

INLAND GULF PORTS POISED FOR GROWTH SURGE

The Acadiana region of southwest Louisiana is home to five ports: Port of Iberia, Port of Krotz Springs, Port of Vermilion, Twin Parish Port, and Mermentau River Harbor and Terminal District.

Krotz Springs, located inland on the Atchafalaya River, handles strictly barge traffic. They are located about 70 miles north of the Morgan City Port and close to Baton Rouge.

Six docks are being operated at Krotz Springs, where more than 200 employees work handling 3.1 million tons of cargo annually. "We are a niche port," Gary Soileau, executive director for Krotz Springs Port, says.

One of the big projects that they are working on now, slated to break ground next spring, is the Hazelwood Energy Hub (HEH) project. HEH is a master planned regional energy hub company.

HEH is going to build a state-of-the-art oil storage and blending project at the port, making a parish-wide investment of \$400 million, with a \$145 million investment at the port to put in a dock and some above-ground storage.

"They are going to blend, store and then ship crude oil to refinery customers in the gulf region," Soileau says. "And they are also going to utilize four salt dome facilities for additional storage."

He says they will end up creating 123 jobs. "We are still in the permitting process but everything is moving ahead and we haven't had any big problems," he says.

All five of the ports are looking to increase business substantially with the opening of the canal. But there is more than just an increase in domestic freight.

The president of the Iberia Industrial Development Foundation, Mike Tarantino, says that all the gulf coast ports are going to be key in developing trade to South America and beyond.

"There are a lot of treaties and trade agreements that have been added recently that not only require us to have better access to their market, but for them to have better access to our markets," he says. "And ports play a key role in that."

He says that the focus at the Port of Iberia is the deepening of the channel there that provides access to the Gulf.

The Port of Iberia has been a gas and fabrication port where raw materials come in, get manufactured and repaired, then go back out. "I see in the future maybe container offload sites at that port," Tarantino says. "Deep water ports like New Orleans and Houston accommodate ocean going container ships. But once those containers are broken down and transported along the coast, I could see the port of Iberia being a great place for loading and unloading fabrication supplies."

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