My introduction to this area of the world, to the Red River Valley/ Alexandria, Louisiana, came with the Avoyelles Sportsmen's League Case. Representing the plaintiffs meant coming to know them, their food, their culture, the natural environment they love and will defend.

The Red River Valley is a cultural ecotone. It is a dividing line between two major cultural divisions of the State.

To the north of this valley we have a conservative culture. The people live close to the land, and tend to be protestant. They are a sincere, formal people. Men in their fifties call their neighbors of twenty years or more, "Mister." They like country/western and gospel music. They are hunters and fishermen and rodeo lovers. They tend to have strong, close families and when they gather on Saturday afternoon they drink iced tea. They have last names like Smith or Carpenter.

To the south the culture is more liberal. Most are Catholic. They are expressive, open people. They dance the fais do do. They are hunters and fishermen. They wear costumes for Mardi Gras. Families tend to be large and close. A popular Saturday night beverage is a beer called Dixie. They have last names like Cheramie which means "friend of mine" or (phonetically) Rowbear, spelled Robert.

I have come to learn to listen to what these Louisiana people, who live close to the land and love the land, have to say.

To the south of this river basin is Louisiana's coastal zone. When we talk about its growth and health, we generally talk of a long time — the past 5,000 years. It has been a dynamic, productive growing system for most of that time. Louisiana still has 25% of our nation's wetlands and produces 28% of our nation's seafood. In 1978, coastal Louisiana landed 1.7 billion pounds of commercial seafood worth $200 million. Louisiana accounts for one-third of the nation's fur production.

Five million man-days were spent salt water fishing in the coastal zone last year and nearly three million man-days were spent crabbing.

Waterfowl hunting demands have put most of coastal Louisiana under private hunting leases. The alligator, too, is hunted under license. And in the marshes we have the bald eagle. Birders come from all over the world to observe the birds in the coastal zone.

In the more northern part of our State we have the hardwood bottomlands. Seven years ago they accounted for 38% of Louisiana's forest land. Recently, the primary and secondary economic impact of all Louisiana forestry has generally been reported by forestry sources to be in excess of $2 billion annually and at that, more than twice the impact of all other plant and animal science products produced in the State. Most hunting leases here are brother-in-law deals, but a hardwood bottomland hunting lease put up at public bid recently brought $26.87 per acre for one season's hunting rights.

One thing common to both parts of this State is that they are both losing wetlands at a shocking rate.

To the south the current rate of loss is more than forty square miles a year. In 1913, the rate of loss was 6.7 square miles per year. By 1946, it was 15.8 square miles per year and in 1967, 28 square miles per year. The rate of loss is increasing geometrically. Louisiana now has the distinction of humanizing its Parishes by giving them wetland life expectancies. Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana, with nearly half-a-million acres today, has a life expectancy of 52 years. Fisheries production seems to be holding its own, but then I am told that decaying, dying marshes produce lots of energy. Our Marine Extension Service gives us figures that disclose that the amount of energy going into catching those shrimp and fish is increasing. Two men shrimping today apparently bring in as many shrimp as their grandfathers did. The difference is that today they use a 30-foot boat mortgaged for $30,000 and burn 80 gallons of fuel. Their grandparents used a smaller, homemade boat and much less fuel, and they were home for lunch.

The hardwood bottomland losses are equally dramatic. In the Lower Mississippi River Valley, we lost 6.6 million acres between 1937 and 1977. Most current estimates indicate there are less than three million acres of hardwood bottomlands remaining in the whole valley and less than two million acres of wooded and shrub swamps. Those are going fast in conversion projects of 1,000 to 20,000 acres. Conversions of this magnitude represent half-million dollar to $30 million gambles. The conversion game is not for small farmers or poor folks. It's a rough-and-tumble game for big business. Yancey, in 1970, indicated that Louisiana had lost almost half of its hardwood bottomlands and projected that at the then-existing rate, more than half of the 1968 hardwood bottomlands would be lost by 1985. I imagine if Yancey were to update his figures now, considering the size and rate of clearing, that the figures would be more painful. The problem has been qualitative as well as quantitative. Lake Providence in Louisiana has been closed to fishing due to agricultural chemical pollution. A recent sampling of fish in the East Franklin-Bonnet Iidee Watershed showed 75% of the fish unsafe for human consumption because of agricultural chemicals. Recently in New Orleans, a group of office workers complained of unsafe working conditions. They had no bottled water to drink. South Louisiana leads the nation in bladder cancer and no one knows why.