Three University of Louisiana of Lafayette faculty members were awarded a combined total of $2.5 million in grants to conduct projects for coastal restoration as part of a 50-year effort to reverse the effects of coastal erosion on the shorelines of the Gulf of Mexico.

Biology professor Paul Leberg, Ph.D., civil engineering professor Emad Habib, Ph.D., and geosciences assistant professor Rui Zhang, Ph.D., were among 13 researchers who received two-year grants from the Louisiana RESTORE Act Center of Excellence.

Leberg and his project coordinator Jordan Karubian, Ph.D., assistant professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at Tulane University of New Orleans, were awarded $299,733 for their research to determine how coastal island restoration affected nesting habitats for brown pelicans. His project will include studying predators, vegetation and other factors that may dictate whether the pelicans nest on the barrier islands.

Habib was awarded $71,148 for a project to assess if rainfall measurements collected by a radar are accurate enough to be used in studies for coastal master plans.

Zhang and his team, which includes scientists from the University of Kentucky and Tulane, were awarded $349,174 to use sediment coring and high-resolution seismic data to assess Mississippi River delta faulting. Zhang and his team will study the areas of Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Bourne and northern portions of Terrebonne Parish.