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Challenges of Re-building the Historic New Canal Lighthouse on New Orleans' Lake Pontchartrain
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Because of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation's (LPBF) environmental focus on Lake Pontchartrain, we anticipated a transformational organization opportunity to utilize the historic (circa 1838) New Canal Lighthouse (NCL) on Lake Pontchartrain for environmental education and outreach. In the late 1990's, the Federal government who had utilized the NCL for 150 years was planning to build a new US Coast Guard station and end its use of the NCL. LPBF hoped to have the NCL and land donated to LPBF, and there was a verbal understanding with the USCG to do so when they did move to their new facility in 2001. But before the property transfer was consummated Hurricane Katrina came in 2005, and then Rita a month later. Finally, a rare extreme winter storm in early 2006 gave the lighthouse a final blow. Afterward the lighthouse was deemed irreparable. Aside from the bleak urban backdrop of the disastrous consequences of Hurricane Katrina, this event changed not just the physical lighthouse, but its legal status and altered the understanding that the lighthouse might simply be transferred to LPBF. Even though LPBF had a lease for the NCL in ruins, the USCG successfully petitioned to remove the NCL from the National Register of Historic Places and therefore, the NCL was no longer under the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act. Thereby, the NCL land and salvaged structural materials were now simply "excess government property" subject to general property divestiture rules including public bidding and possible use of proceeds for USCG retirees. Through persistence and many allies, LPBF ultimately was able to lease the NCL site for a nominal rent from a local state agency, and to purchase the deconstructed NCL materials. The rebuilding of the NCL began in 2011, and was completed and opened to the public as a museum and education center in 2013.