8. Contact the LWVUS for funding sources.



**Table 3: Voter Education (Environmental) – to raise awareness about what’s going on in our communities**

**LOCAL Ways:**

**PARTNERSHIPS - Examples:**

AL Arise, BayKeepers, Botanical Gardens, HS Science Clubs & AP Classes, AU Cooperative Extension, Social Media (eg. FB’s Fairhope Now), Girl Scout Troops, Vocational Schools, Board of Registrars (eg. Mock Elections n schools etc. ), Baldwin County Schools Superintendent - “Why Vote” School Competitions, w/ dollar awards (eg., essays & posters), establish relationships (eg. Donuts for Teachers, on the first day of school)

**EVENTS - Examples**

LA has an “Adopt a Meteorologist For A Day” Project, Earth Day (April 22, 2025), Mobile Coal Ash “manned” exhibits, with photos, at large gatherings (eg., Fairhope’s Arts & Crafts Festival mid-March), Library exhibits, Youth Art & Essay Projects with Awards (maybe let youth run it).



**Table 4: Utility rates – Public Service Commissions; water; Southern Company; In NewOrleans  
Energy Regulated by City government.**

1. Compare utility rates from one company to another and regionally and state to state.  
How are the rates supervised?
2. Compare the way utility rates are regulated.
3. Get the Observer Corp involved to attend local municipality meetings.
4. The PSC does not have open meetings push for open meetings.
5. White paper with good research.
6. Compare rates and publicize flyers, billboards, libraries.
7. As a regulated utility there is a guaranteed rate of return.
8. Cooperatives run 25% of energy. Get involved with a cooperative to get the ear of the official.
9. Can we get Universities to do research projects?
10. Daniel Tate can be a resource who has been tracking rates.
11. The complexity of comparing rates from different energy sources, make the task of research a challenge.



**Table 5: Bringing more youth membership – for example, through environmental civics; Envirothon**

Attracting and Encouraging involvement in League by Younger Members

**Curriculum:** Be sure environment is part of the school curriculum in your area. Find out if it is an elective or part of all students learning. Offer to assist with information.

Invite them. Have “join us” membership tables, print “join us – be involved” on all handouts. Do talks with professional groups, etc. , invite your contacts and friends to join. More open state-wide meetings that show we are more than just “voting rights” Each one reach one.

(This meeting today showed what we do and how important it is to understand the issues – be sure more people know what we do and why it is important.)

**Rebranding?** Voting and issues of interest to Voters. Many people think we are like women suffrages or liberals. And just do voting since that is so prominent in print/media. We are protectors of democracy bringing information on voting and current issues (community, state, US) to others in a unbiased way. Raise awareness of who we really are and what we do.

**Mission Statement.** (added by recorder later to emphasize what we do)

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy

**Social Media** – Increase our activities on our Facebook pages, and websites. Especially local. Consider using email updates like Constant Contact or Mailchimp for better attention by groups. Show results of activities...top 3 problems in area, etc. Share with others via personal email and Facebook pages so others see we are doing more than voter registration. TikTok – have a good video made to attract younger members. What is happening with Junior Members?