Tauzin: Cajun culture erodes along with swamps, marshlands

THIBODAUX, La. (AP) — Louisiana’s Cajuns are among the few ethnic groups which have kept their culture vital in America — but that culture is being eroded along with the swamps and marshlands where they live, says U.S. Rep. Billy Tauzin.

“We are losing Cajun land. An acre is lost every 16 minutes,” the Chackbay Democrat told a classroom full of teachers Friday at Nicholls State University.

The need to conserve Louisiana’s coastline is a favorite topic for Tauzin, but the forum was unusual. He was a guest lecturer for French 593 — a professional workshop called “The Acadian Experience,” which is being given as part of the bicentennial celebration of the Acadians’ arrival in Louisiana from Canada.

“If you look for the Cajuns who didn’t land in Louisiana, it is hard to find them,” Tauzin said.

Cajun names can be found in Massachusetts or along the Canadian border, he said, but the culture with its traditions such as the fais-do-do and boucherie, has disappeared.

“When immigrants landed in America, their cultures were assimilated rather quickly. They were lost. In Louisiana you can say that a unique culture exists,” he said.

Now the rest of the state and even the nation has come to respect the culture, he said, thanks to its spicy cooking and down-home music.

“Once we teach others how to enjoy the riches of Louisiana, we will be on our way. I’m proud to be a Cajun. It is a great and unique culture. Let’s take some real pride in that,” he said.

“We have a right to be proud of it. We have a special culture, so let’s do what we can to preserve it.”

He said Louisiana’s Cajuns kept their culture because the oil and gas industry gave them chance to work and stay close to home.

But canals dredged by that industry are contributing to the erosion that is destroying the wetlands which fringe Louisiana’s coastline, he said.

“Those acres are reproductive acres that make the seafood and other items we can use to build our economy, and we are losing it.

“If you want to keep it going, we have to turn our attention to the recurring things that we love so much,” he said. “We must encourage the state to look at the horrible loss of land along the coast of Louisiana.”

Tauzin said one way to slow the erosion would be to channel fresh water back into marshes seasonally.

“We also have to get the oil and gas companies to do a better job with the canals, to decrease the salt water intrusion into our marshes. We must stop a lot of it (erosion) from occurring for the next generation of Cajuns to come.”