THE STUDY AREA

The "Island of Belle Fontaine" (a.k.a. the study area) comprises a convex-shaped landmass of marsh-fringed uplands approximately 9 miles long and 2.5 miles wide located between Ocean Springs and Gautier in Jackson County (Figure 1). The core of the landmass—perhaps 75% of the total surface area—consists of a barrier ridge complex which ranges from about 8 to 20 feet above sea level, and can readily be delineated by the +10 ft. contour. The beach ridge complex has been truncated by wave action at the eastern end, where a narrow sand beach occupies the base of eroded cliffs. More recent dune ridges over 10 feet high extend westward from this zone of truncation along the shoreline for about 3 miles. A low-elevation beach/dune complex, highly susceptible to erosion, extends northeastward to the mouth of Graveline Bayou. The name Belle Fontaine Beach is now used for the entire convex beach area of which Belle Fontaine Point marks the southernmost point. The western end of the beach ridge pinches off in a trailing spit which recedes northward into marsh (the eastern end of the Marsh Point peninsula). Historically, the westernmost beach ridges (Pointe aux Chênes) were frontal by a narrow strip of salt marsh, but over the past several decades waves have eroded the marshes and encroached upon the dunes directly. As a result of this erosion, a narrow beach has been created in this area as well as along the front of the highly erosive Marsh Point peninsula immediately to the west.

The "Island of Belle Fontaine" is separated from the "mainland" by a sinuous depression occupied by cypress swamp forest and brackish-to-saline marshes and drained by Simmons Bayou which empties westward into Davis Bayou, an embayment of Biloxi Bay, and Crossway Bayou, which drains eastward into Graveline Bay and on into Graveline Bayou and Mississippi Sound. In addition to the extensive wetlands flanking these waterbodies, tidal marshes are found north of the Belle Fontaine Point dune ridge complex and into the Marsh Point peninsula. Natural springs flowed profusely in numerous locations during historic times, especially along upland/wetland contact zones where aquifers discharged their flow. Although the original springs that gave rise to the name 'la belle fontaine' ('good fountain' or 'good spring') have long ceased to flow permanently, several lesser known springs, especially immediately north of the Simmons Bayou/Crossway Bayou depression, flowed freely until the 1980s (Lawton, personal communication, 1992).

The use of the geographic placenames of Belle Fontaine, Belle Fountain, and Fontainebleau has been a source of confusion. The original name of Belle Fontaine was adopted by Jean Baptiste LeMoyne, Sieur de Bienville (brother of d' Iberville) in 1719 during a move of the headquarters of French operations along the Gulf Coast from Mobile back to Biloxi. At the entrance to Biloxi Bay (incorrectly identified as Bay St. Louis) about 5 leagues WNW of Round Island, Bienville referred to the fountain of water that flowed from "the hills" as "the best water on the coast" (Bilbo, 1941). From Bienville's measured distance and geographic description, that location is identified as the present Pointe aux Chênes (Oak Point), from which spring water flowed freely to the beach as recently as the late 1920s (White, 1986). The name Belle Fontaine referred to Pointe aux Chênes throughout the 18th century, and references to a Baudreux residence at the "presque isle" (peninsula or sand spit) called Belle Fontaine are numerous. (Because the Belle Fontaine uplands were surrounded entirely by marsh or water, the word "Isle" or island became used in conjunction with Belle Fontaine early in the colonial period.)

A second, and later, theory holds that the name Belle Fontaine stems from springs that flowed until the early 1900s at the zone of truncation, along present-day Belle Fontaine Beach, where an estate called Belle Fontaine was built in the 1890s (Walsh, 1937). In any case, the name Belle Fontaine subsequently became applied to the entire area south of the Simmons Bayou/Crossway Bayou depression, both in its French or Anglicized (Belle Fountain, Bell Fountain) forms.

The first significant Anglo settlement in the region (in the 1830s and 1840s, on the higher ground extending from Pointe aux Chênes to north of the Simmons Bayou/Crossway Bayou depression) was known as Belle Fountain. When the first railroad was built in the late 1870s (along the approximate route of the old Fort Road, which ran from Fort Louis in Mobile to Fort Maurepas in Old Biloxi), Belle Fountain became the first flag stop east of Ocean Springs. By 1892, a post office was established. Inspired by the town of Fontainebleau, France, as well as a variation of nearby Belle Fontaine, the name Fontainebleau was adopted for the post office by the community's first and only postmistress, Louise Richter (Hines, 1988). When the railroad built a depot the name Fontainebleau was used, and it soon replaced Belle Fontaine in referring to the entire region. The post office was closed in 1912 and the railroad station shut down in 1934, yet the name Fontainebleau remains on the map, mostly associ-
ated with the dispersed community astride the Old Spanish Trail (in 1918 the first motor road through the area) and U. S. Highway 90 (see Figure 1).

Subdivisions began appearing in the Belle Fontaine region in the 1950s, and today the western portion of the study area is increasingly being absorbed into a rapidly expanding Ocean Springs. The older regional toponyms (Belle Fontaine, Belle Fountain, Fontainebleau) increasingly are being replaced by subdivision names such as Gulf Park Estates and St. Andrews, and the placename Belle Fontaine now is used almost exclusively to refer to the Belle Fontaine Beach area.

ABORIGINAL OCCUPANTS

Little is known of Indian occupation of the Belle Fontaine region in the pre-European times. At the time of establishment of the first French outpost, Fort Maurepas in Old Biloxi (present-day Ocean Springs), in 1699 under direction of the authorized French-Canadian explorer/colonist Pierre LeMoyne, Sieur d'Iberville, Indians (whose name was interpreted as "Biloxi") were frequenting the coast to harvest abundant seafood resources, notably oysters (Sullivan et al., 1985). Initial European contacts were with three (and perhaps four) politically distinct Indian groups (not truly tribes, although they are often referred to as such) within a broader Choctaw cultural realm: the Bayougoula ("people of the bayou"), the Pascagoula ("bread nation"), and the Biloxi ("first people") (Kniffen et al., 1987; Sullivan et al., 1985; WPA, 1938). Except for the Bayougoula, who had entered the area on hunting expeditions from their home along the Mississippi River, the other two groups lived in a series of villages along the Pascagoula River about 12 leagues upriver from the mouth (WPA, 1938). Within two years of contact, the Biloxi had abandoned their village and moved westward. It is quite likely that any of the Indian groups or their cultural predecessors also frequented the Belle Fontaine region on hunting, fishing, or shell-gathering expeditions.

At least six known prehistoric Indian sites have been identified, although most are minor and are characterized by small shell or dirt middens and/or a small assemblage of tools, arrowheads, or fragments of ceramic pottery. An interesting find was made along Belle Fontaine Beach in the mid-1980s when a "bucketful" of projectile points became exposed as a consequence of wave erosion of the shore. The only prominent ceremonial midden complex is found at Pointe aux Chênes (although often incorrectly shown on maps to be elsewhere in the region) where two mounds were found to contain extensive potsherds of Tchefuncte age (Morgan, personal communication, 1992). Numerous areas, especially in the beach ridges, are potential Indian midden sites, but official archeological surveys have uncovered no more.

THE COLONIAL PERIOD, 1699-1810

Throughout the French (1699-1763), British (1763-1780), and Spanish (1780-1810) colonial periods (Sullivan et al., 1985) the Island of Belle Fontaine remained sparsely settled and most closely associated with a Jean Baptiste Baudreaux dit (French for alias, although "de" is sometimes substituted) Graveline, a colorful character who had several descendants of the same name and equally colorful disposition. This close association would form the basis of land claims following the acquisition of this territory by the United States in 1811.

On the second of d'Iberville's trips to what is now the Mississippi coast, in 1700, he was accompanied by about sixty Canadians, including a Jean Baptiste Baudreaux (alternately spelled Baudreau, Baudreaux, Beaudreau, Baudro, Boudraux, or Budreau) dit Graveline (Giraud, 1974). Born into a wealthy merchant family in Montreal in 1671 and a well-to-do merchant himself at the time of his arrival in the new Louisiana territory, J. B. Baudreaux helped at Fort Maurepas and accompanied d'Iberville on explorations of the Indian settlements of the Pascagoula River. Employed by the French colonial government until 1701, Baudreaux was let go due to his "crafty buying and selling" (Higginbotham, 1977). By the time St. Louis was established near present-day Mobile, Baudreaux was a wealthy businessman who had built one of the finer homes in the city. Subsequent business ventures, including trading with Veracruz and acquiring ships to establish trade with Canada, got him into some trouble with French authorities, and in 1709 he moved to Massacre Island (Dauphin Island).

The enterprising Baudreaux imported "horned cattle" from Cuba to raise on the barrier island for subsequent sale to both the French as well as the Spanish at Pensacola (Higginbotham, 1977). By 1710, only sixteen residents lived on Dauphin Island, but by that time Baudreaux had built the "finest home in the colony" on the bay side, facing what is today called Graveline Bay. Baudreaux soon became regarded as one of the few merchants to profit from the French Louisiana colony (Higginbotham, 1977). By 1715, Baudreaux had obtained a French land grant (Sullivan et al., 1985) to "all lands between the Pascagoula River and Biloxi Bay, including the 'Ile de Bellefontaine'," although the original deeds were later not found. Apparently these lands, perhaps along with Horn Island, were used for grazing cattle (vacherie) prior to 1718.

Because of the 1717 hurricane that destroyed the French settlement at Dauphin Island, Baudreaux moved his permanent residence to his west bank property by 1718. The main house was built on the bluffs above Lake Farragut, just south of Martin's Bluff (near the present-day westbound rest area of Interstate 10, where a historical marker has been erected). He had by that time two children, including Jean Baptiste Baudreaux II (about age 8) and Magdelaine. There
Figure 1. The Island of Belle Fontaine and vicinity.
So far as determined by deeds on file at the Jackson County courthouse in Pascagoula, the Belle Fontaine land claims finally recognized by the United States government between the 1820s and 1840s consisted of multiple parcels assigned to various heirs of J. B. Baudreaux I, including E. A. Lewis and his son A. E. Lewis. These parcels include: 1) a 1238-acre piece of land containing Pointe aux Chênes and comprising the present Sections 9, 10, 11, and 14 of T.8S./R.8W. was awarded to the J. B. Baudreaux heirs (E. A. Lewis, agent), 2) Sections 3 and 4 of T.8S./R.8W. (comprising mostly the Marsh Point peninsula) was deeded to E. A. Lewis and a Mr. Krebs, 3) a 1226.35-acre piece containing the entire Belle Fontaine Beach and now identified as Section 19 of T.8S./R.7W. was awarded to J. B. Baudreaux, presumably J. B. Baudreaux IV, the son of J. B. Baudreaux III (in a letter dated Sept. 14, 1818, J. B. Baudreaux’s sisters Marie Angelique and Margaret relinquished their inherited land claims to their brother), 4) a 1067-acre parcel consisting of most of Sections 7 and 8 and all of 17 and 18 of T.8S./R.7W. was recognized in 1824, 5) Section 13 of
Figure 2. Survey sections on the Island of Belle Fontaine and vicinity.
Figure 3. The Island of Belle Fontaine, 1851 (USCS, 1850-51).
BELLE FONTAINE, JACKSON COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

T.8S./R.8W., a Baudreaux claim, was acquired by A. E. Lewis, and 6) Sections 1 and 12 of T.8S./R.8W., also a Baudreaux claim, were acquired jointly by A. E. Lewis and a Mr. McRae in 1854 (Figure 2).

The Island of Belle Fontaine was apparently used for little more than cattle grazing lands throughout the remainder of most of the nineteenth century. According to deed books at the Jackson County courthouse in Pascagoula, there was frequent turnover of property in the region, and increasing landownership by newer Anglo arrivals. In addition to E. A. Lewis, who had married Margueritte Baudreaux and (at least temporarily) settled down on the Pointe aux Chênes family property, settlers by names of Ramsay, Davis, Webb and Bilbo moved into the region. The Ramsays bought property from Lewis and settled at Pointe aux Chênes, where they built a home and where their grave markers remain today (White, personal communication, 1992). The Bilbos, who settled along the Pointe aux Chênes Road north of Simmons Bayou, later built the Baptist church which they named Belle Fountain.

The only reliable large-scale map is the coastal survey map of 1850-51 (U. S. Coast Survey, 1850-51). Aside from two properties at Pointe aux Chênes containing houses and cleared land (the Ramsay estate and possibly a relict Lewis or Baudreaux structure) and two small houses along Belle Fontaine Beach (former Baudreaux properties?), few signs of other land use are evident (Figure 3).

Little is known of the Civil War and Reconstruction periods in the Belle Fontaine region, but the Louisville & Nashville Railroad, connecting New Orleans with Mobile, opened the region to potential development in 1870. By 1890, J. B. Lyon of Chicago, "a large landowner in five states," had purchased a tract of 93,000 acres in the area for purposes of lumbering and agricultural improvement. Somewhere near the springs of Belle Fontaine, Mr. Lyon built a home, where his daughter Caroline remembered growing up (Walsh, 1937).

THE LAND DEVELOPMENT AND SPECULATION ERA, 1890-1950

Because of the railroad and a good national economic climate at the time, Mr. Lyon (and his Gulf of Mexico Land & Improvement Co., later incorporated into the Lyon Company) was able to bring prosperity to the Belle Fontaine area largely on the basis of lumbering and cattle grazing. It was during this time of increased commerce that the Fontainebleau post office (1892-1912) and the Fontainebleau train depot were established (Hines, 1988). (As stated earlier, this marked the beginning of the discarding of the names "Bellefontaine" and "Belle Fountain" in favor of the newer "Fontainebleau," especially north of the Simmons Bayou/Crossway Bayou depression.) Lyon apparently used most of his Belle Fontaine holdings as cattle range.

Lyon Company bookkeeper Robert W. Hamill (also a Chicagoan) married Caroline Lyon and continued to develop the region after J. B. Lyon's death in 1910. Between his acquisitions and his wife's inheritance, Hamill (and the Hamill Corporation) acquired 57,000 acres of the former Lyon property (Hines, 1988) and converted much of the cutover land to pecan, citrus, and tung (for tung oil) production. Also, general truck farming was begun, and even turtle farms were allegedly established to supply the demand for turtle soup, which was popular at the time. Most of the development and land use changes were in the vicinity of Fontainebleau, just north of the Island of Belle Fontaine, which still remained mostly cattle range. Exceptions include some pine lumbering and agricultural conversion (mostly pecan orchards) in the area just south of Simmons Bayou and limited exclusive residential development along the beaches of Belle Fontaine. In 1912 the Hamills built a new residence at the Belle Fontaine Beach springs (at the exact site of one of the structures shown on the 1851 map). The rambling Hamill Estate, named Belle Fontaine, consisted of 15 rooms and 9 fireplaces in addition to tennis courts and a nearby lodge for parties and out-of-town guests (Hines, 1988).

In spite of some grandiose plans, only limited construction took place on the Island of Belle Fontaine in the 1920s and 1930s. During the Roaring 20s, the Hamills contemplated improving the highway to the beach and developing a new townscape complete with a "modern hotel" (Anonymous, 1925). These plans never materialized, and a few years later the national economic depression led to financial ruin of the Hamill Corporation. Parts of the agricultural operations of Hamill Farms were reorganized as Fontainebleau Farms, of which a Henry Plateau was overseer in the 1930s. In 1929, the 2000-acre Pointe aux Chênes Estate was sold by the Ramsays and bought by an L. L. Cook, described as "a Chicago capitalist," and several associates (Walsh, 1937; White, 1992). In 1930, nine 15-acre lots were carved out of the giant tract as the Pointe aux Chênes Subdivision. One of these associates, the Chicago banker James Leavell, built a rambling pink stucco Spanish-style house called Doonesgate on the site of the old Ramsay house near the Indian mounds and the 19th-century graves of the Ramsays. Henry Plateau built a lodge, "a most delightful bachelor's retreat," at the water's edge near Doonesgate, where a pier jutted out into the sound (Walsh, 1937). Both Leavell and Plateau made significant improvements to their properties (Walsh, 1937), perhaps including the "oak alley" that was planted from Pointe Aux Chênes Road to the waterfront. Also, nearby marshes on the Marsh Point peninsula and south of Pointe aux Chênes were ditched in the early 1930s as part of a federal conservation project to reduce mosquito breeding grounds (White, personal communication, 1992; Figure 4). Plateau's home and pier succumbed to hurricanes, primarily the Hurricane of 1947, but
the decaying Doonesgate estate still stands.

The incipient regional affluence that began in 1890 had more or less ended by the early 1930s, because of both a major freeze in 1918 that wiped out most of Hamill Farms' citrus (satsuma) and vegetable farms and also the Great Depression that followed the infamous Stock Market Crash of 1929. Banks took over the property in 1934, and by the late 1930s they began cutting the remaining pine forests on Belle Fontaine, including the largest (at 3,000 acres) stand of virgin yellow pine in the state. A sawmill complex with several workers' cottages, operated by Barnes and Davis of Meridian, was constructed near the present site of the grocery store at the entrance to St. Andrews (Hines, 1988), and by 1940 most of the Belle Fontaine pine lands had been cut over (Tobin Research, Inc., 1940). One of the few properties not cut was the remnant 58-acre Hamill Estate property which still today remains under control of the Chicago-based Hamill Corporation (Germany, personal communication, 1992).

SUBDIVISION AND SETTLEMENT OF BELLE FONTAINE, 1950-PRESENT

Following World War II, land speculation and subdivision activity began anew, and this time the Island of Belle Fontaine witnessed a substantial change in patterns of settlement. After the first wave of pre-subdivision beach cottage construction began about 1950, real estate developers (individual as well as corporate) became aware of the demand for homesites on the Island of Belle Fontaine. They quickly set out to provide a supply, and most of the big tracts of land on the Island were subdivided by the later 1970s. Although demand existed for seasonal vacation homesites, the greatest demand was for permanent homesites. This was made possible by a greatly improved postwar economic climate, specifically the development of Pascagoula shipyards such as Ingalls and the growth of military bases such as Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi. As both Pascagoula and Biloxi contained little open land for residential expansion, communities such as Ocean Springs and Gautier on the fringes of vast tracts of formerly productive farm land witnessed record levels of population growth and areal expansion. Belle Fontaine was well situated to attract increasing numbers of residents. The types of residential subdivisions that were developed after 1950 may be grouped into three broad categories: 1) beachfront, 2) suburban, and 3) golf-oriented.

Even before the first formal beachfront subdivisions appeared, several private individuals had acquired small parcels of property and built beach cottages, mostly along Belle Fontaine Beach immediately east of the old Hamill Estate. (The only other non-marsh beachfront real estate was at Pointe aux Chènes, but this was already subdivided into large, exclusive estates.) In 1951, a total of four cottages, or camps, faced the Belle Fontaine Beach (Germany, personal communication, 1992). In 1954, Bacot Beach was platted east of this small cluster of camps, and to the west of the present St. Andrews water tower/lighthouse, the elongate Belle Fontaine Beach Subdivision began Phase I of construction in 1956. The construction of mostly simple beach camps accelerated during the 1960s (up to 32 houses by 1970, according to the 1970 General Highway Map), at least until the onslaught of Hurricane Camille in 1969. Only three or four structures survived total destruction by this storm, including the now famous piling-reinforced 6-sided house just west of the St. Andrews water tower designed by Kaarlo Oivanki and owned by Mr. Bob Erie of Baton Rouge (Erie, personal communication, 1992). Although the hurricane temporarily slowed beachfront development, the final phases of construction in the Belle Fontaine Beach subdivision began in 1970, and soon bigger and fancier homes were being built. This trend has continued to the present day.

The second category of subdivision is classed as suburban. This is typified by Gulf Park Estates, a huge subdivision just east of Pointe aux Chênes, in which lots were first sold in 1958. Regarded as a southeastern extension of Ocean Springs (Beach View Drive was built to provide a more direct access road), Gulf Park Estates was essentially completely subdivided by 1968 and is today almost completely filled in with houses. One smaller subdivision to the east, Treasure Acres, was platted in 1967, but it remains undeveloped today. Also, the entire Section 12 of T.8S., R.8W. has been cleared of pine trees but it remains undeveloped. It is unclear whether this entire section is part of Gulf Park Estates. In any case, the land is not suitable for development without extensive drainage improvements. The old Pointe aux Chênes subdivision, which dates to 1930, may now be regarded as a high-class suburb, the residents of which mostly commute to jobs in nearby cities. A less successful suburban subdivision is West Ocean Beach Estates. Not as closely linked to a city (as Gulf Park Estates), the vast subdivision has experienced only limited residential construction. A newer (1973) subdivision, Pinehurst, has been more successful in terms of development.

The final category of subdivision is one oriented around a golf course. The prime example of that in the Belle Fontaine region is St. Andrews on the Gulf, which was first platted in 1978 just to the west of West Ocean Beach. Consisting of both residences and condominiums built around an 18-hole fairway, St. Andrews has been popular since it first opened, and the placename "St. Andrews" has almost replaced "Belle Fontaine" in popular usage. A second golf course, although not residentially oriented, is the Pine Island Golf Club built upon small upland outliers within the marsh just south of Simmons Bayou off of Beach View Drive. The westernmost outlier, west of the golf course, was platted as Banana Island Subdivision in 1976, but by 1992 only two homes had been built.

There are still subdivisions that have many vacant lots...
Figure 5. Subdivisions and land use on the Island of Belle Fontaine, 1992.
Table 1. Beach structures along the shores of Belle Fontaine.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shoreline Segment</th>
<th>Piers</th>
<th>Groins</th>
<th>Bulkheads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pointe aux Chênes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belle Fontaine Beach Subdivision</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belle Fontaine (east of water tower)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While most of the shorefront of the Island of Belle Fontaine is eroding because of natural conditions, the human modifications also have contributed to the severity of the problem. Locally, individual groins have contributed to erosion of the downdrift property. Construction of bulkheads along naturally eroding (especially cliffed) shorelines temporarily reduces the potential supply of sand for downdrift beach nourishment. The greatest single negative impact appears to be the jetty/groin at the west end of the Belle Fontaine Beach Subdivision. At least 8000 feet of shoreline to the west of the groin have experienced accelerated erosion since the 1960s. This shoreline consists mostly of marsh, and except for the riprap/fishing pier construction at the public park, little development has been affected by this accelerated erosion.

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