



Service to America Medal Award

Several articles in this book detail the work performed by the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Louisiana Hurricane Team that merited them the Service to America Medal Award in September 2006.

Amid the chaos of Hurricane Katrina's aftermath, USGS scientists—from the National Wetlands Research Center in Lafayette, La., and the Louisiana Water Science Center in Baton Rouge, La.—helped rescue thousands of citizens in the New Orleans area. They rescued people from flood waters via boats and used their technologies to map 911 calls and infrastructure and to gage flooding and dewatering.

Although search and rescue are not the mission of the USGS, its scientists worked with other agencies to rescue a total of 600 people directly from rooftops and porches and gave food, water, and assistance getting off of ferry boats to 2,000 others. The USGS scientists developed mapping techniques to “geaddress” eight thousand 911 calls for Katrina, August 30–September 27 (and 300 for Hurricane Rita, October 16–26).

The USGS worked around the clock, producing maps and digital data daily. The staff used geospatial technologies to map the city's levee system and pumping stations and installed temporary real-time gages in Lake Pontchartrain and Orleans, Plaquemines, and St. Bernard Parishes to learn how quickly the area was dewatering and when reflooding from Rita might occur.

While doing rescue work, these same scientists and their coworkers also donated food, water, blood, homes, and office space to evacuees.

The USGS team vowed to attend to the humanitarian needs first, and they put all of their science, their knowledge of boats, and their geospatial and water-gaging technologies to the ultimate test of saving lives during one of the greatest disasters our Nation has known. Communications were in disarray in Louisiana, with cell phones not working and computers down. Media reports of both true and rumored violence filled the airways. But this team of employees, some in boats, some with computers, some with both, were determined to make a difference, both as scientists and as human beings. And they did.

The articles documenting the work that earned the USGS Louisiana Hurricane Team, led by the Central Regional Director, a Service to America Medal are the following: “USGS Humanitarian and Geospatial Response for Search and Rescue After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita” (Hartley); “Using Geospatial Technology To Process 911 Calls After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita” (Conzelmann and others); and “Data Access and Dissemination for Emergency Response and Long-term Recovery Efforts Related to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita” (Wilson and Cretini).

To learn more about Service to America Medal recipients, go to <http://www.nwrc.usgs.gov/special/serviceamericaaward/serviceamericaaward.htm>.