



GULF OF MEXICO NEWS

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September 2011



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NOAA Gulf of Mexico News

Acting Secretary Blank Announces \$102 Million in Wetlands, Barrier Island Restoration Awards for Louisiana

September 27, 2011

Blank also highlights benefits to Louisiana of American Jobs Act

Acting Secretary of Commerce Rebecca Blank today announced \$102 million for three Louisiana projects in the Barataria and Terrebone basins, to restore deteriorated wetlands and barrier island habitats along the state's coast. These awards are funded by the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) program. U.S. Rep. Cedric Richmond, D-La., Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority Director Garret Graves and Great Lakes Dredge & Dock Project Director Bobby Guichet also participated in the announcement.

Great Lakes Dredge & Dock and Weeks Marine have been contracted to restore beach, dune and marsh on Pelican Island in Plaquemines Parish, and West Belle Pass barrier headland in Lafourche Parish, respectively. The state of Louisiana will receive the third award to rebuild marsh and construct an 11,000-foot long protective ridge in the Bayou Dupont area in Jefferson Parish. The three projects will employ local citizens and generate further economic benefits for local businesses and coastal communities.

"Restoring wetlands and barrier islands and the habitat they support provides immediate local jobs and makes a long-term investment in the health of our fisheries and the resilience of our coastline," Acting Secretary Blank said. "This restoration will pay dividends for those whose lives and livelihoods depend on sustainable Gulf fisheries and for all Americans who enjoy Gulf seafood."

"If one block of New York City disappeared every hour the nation would be outraged. Well, Louisiana loses a football field of wetlands every hour, which is crippling to the state and the nation. It affects our seafood supply, gas and oil reserves, and storm protection. Reversing this trend is a critical national priority, which is why it's my fight," Rep. Cedric Richmond said. "This is also why these grant announcements are so critical. I am pleased that Acting Secretary Blank and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration within the Department of Commerce recognize the importance of New Orleans area coastal restoration efforts."

At the event, Blank also outlined help the American Jobs Act would provide Louisiana—putting people to work and boosting businesses. The plan would provide a significant new tax cut for small businesses, make major reforms to unemployment insurance to help get more Americans back on the job, and it would put more money in the pockets of Americans by reducing payroll taxes paid by workers.

For Louisiana, the Jobs Act would mean:

- 80,000 firms receiving a payroll tax cut;
- 6,400 jobs supported for highway and transit modernization projects;
- 6,300 educators and first responders who get to stay on the job;
- Help for 42,000 long-term unemployed workers; and,
- A \$1,400 tax cut for the typical Louisiana household.

The Jobs Act would complement the coastal restoration work funded by the awards announced by Blank today.

Currently, Louisiana accounts for nearly 71 percent of U.S. fisheries landings by weight from the Gulf of Mexico. Many species of finfish, shrimp and crab depend on the wetlands of the Barataria Basin for habitat during their life cycles.

But with one of the highest rates of wetlands loss in the world, the Louisiana coastline has deteriorated extensively over the last 80 years, losing more than 420 square miles of wetlands to open water in the Barataria Basin alone. These losses are largely the result of long-term, man-made changes, including the construction of levees, which have cut off the natural flow of nourishing sediments. Although the area sustained damage as a result of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, the three projects in Bayou Dupont, Pelican Island and West Belle Pass were designed prior to the spill and are intended to address long-standing issues rather than the direct repercussions of the spill.

Restoring the wetlands and barrier islands will also increase protection for Louisiana's people and property, as well as one of America's richest fisheries. By absorbing hurricane storm surge, rebuilt wetland and barrier island areas will help protect Orleans and Jefferson parishes, two of the top five most densely populated counties in the Gulf coastal zone.

These three projects continue NOAA's long-term investment in the Louisiana coastline through the CWPPRA program. Enacted in 1990, CWPPRA has designed and funded 151 coastal restoration or protection projects benefiting more than 110,000 acres in Louisiana. Most recently, NOAA has been working to rebuild the Barataria Basin barrier island chain, constructing two barrier islands, Chaland Headlands and Pass la Mer to Grand Bayou Pass, in addition to Pelican Island.

NOAA and U.S. FWS Establish a Gulf Coast Landscape Conservation Partnership

Climate change—variation in Earth's climate over time—affects our coasts and oceans through shifting weather patterns, changing species distribution, rising sea levels, and other shifts in ecological processes. Managing coastal resources and planning for sustainable coastal communities in a changing climate are more challenging and demand new partnerships. The [NOAA](#) Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM) and the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) have established a Gulf Coast Landscape Conservation Liaison position to advance the Department of Interior (DOI) and NOAA shared goals of cooperative conservation and climate change adaptation in the Gulf Coast region.

The [OCRM](#) works with coastal states and territories to support effective management practices based on sound science for coastal management programs, estuarine research reserves and coral reef ecosystems. OCRM also work with state and territory resource managers to implement the coastal and estuarine land conservation program and to develop a comprehensive national system of marine protected areas to help achieve common conservation objectives. OCRM is also a contributor to NOAA's Regional Climate Services Partnership.

Through the Climate Services Partnership, six NOAA [Regional Climate Services Directors](#) (RCSDs) are building an active, inter-agency partner network at the regional level for the development and delivery of place-based climate information and services. The RCSDs then leverage the network to ensure that stakeholders receive the kind of support they need to prepare for and adapt to the impacts of climate extremes on socioeconomic and ecological systems.

[Landscape Conservation Cooperatives](#) (LCCs) are management-science partnerships that inform integrated resource management actions addressing climate change and other stressors within and across landscapes. Facilitated by the Department of the Interior (DOI) as part of its collaborative, science-based response to climate change, LCCs complement and build upon existing science and conservation efforts

as well as water resources, land, and cultural partnerships. LCCs will identify and seek to coordinate among existing relevant conservation partnerships, plans, agreements, and programs with the specific goals of identifying common needs for information and sharing information and science.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with support and cooperation from the U.S. Geological Survey, developed a national geographic framework for “putting science in the right places” to conserve our nation’s fish and wildlife resources. This framework was used to establish the [boundaries](#) for the LCCs. The Gulf Coast is falls within the boundaries of four LCCs (starting from West to East): [Gulf Coast Prairie](#), [Gulf Coastal Plains and Ozarks](#), [South Atlantic](#), and [Peninsular Florida](#) LCCs.

The Gulf Coast Landscape Conservation Liaison will coordinate between these four LCCs to enhance communication; identify and coordinate resources for regional priorities; and support integration of climate products and services for Gulf coast application. The position will also serve as a liaison with resource management partners in the Gulf to identify best practices, connect efforts, identify gaps, and avoid duplication through improved conservation planning and design.

Contact: Laurie.Rounds@noaa.gov

Sea Level Rise and Coastal Flooding Impacts Viewer Expands Gulf Coast Coverage

NOAA’s Coastal Services Center recently added new Gulf Coast geography to its [Sea Level Rise and Coastal Flooding Impacts Viewer](#). The viewer now contains all coastal counties in Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and the Gulf Coast of Florida, with new regions being added throughout the upcoming fiscal year. This Digital Coast tool features coastal flooding scenarios, coupled with photos of well-known locations that illustrate potential inundation; uncertainty maps; flood frequency information; and social and economic vulnerability information. For more information, contact [John Mccombs](#).

HAB Operational Forecast System Team Responds to Texas Coastline Blooms

The Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services (CO-OPS) Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) Operational Forecast System team has been hard at work over the past two weeks as newly identified HABs expand along the Texas coastline. The blooms of the toxic algae *Karenia brevis* mark the first in Texas since CO-OPS transitioned the region to operations last September. Using satellite imagery, bloom transport models, in-situ sample information, wind forecasts, and impact reports from the field, HAB analysts have been forecasting possible bloom movements and respiratory impacts. All of this information is integrated into bulletins that are disseminated to coastal resource managers twice weekly, allowing them to better coordinate bloom response efforts and effectively mitigate impacts. A [web-based public conditions report](#) is also published, in order to help individuals make informed decisions about beach-going activities. Thus far, dead fish, discolored water, and respiratory irritation have been reported in the areas of Texas affected by the bloom. For more information, contact [Pat Burke](#).

NOAA Announces Contract to Construct National Water Center

Alabama facility will improve river and flood forecasting

September 22, 2011

NOAA today announced the award of a contract to Triune-Beck, Joint Venture V of Dallas to build the new NOAA National Water Center on the campus of the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa.

Amid growing economic and societal demands for more integrated and expansive water resources information, the center will integrate and combine the capabilities of multiple federal water partners to expand and improve river and flood forecasting, enhance water resource management, accelerate the application of research to real world uses and provide a single portal for water resources information.

The \$18,881,500 award to construct the center will create a first-of-its-kind facility that will combine hydrological forecasting operations and research under one roof to support field operations, improve joint agency coordination and address emerging stakeholder needs.

“Water resource issues are complex, multi-disciplinary and growing, as we’ve seen with this year’s floods in the northeast and the Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio rivers and the prolonged drought across much of the South,” said NOAA Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco. “The necessary expertise and capabilities to address these cross-boundary issues rarely reside within one agency or organization. There is an increasing need for close partnerships among federal agencies and local, state and regional entities; the National Water Center provides a focal point to address this national need.”

The center will help achieve the strategy of the Integrated Water Resources Science and Services (IWRSS) — a federal partnership of agencies, including NOAA, with complementary missions in water science, observation, prediction and management who are committed to addressing the nation’s water resources information and management needs. NOAA anticipates the center will facilitate a strong collaborative relationship with the University of Alabama and other universities.

Among other functions, the center will include a water resources forecasting operations center, an applied water resources research and development laboratory, a geo-intelligence laboratory, and a distance learning center. The facility will reflect sustainable design principles and meet the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold certification.

The center is part of NOAA’s commitment to creating a Weather-Ready Nation, in which the country is able to prepare for and respond to environmental events that affect safety, health, the environment, economy, and homeland security. The center will be a cornerstone of this effort by providing emergency managers with detailed maps that explicitly show forecasted locations and effects of flooding, so they can direct their evacuation and mitigation measures more effectively. New forecasts of water supply and availability will help decision-makers plan for uncertain water futures, make more effective decisions, build more resilient communities, and create new business opportunities.

NOAA’s mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth’s environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Join us on Facebook, Twitter and our other social media channels.

Mobile Bay Storm Surge Stations Go Live on Tides Online

Real-time data from the Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services (CO-OPS) are now fully available for the first three stations in the Mobile Bay Storm Surge Monitoring Network in Alabama. The stations were installed by members of the Integrated Ocean Observing System. The Dog River Bridge, East Fowl River Bridge, and West Fowl River Bridge stations were posted to [Tides Online](#) on September 2 and were added to the [Mobile Bay Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System \(PORTS®\) website](#) on September 15. Mobile County officials were notified of the availability of data so they could refer to the data on Tides Online for emergency planning as Tropical Storm Lee affected the water levels from Louisiana to Florida. The new water-level network, consisting of five new strategically located stations, will provide real-time storm surge data to Mobile County's emergency managers, weather forecast office, and others. The remaining two stations are being installed and will be online later this fall. For more information, contact [Thomas Landon](#).

As NOAA Climate Stewards, Educators Take Small Steps to Reduce a Large 'Carbon Footprint'

Did someone ever *really* say that one person can't make a difference?



The students of NOAA Climate Stewards participate in a variety of activities, ranging from planting and maintaining a garden in Maryland (shown here), to growing native sea grasses in rural Louisiana, to water quality testing in Hawaii.

Consider the efforts of 61 talented educators involved in NOAA's Climate Stewards Program, which aims to increase teachers' and students' understanding of essential climate concepts and give them ready access to reliable scientific information. Then, armed with that knowledge, NOAA Climate Stewards initiate environmentally friendly action plans to reduce the "carbon footprint" in their own communities.

[Opportunity, Community
Steward In Action
Steward's Perspective](#)

Opportunity and Community

NOAA Climate Stewards is part of the NOAA education community's comprehensive portfolio of activities to strengthen ocean, climate, and atmospheric science education. The program, now in its second year, already boasts a broad reach, with participants from 26 states (including land-locked ones like Colorado and West Virginia) and the District of Columbia. NOAA Climate Stewards include professional teachers of students ranging from elementary through college age, and informal educators who share their expertise with the public in nature and science centers, aquaria, and zoos.

NOAA gives the educators access to a wide array of professional development opportunities. Participants interact directly with NOAA scientists and education specialists, and receive instruction in the use of data resources, digital tools, and other innovative technologies. The educators benefit from an active online learning community that offers collaborative space, web seminars, conference symposia, workshops, and virtual conferences.

In Sept. 2011, for example, NOS Education, in cooperation with the NOAA Climate Program Office and Raytheon Professional Services, hosted a virtual conference on climate change science and education in [Second Life](#), where participants represent themselves as an avatar. For three evenings, educators from across the country worked together in an immersive interactive environment.

Presentations and discussions included online visualization tools, the impacts of climate change on human health, how to develop community stewardship projects, and how to address climate misconceptions in the classroom. Conference participants also toured places in [Second Life's Scilands](#), including NOAA's [Virtual Island on YouTube](#), where they watched the effects of climate change on a virtual glacier.

NOAA Climate Stewards also receive modest financial assistance and expert evaluation as they design and launch action plans for their communities. Diverse action plans include workshops for Native American educators in northern Arizona, a garden maintained by second-graders in Maryland, and an elementary curriculum in Hawaii. Climate Steward Sylvia Quinton used the knowledge and motivation she gained from the program to successfully apply for, and receive, a \$2 million National Science Foundation grant for her project in Suitland, Maryland.

NOAA Releases First National Bycatch Report

Establishes methodology, baseline for future studies

September 22, 2011



Researchers from NOAA Fisheries and the Oregon Department of Fisheries and Wildlife use sonar to study fishing techniques that improve selectivity and reduce bycatch on a commercial flatfish trawler.

[Download here.](#) (Credit: NOAA)

A new NOAA report of data collected in 2005 will help the agency's scientists better monitor progress in reducing bycatch – the non-target fish, marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds caught incidentally in fishing.

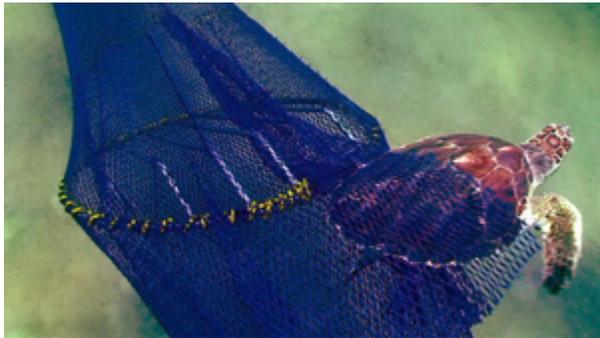
Bycatch costs fishermen time and money, harms endangered and threatened species, affects marine and coastal ecosystems, and makes it more difficult for scientists to measure the effect of fishing on the stock's population, and for managers to set sustainable levels for fishing.

Preventing and reducing bycatch is an important part of ensuring sustainable living marine resources and coastal communities. The 2006 reauthorization of the Magnuson Stevens Act, the nation's principal law for living marine resources, made bycatch reduction a priority, leading NOAA to establish a [bycatch reduction program](#) to develop technological devices and

other conservation engineering solutions.

While the [National Bycatch Report](#) does not represent an estimate of current bycatch rates, it is the first to compile collect regional data about U.S. commercial fisheries into one nationwide report. It found that 17 percent of fish caught commercially were harvested unintentionally. The report also details the numbers of marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds caught incidentally during fishing operations in 2005. The retrospective report provides a baseline for measuring bycatch reduction and establishes a consistent, comprehensive methodology for future studies.

“Fisheries managers, the fishing industry, and the environmental community share the goal of preventing and reducing bycatch, which is an important part of ending overfishing and ensuring sustainable marine resources,” said Richard Merrick, Ph.D., [NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service](#) chief scientist. “This report helps us understand the extent of bycatch in the U.S. and the quality of our data about bycatch. As we update this report, we will see improvements in data quality and will measure the progress we believe management measures and technologies are having in reducing bycatch.”



Sea turtle escaping a net equipped with turtle excluder device (TED).

[Download here.](#) (Credit: NOAA)

Since 2005, important steps have been taken to address bycatch in fisheries across the country. NOAA’s Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program, which began in 2008, supports scientists working side-by-side with fishermen to test gear and fishing modifications which are often inspired by fishermen. The program has helped generate changes in fishing practices and technological solutions like “[weak hooks](#),” which bend under pressure to allow the heavier bluefin tuna to free themselves from longline fishing hooks meant for yellowfin tuna and swordfish.

Cooperative research with fishermen across the country has helped design and test fishing gear

to avoid bycatch, allow nontargeted species to escape nets or lines, and reduce harm to those species incidentally caught and released. NOAA’s law enforcement personnel routinely assist fishermen through outreach and education programs to ensure proper use of required bycatch-avoidance gear, like turtle excluder devices.

The report provides baseline bycatch estimates for 481 species, including marine mammals, sea turtles, seabirds, and fish. It also presents bycatch estimates for 81 fisheries, which are defined by a combination of area, species, and fishing gear. A fishery can be made up of more than one fish species.

The report showed large differences between regions and fisheries in 2005. In some regions, such as the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, where fishermen can more easily catch fish without interacting with nontargeted species, unintended catch of fish amounted to seven percent in 2005. In other regions, where multispecies fisheries are more common, fishermen may find it much more difficult to avoid nontargeted species.

The report also evaluated the quality of bycatch data from the period for 152 federal fisheries or fisheries with federal data collection programs, finding that 46 percent had high-quality data in 2005. NOAA is working to improve the quality of bycatch data through regional fisheries observer programs and developing best practices for estimating bycatch. The report also includes recommendations on how bycatch data can be improved.

To complete the report, NOAA examined a variety of sources, including data from at-sea fisheries observers, commercial fishing logbooks, and production reports. NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service scientists from each regional office, science center, and headquarters office were involved in developing the estimates and the report, including scientists who undertake stock assessments for fish and protected species.

Actions by NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, stakeholder groups, and the regional fishery management councils have also reduced bycatch. In the southwest region, bycatch of whales, dolphins and porpoises has been reduced by half since 1997, when fishermen in the California drift gillnet fishery were required to use acoustic pingers, underwater sound-emitting devices that alert animals to the net, decreasing the probability of entanglement. In Hawaii, longline vessels reduced seabird interactions with fishermen by 92 to 95 percent by thawing and dyeing fish bait blue to make it less visible to the birds. Catch shares and industry-managed cooperatives have changed fleet behavior in Alaska and the Northwest, reducing economic discards, or the disposal of target fish that are of undesirable size, sex or quality.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that NOAA's conservation and management measures minimize bycatch to the extent practicable. Bycatch data are important information used by managers in setting annual catch limits and scientists in producing stock assessments for fish and protected species.

Conservation and management measures are developed through a public process by the eight regional fishery management councils, which include members who represent commercial fishing, recreational fishing, environmental interests, and academia. Improved data on the scope of the problem and how bycatch reduction measures are working will help councils and fishermen increasingly avoid the costly and wasteful problem of bycatch.

NOAA's National Bycatch Report is available [online](#). The agency continues to collect data on bycatch in preparation for the next edition of the national bycatch report, scheduled for 2013. Future editions in the report will be used to monitor changes and trends in bycatch, including as a result of new regulations, bycatch reduction devices, changes in fishing patterns, and population fluctuations in both targeted and bycatch species.



Green stick gear is used by a few boats in the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, and the gear - pulled through the water at fairly high speed - is thought by some to be a lower-bycatch alternative to longline gear.

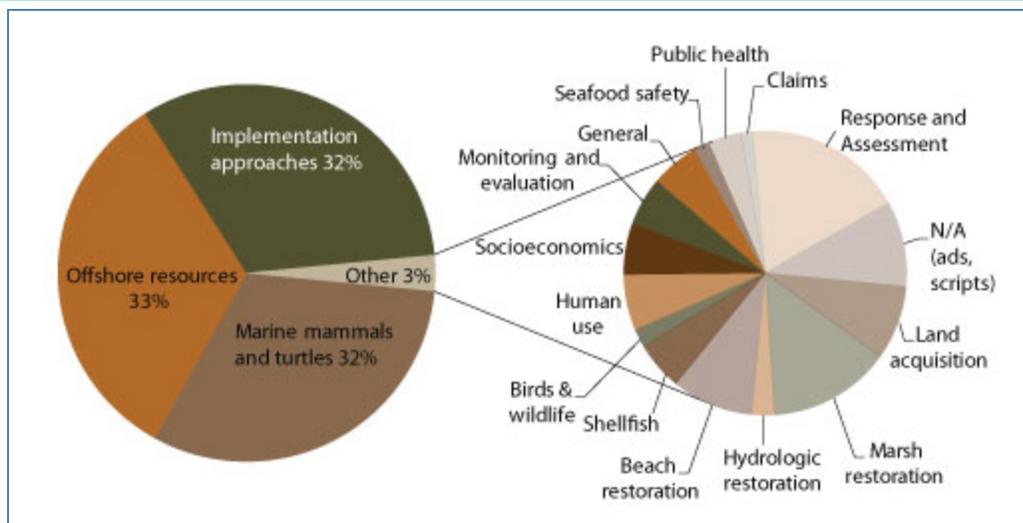
[Download here](#). (Credit: NOAA)

What We Heard from the Public on Restoration Types to Restore the Gulf

Earlier this year, the [trustees](#) for the Deepwater Horizon oil spill asked the public for input on the types of restoration needed to address impacts from the spill. The comments were collected as part of the [Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement](#) (PEIS) process. The PEIS will serve as the core planning document for restoration associated with the oil spill.

We collected comments at public meetings in the Gulf region and Washington, DC, as well as online and verbal submissions. A total of 7,773 comments were received, with nearly 70 percent of those coming from Gulf residents and organizations.

The comments focused on three main categories: implementation approaches, marine mammals and turtles, and offshore resources. See below for a breakdown of all the comments received:



The trustees are considering these comments as they create a draft PEIS, which should be available for public review in late 2011. Once comments on the draft are received, a final PEIS will be released in late 2012. Learn more about the [PEIS process](#) or view the [full summary](#) (PDF) of the comments received. You can also [view the comments](#) that were submitted online, or look at the specific [restoration project ideas](#) we have received so far.

Agencies Partner to Help Save Endangered Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtles

September 22, 2011



Kemp's ridley turtles are seen during the June 5, 2011 arribada, or mass nesting of turtles, at Rancho Nuevo, Mexico.

(Credit: Toni Torres, Gladys Porter Zoo)

NOAA's Fisheries Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Mexican environmental officials today released an updated plan to guide and strengthen the conservation and recovery of the endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtle. The Bi-National Recovery Plan revises the current recovery plan issued in 1992.

The recovery plan updates the conservation efforts that have proved successful for the Kemp's ridley. The plan also guides the implementation of research programs that improve understanding of how human activities and natural processes affect the species. The plan also provides criteria for delisting the species. If population growth and recruitment maintain their current rates of increase, scientists estimate Kemp's ridleys may attain an important delisting criterion of 40,000 nesting females per season over a 6-year period by 2024.

"We are working together with other U.S. and Mexican agencies on the recovery of the Kemp's ridley, and we are seeing results," said Eric Schwaab, assistant NOAA administrator for fisheries. "Cooperation among government agencies, fishermen, local communities and ocean users is the key to continuing our success, and this new updated plan will help us to continue in our efforts to save this species. We are well on our way, but we still have a long way to go."

The recovery plan, based on the best available science, highlights the past bi-national conservation efforts that have led to the increase in the Kemp's ridley nesting population. It also discusses the natural history, current status, and the known and potential threats to the Kemp's ridley sea turtle.

"The results of our partnership, and how effectively we are able to work together, were demonstrated this year when a record number of nests were identified along the Texas coast," said Benjamin Tuggle, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service southwest regional director. "In addition to that achievement, on a single day this June, a massive arribada – a group nesting event – of about 9,000 Kemp's ridleys was seen on the main nesting beach in Mexico."

Since the mid-1980s, scientists have documented an approximate 15 percent increase in Kemp's ridley nests per year at the species' main nesting beaches along the northeast coast of Mexico. Currently, the Kemp's ridley, once the most imperiled of all the sea turtle species, is close to meeting one of the major recovery criteria for downlisting to threatened from endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

Kemp's ridleys face threats on both nesting beaches and in the marine environment. The greatest cause of decline and the continuing primary threat to the Kemp's ridley is incidental capture in near shore fishing gear, primarily in shrimp trawlers, but also in gill nets, longlines, traps and pots, and fishing dredges in the Gulf of Mexico and North Atlantic. The recent BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the northeastern Gulf of Mexico affected critically important offshore habitats for young Kemp's ridley sea turtles, and many were directly exposed to oil. The long-term effects of this oil spill are not yet known but are of concern for the species recovery.

Egg collection by locals for food was an extreme threat to the population, but since nesting beaches were afforded official protection by Mexico in 1966, this threat no longer poses a major concern.

"Mexico recognized early on the importance of protecting the main Kemp's ridley nesting beaches on their coast," said Jim Lecky, Director of NOAA Fisheries Office of Protected Resources. "All of our agencies working together, with concerned citizens and groups in both our countries, have helped set the Kemp's ridley on the path to recovery. This Bi-National Recovery Plan keeps us all heading in the right direction."

To view the Bi-National Recovery Plan and learn more about the Kemp's ridley turtle and recovery efforts, visit:

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/recovery/plans.htm#turtles>

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/turtles/kempstridley.htm>

USFWS Kemp's ridley:

<http://www.fws.gov/kempstridley/index.html>

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Join us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and our other [social media channels](#).

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service.



Kemp's ridley turtle swimming at the waters surface.

(Credit: Kim Basso, Hull Mote Marine Lab)

NOAA's VDatum a Vital GIS Tool for Safe Navigational Products

September 16, 2011

NOAA's just-completed first edition VDatum tool will allow users to combine and transform geospatial data from different sources onto a single vertical reference surface, removing the largest obstacle GIS users face when creating products that enable safe navigation and serve other vital purposes for coastal communities.

The Vertical Datum Transformation tool, known as VDatum, allows users to produce a set of consistent geospatial data over coastal and interior areas of the contiguous U.S., removing the differences between the vertical reference systems of land- and water-based data. Information about where the water meets the land becomes increasingly important when talking about sea level change and climate change, and is essential to the safety and economic vitality of coastal communities.

NOAA defines the geospatial reference system for the United States. This National Spatial Reference System provides the backbone for all of the nation's positioning and navigation services, including GPS.

Water level data and land elevation data are generally not based on the same reference system. VDatum enables users to merge these disparate data to a single "zero" point for uniformity of measurement. This is essential for precise planning on the coast or along a lakeshore. For example, marsh restoration relies on accurate geospatial data to determine how high the tide will rise in a marsh, what vegetation will be affected, how often certain parts will be inundated, and how sea level change will affect the ecosystem of the marsh.

"VDatum is essential for merging spatial data from different sectors of the environment, so that positions and heights are uniformly accurate," said Doug Brown, NOAA's VDatum program manager. "With this tool now covering the contiguous U.S., users can save time and eliminate inconsistencies when converting geospatial data from one datum to another."

NOAA provides free and unlimited access to the VDatum web-based software tool at <http://vdatum.noaa.gov/>. VDatum was jointly developed over ten years by NOAA's National Geodetic Survey, Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services, and Office of Coast Survey. NOAA plans to update the current VDatum coverage regularly and, in the near future, expand coverage to Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Alaska, and Hawaii.

NOAA's Spill Response Team Nominated for Service to America Honors

September 15, 2011

NOAA scientist Amy Merten and her team are one of four finalists for the Samuel J. Heyman Partnership for Public Service to America Medal for Homeland Security. They were nominated for their efforts in the Deepwater Horizon oil spill to refine and expand the capability of an innovative tool providing responders and decision makers with quick access to spill data in a secure and user-friendly format.

During the spill, the tool, NOAA's Environmental Response Management Application or ERMA, provided responders and decision-makers as well the public and news media access to see maps that charted areas oiled, fishery closures, and the location of response ships and other assets.

"The importance of quick access to up to date information was vital for decision-making during the Deepwater Horizon response," said David Kennedy, assistant NOAA administrator for [NOAA's National Ocean Service](#). "Amy and her team were able to successfully expand an experimental NOAA tool into a

critically important asset for spill management, the news media and the public. Her team's nomination for this honor is recognition of that outstanding effort."

A small pilot project developed by NOAA and the University of New Hampshire, ERMA was first introduced in 2008 as a prototype in the Portsmouth, N.H. region. It proved highly successful and ERMA sites are currently being developed for the U.S. Caribbean, New England, and Pacific Northwest. The Caribbean site was the first operational ERMA and was a partnership with NOAA and US EPA Region II. Merten is currently working on developing similar ERMA systems for the Arctic and the U.S. Pacific Islands and is updating the other ERMA programs developed for use in New England and the Caribbean.

According to Merten, the idea for creating ERMA originally stemmed from a presentation she saw using real-time weather information for web-mapping. After years of relying on manual maps and lagging information, she became determined to create a decision-making tool that would provide timely and comprehensive data to help leaders respond to oil spills.

The Gulf ERMA runs the federal geospatial information system, GeoPlatform.gov, and incorporates information from NOAA, the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, EPA, NASA, U.S. Geological Survey and each of the five Gulf states. Agencies contribute data through the response data sharing mechanism within the command posts. This includes posting geospatial data on a common server, allowing access and use for multiple spatial platforms.

Merten and her team are finalists for the Homeland Security category, one of the eight Sammie categories presented by the Partnership for Public Service. The award ceremony will take place tonight (Sept. 15) in Washington, D.C.

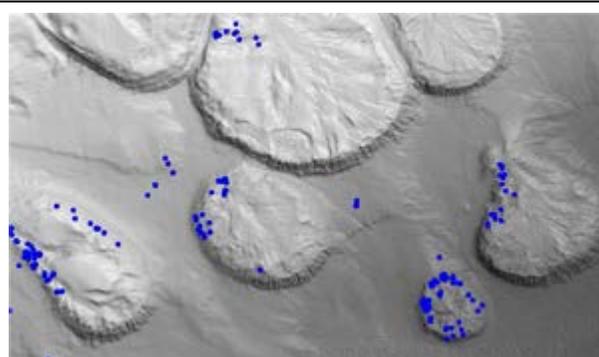
NOAA and Partners Demonstrate Success of Multibeam Sonar to Detect and Map Deep-sea Gas Seeps

September 15, 2011

Multibeam sonar, an echo sounding technology commonly used to map the seafloor, can also be used to map and detect gaseous seeps in the water column, according to scientists testing the technology on board [NOAA Ship *Okeanos Explorer*](#) last week in the Gulf of Mexico. Unlike other types of sonar, multibeam technology is able to survey a wide area of the seafloor and water column.

The ship's multibeam system produced data to make high-resolution maps of gas in the water column in depths ranging from 3,000 to 7,000 feet (1,000 to 2,500 meters).

"This capability will help increase our knowledge of the marine environment, including the distribution of natural sources of methane input into the ocean and the identification of communities of life that are often associated with methane gas seeps," said Thomas Weber, Ph.D., of the University of New Hampshire's



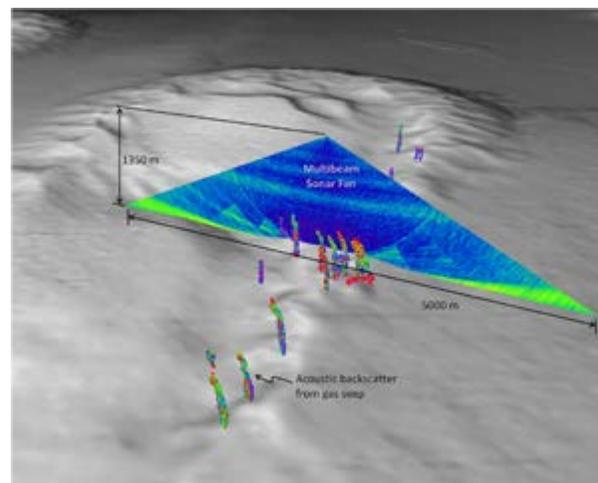
A perspective of the seafloor showing preliminary results of gas seeps detected NOAA Ship *Okeanos Explorer* multibeam sonar in vicinity of Biloxi Dome in Northern Gulf of Mexico. Gas seep locations are shown as blue dots and are overlaid on the seafloor bathymetry that was collected.

[Download here.](#) (Credit: Image produced by the University of New Hampshire Center for Coastal and Ocean Mapping / Joint Hydrographic Center using IVS Fledermaus software.)

Center for Coastal and Ocean Mapping and lead scientist of the mission. With the Gulf of Mexico home to numerous gaseous seeps, data collected by multibeam sonar could prove valuable to researchers planning further studies of gas seeps and their effects on the marine environment.

The objective of the expedition was to test the sonar's ability to map gaseous seeps, not oil, as oil is more difficult to acoustically detect with the multibeam sonar. Techniques developed during this cruise are intended to help scientists better understand detection of gas seeps which may in turn better inform scientists who are working on techniques to map oil in the water column.

"Mapping the seafloor and the water column are essential first steps in exploring our largely unknown ocean," said Weber. "This expedition confirms earlier indications that multibeam technology provides a valuable new tool in the inventory to detect plumes of gas in the water column, and especially in deep water."



A view of the multibeam sonar water column backscatter data used to detect gas seeps. Gas seeps derived from the sonar are shown in the foreground.

[Download here.](#) (Credit: Image produced by the University of New Hampshire Center for Coastal and Ocean Mapping / Joint Hydrographic Center using IVS Fledermaus software.)

The expedition was conducted jointly by [NOAA's Office of Ocean Exploration and Research](#) (OER), the University of New Hampshire's Center for Coastal and Ocean Mapping, and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE), as well as scientists and technicians from NOAA's Southeast Fisheries Science Center working in parallel from [NOAA Ship Pisces](#).

"In 2009, we were testing *Okeanos Explorer's* multibeam sonar off the U.S. West Coast when the sonar first displayed its potential to acoustically map the water column," said Mashkoor Malik, a physical scientist with NOAA's OER and expedition coordinator for the mission. "The sonar mapped a plume of suspected methane gas that rose 4,200 feet (1,400 meters) from the seafloor. But this expedition in the Gulf was the first comprehensive test of *Okeanos Explorer's* multibeam to detect deep gaseous seeps over a wide area. Its use during this mission confirms the effectiveness of the tool and may lead to extending NOAA's water-column mapping capabilities."

Single beam sonar systems have been used extensively to map gas seeps but do not provide as much coverage as typically collected by multibeam systems. Since multibeam sonar obtains information from a wide fan-shape of beams, it maps a wider area more quickly and efficiently. The multibeam sonar on *Okeanos Explorer* is one of the few that is specially configured to collect water column data to characterize gaseous seeps in wide areas of the deep-ocean's water column in high resolution.

Bill Shedd, a BOEMRE geophysicist and expert in hydrocarbon seeps who participated in the expedition as part of an ongoing collaboration with NOAA's OER, stated, "Our agencies have been working together in the Gulf of Mexico since 2003. We're optimistic and impressed about this new capability for exploration that was demonstrated so well during this expedition."

NOAA Ship *Okeanos Explorer* is operated, managed and maintained by NOAA's Office of Marine and Aviation Operations, which includes commissioned officers of the NOAA Corps and civilian wage mariners. NOAA's OER owns and is responsible for operating and managing the cutting-edge ocean exploration systems on the vessel. It is the only federal ship dedicated to systematic exploration of the planet's largely unknown ocean.

NOAA: U.S. Domestic Seafood Landings and Values Increase in 2010

Dutch Harbor-Unalaska, Alaska and New Bedford, Mass. are top fishing ports

September 7, 2011

U.S. commercial fishermen landed 8.2 billion pounds of seafood in 2010, valued at \$4.5 billion, an increase of 200 million pounds and more than \$600 million in value over 2009, according to a new report released today by NOAA. This report shows U.S. fishermen, who meet high environmental and safety standards, continue to be competitive in the dynamic, fast-paced global seafood marketplace.

"These increases in fish landings and value are good news for our nation's fishermen and for fishing communities, where jobs depend on healthy fish stocks," said Eric Schwaab, assistant NOAA administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "We know fishermen are making sacrifices now to rebuild fish populations, and these efforts, combined with good science and management, support sustainable jobs for Americans."

Commercial and recreational fishing are integral to the nation's social and economic fabric. In NOAA's most recent economic report, commercial and recreational fisheries generated \$166 billion in sales impacts, contributed \$72 billion to the Gross National Product and supported 1.4 million jobs in the fishing sector and across the broader economy.

Today's report, Fisheries of the United States 2010, shows that for the 22nd consecutive year, the Alaska port of Dutch Harbor-Unalaska led the nation with the highest amount of fish landed, primarily pollock. For the 11th consecutive year New Bedford, Mass. had the highest valued catch, due in large part to the sea scallop fishery.

Last year, commercial fishermen unloaded 515.2 million pounds of fish and shellfish in Dutch Harbor-Unalaska, an increase of nearly 10 million pounds over 2009 and a rise in the dockside value of \$3.4 million to \$163 million. Alaska claims three of the top 10 ports for landings volume and six of the top 10 ports for landings value. More than half of the seafood Americans eat from U.S. waters is caught in Alaska.

The port of New Bedford took top place for values of landings, bringing in \$306 million in 2010, a 22.8-percent increase over 2009, and the highest landing values in 30 years for that port. While there was a substantial increase in value, the total amount of seafood landed in New Bedford decreased by 36.6 million pounds to 133.4 million pounds. The increase in value was driven by a 28 percent increase in the per-pound price of sea scallops. Sea scallops, which account for 22 percent of the volume and 77 percent of the value of landings in New Bedford, were declared overfished in 1998. As a result of the cooperation of fishermen and a rebuilding plan that included temporarily reducing fishing effort, restricting some gear, and closing some areas, the population was fully rebuilt in 2001, and is now the top-valued fishery in the country.

Fishermen at the nearby port of Gloucester, Mass., also landed their top value in the last 30 years, with landings valued at \$56.6 million, an increase of 11 percent from 2009.

All coastal regions of the country saw increases in total value of fisheries landings in 2010. The Gulf of Mexico region, which suffered the nation's worst marine oil spill in 2010 and saw landings drop by 19 percent, achieved a modest two percent increase in total landings value.

Today's report also shows that the average American ate 15.8 pounds of fish and shellfish in 2010, a slight decline from the 2009 figure of 16 pounds. The U.S. continues to be third-ranked for consuming

fish and shellfish, behind China and Japan. Americans consumed 4.878 billion pounds of seafood, slightly less than the 4.907 billion pounds in 2009.

While seafood consumption remained fairly consistent, the amount of imported seafood consumed by Americans continued to increase. About 86 percent of the seafood consumed in the U.S. is imported, measured by edible weight, up four percent from 2009. However, a portion of this imported seafood is caught by American fishermen, exported overseas for processing and then re-imported to the U.S.

The U.S. exports 63 percent of its domestically produced seafood, measured by live weight, which represents an increase of four percent over 2009.

Almost half of imported seafood comes from aquaculture, or farmed seafood. Aquaculture outside the U.S. has expanded dramatically in the last three decades and now supplies the world with half its seafood demand, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. America's aquaculture industry, though vibrant and diverse, currently meets less than 5 percent of U.S. seafood demand.

"While we are turning a corner on ending overfishing on wild stocks, this report shows the need for U.S. aquaculture to grow and complement wild fisheries," said Schwaab. "Sustainable domestic aquaculture creates jobs in our coastal communities, helps meet the demand for healthy seafood, supports exports to global markets and helps us narrow the trade gap."

In July, NOAA announced its National Aquaculture Initiative, to jump-start private sector investments in aquaculture to create job opportunities.

To learn more about the nation's commercial and recreational fisheries, landings, import, export, per capita fish consumption and consumer expenditures for fish products, go to the NOAA Fisheries [website](#). The Fisheries of the United States 2010 report is available [online](#).

NOAA Provides Easy Access to Historical Hurricane Tracks

Understanding historical hurricane landfalls important in preparing for current storms

August 25, 2011

Would you like to know about historical storm activity for your hometown? Are you looking for a specific storm track? Are you curious to know where Hurricanes Katrina, Iniki, or Karl made landfall? NOAA's [Historical Hurricane Tracks](#) mapping application can easily generate customized maps based on more than 150 years of Atlantic hurricane data.

"Understanding the history of hurricane landfalls in your community is an important step toward assessing your vulnerability to these potentially devastating storms," said Ethan Gibney, a senior geospatial analyst for NOAA and one of the site's developers. "The Historical Hurricane Tracks tool allows visitors to quickly and easily conduct highly customized searches of historical data for hurricanes, whether along the U.S. coast or around the world."

NOAA's [Historical Hurricane Tracks](#) web site includes tropical cyclone data and information on coastal county hurricane strikes data through 2010. It also features a searchable database of population changes versus hurricane strikes for U.S. coastal counties from 1900 to 2000 and includes detailed reports on the life history and effects of U.S. tropical cyclones since 1958.

Developed by the NOAA [Coastal Services Center](#) in partnership with NOAA's [National Hurricane Center](#) and the agency's [National Climatic Data Center](#), Historical Hurricane Tracks allows users to search by place name, storm name or year, or latitude and longitude points. With the search results, users can generate a map showing the track of the storm or storms accompanied by a table of related information. In addition, the site contains global hurricane data from as far back as 1842.

National Weather Service Launches New Heat Safety Website En Español

August 24, 2011

The National Weather Service is redoubling efforts to help America become a “Weather-ready” nation, and has launched a new heat safety website in Spanish. The new site aims to educate the nation’s growing Hispanic population about the health dangers of prolonged heat exposure.

Texas, home to more than nine million Hispanics, has been particularly hard hit during this summer’s intense heat wave, which continues to rage in the south central United States. Those working in outdoor jobs, such as farming, fishing, forestry or construction, are particularly vulnerable to heat illness.

The site, <http://www.weather.gov/om/heat/index-s.shtml>, includes a wealth of information. It explains the different heat forecasts issued by the National Weather Service, defines the heat index, outlines various heat hazards, discusses the dangers of leaving children and pets in a car, includes a variety of heat safety tips and includes information about heat disorders to help people recognize when they are in trouble.

NOAA's National Weather Service is the primary source of weather data, forecasts and warnings for the United States and its territories. NOAA’s National Weather Service operates the most advanced weather and flood warning and forecast system in the world, helping to protect lives and property and enhance the national economy. Visit us online at weather.gov and on [Facebook](#).

NOAA's National Weather Service Taking Action to Build a 'Weather-ready' Nation

2011 ties record for billion-dollar disasters

August 17, 2011

NOAA is launching a comprehensive initiative to build a “Weather-ready” nation to make America safer by saving more lives and protecting livelihoods as communities across the country become increasingly vulnerable to severe weather events, such as tornado outbreaks, intense heat waves, flooding, active hurricane seasons, and solar storms that threaten electrical and communication systems.

NOAA is also announcing that the United States has so far this year experienced [nine separate disasters](#), each with an economic loss of \$1 billion or more — tying the record set in 2008. The latest event to surpass the \$1 billion price tag is this summer’s flooding along the Missouri and Souris rivers in the upper Midwest. This year’s losses have so far amounted to more than \$35 billion.

“Severe weather represents a very real threat to public safety that requires additional robust action,” said Jack Hayes, director of NOAA’s National Weather Service. “The increasing impacts of natural disasters, as seen this year, are a stark reminder of the lives and livelihoods at risk.”

In partnership with other government agencies, researchers, and the private sector, the National Weather Service is charting a path to a weather-ready nation through:

- Improved precision of weather and water forecasts and effective communication of risk to local authorities;
- Improved weather decision support services with new initiatives such as the development of mobile-ready emergency response specialist teams;
- Innovative science and technological solutions such as the nationwide implementation of Dual Pol radar technology, Integrated Water Resources Science and Services, and the Joint Polar Satellite System;
- Strengthening joint partnerships to enhance community preparedness;
- Working with weather enterprise partners and the emergency management community to enhance safety and economic output and effectively manage environmental resources.

The National Weather Service is also planning innovative, community-based test projects across the country, ranging in focus from emergency response to ecological forecasting, to enhance the agency's preparedness efforts to better address the impacts of extreme weather. Test projects will initially be launched at strategic locations in the Gulf Coast, South and mid-Atlantic.

“These test projects serve as tangible examples of how the National Weather Service is trying to address the impact of weather-related disasters,” said Hayes. “Ultimately, these projects will provide the specific action plans necessary for us to adapt to extreme weather events and represent an important step in building a weather-ready nation.”

In the past 30 years, the United States has experienced a total of 108 weather-related disasters that have caused more than \$1 billion dollars in damages. Overall, these disasters have resulted in three-quarters of \$1 trillion in standardized losses since 1980, according to NOAA records.

According to Munich Reinsurance America, one of the top providers of property and casualty reinsurance in the U.S., the number of natural disasters has tripled in the last 20 years and 2010 was a record breaker with about 250. Average thunderstorm losses have increased five-fold since 1980. For the first half of 2011 there have been \$20 billion in thunderstorm losses, up from the previous three-year average of \$10 billion.

This increase in weather-related disasters coupled with population growth and density in high-risk areas, has moved NOAA and its partners — from the emergency management community and across America's weather enterprise — from concern to action.

“Building a Weather-ready nation is everyone's responsibility,” said Eddie Hicks, IAEM USA president.

“It starts with National Weather Service and emergency managers, like the U.S. Council of International Association of Emergency Managers, but it ends with actions by individuals and businesses to reduce their risks. The more prepared communities are for destructive weather, the less of a human and economic toll we'll experience in the future, and that's a great thing for the country.”

“The partnership between the government, private, and academic sectors, all represented in the professional membership of the American Meteorological Society, is extremely strong and is essential in achieving this vision,” said Jonathan Malay, president of the AMS. “Given the resources to grow our scientific understanding of our complex environment through observations and research and to apply this knowledge in serving society, we can do amazing things together.”

Dolphins – Partners in the Quest to Restore the Gulf

August 16, 2011

After the Deepwater Horizon oil spill last year, teams of biologists from NOAA and other federal and state agencies mobilized in the Gulf of Mexico. Their mission was to assess the impacts from the spill to a wide range of important natural resources – including dolphins. NOAA has documented extensive exposure of these animals to Deepwater Horizon oil. This exposure can cause a variety of health impacts in marine mammals, including death.

Since the spill, more than 400 dolphins have been found dead in the Gulf. We are continuing to assess the health of dolphins Gulf-wide—their health is a good indication of the recovery of the Gulf.

NBC Nightly News came to see our team at work—watch the [video](#) (Adobe Flash required). Reporters from [The Times-Picayune](#) and [Mississippi Press](#) also saw the team at work and published stories and photo galleries.

Learn more about our efforts to [assess the impact of the spill on dolphins and other marine mammals](#), or watch our webisode on [Dolphin Identification](#), featuring NOAA Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco.

Lionfish Reported at Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary

NOAA formulating response to invasive species threat, asks for help from public

August 15, 2011

Lionfish, a venomous invasive marine species considered one of the top predators in many coral reef environments in the Atlantic, has been documented at NOAA’s Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary — the first instance of the invader in the sanctuary since the species spread to U.S. East Coast waters in 2000.

Several juvenile lionfish, normally native to the Indo-Pacific, were spotted recently in the sanctuary, located 70 to 115 miles off the coasts of Texas and Louisiana in the Gulf of Mexico. NOAA’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is also tracking lionfish activity at Gray’s Reef and Florida Keys national marine sanctuaries.

Lionfish consume important commercial fish and crustacean species in their juvenile stage – including snapper, grouper and shrimp, as well as other reef fish. For this reason, sanctuary resource managers and scientists are concerned about the potential impact lionfish could have on the coral reef ecosystem, which supports the tourism and fishing industries. Lionfish also have venomous spines, placing divers and fishermen at risk from their painful stings.

Recreational divers reported seeing a lionfish at West Flower Garden Bank on July 20 and a second fish at Stetson Bank on July 27. A sanctuary researcher found a third lionfish on August 3 at West Flower Garden Bank. That fish was captured and is in a tank at the sanctuary’s Galveston office. Another lionfish was observed at East Flower Garden Bank on August 8.

“Although not unexpected, these reports are disturbing, and we intend to search for and document the presence of this species in sanctuary waters,” said George Schmahl, sanctuary superintendent. “We are developing a strategy to address the potential threat this highly-invasive species could have on the sanctuary’s native populations.”

As the sanctuary formulates its response, the diving and fishing public is encouraged to report sightings and locations of lionfish to the sanctuary office, by phone at 409-621-5151, ext. 114. The information will be used to track the progress and impacts of the invasion, and enable responders to focus their removal efforts. The public can also help track the invasion by submitting reports to the Reef Environmental Education Foundation (<http://www.reef.org/programs/exotic/lionfish>), and the United States Geological Survey (<http://nas.er.usgs.gov/SightingReport.aspx>).

NOAA's Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary protects 56 square miles of critical marine habitat in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico. The coral reefs and coral-sponge communities support a variety of recreationally and commercially important species, including snappers, groupers, sea turtles, manta rays and sharks.

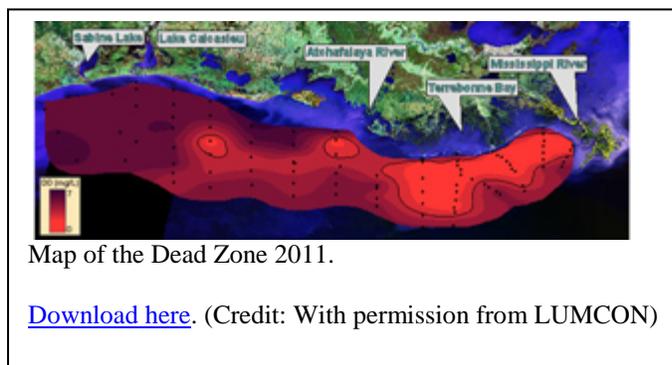
On the Web:

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary: <http://flowergarden.noaa.gov> NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

NOAA's Lionfish website: <http://www.ccfhr.noaa.gov/stressors/lionfish.aspx>

NOAA-supported Scientists Find Large Dead Zone in Gulf of Mexico

August 4, 2011



NOAA-supported scientists found the size of this year's Gulf of Mexico dead zone to be 6,765 square miles. Researchers had predicted the potential for a record sized dead zone between 8,500 and 9,421 square miles due to the spring flooding of the Mississippi River and the associated large loads of nutrients running off into the Gulf, but strong winds and waves associated with Tropical Storm Don disrupted the western portion of the dead zone.

The research cruise, led by Nancy Rabalais, Ph.D., executive director of the [Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium](#), found this year's dead zone to be nearly equal to the land area of the state of New Jersey. The average size of the dead, or hypoxic, zone over the past five years has been 6,688 square miles, very close to this year's measurement and much larger than the 1,900 square mile goal set by the Gulf of Mexico/Mississippi River Watershed Nutrient Task Force. Last year's dead zone measured approximately 7,722 square miles. In addition to surveys in the traditional region of the dead zone, Rabalais' research team documented a large area of hypoxia east of the Mississippi River in mid-July.

“Although Tropical Storm Don disrupted part of the hypoxic zone, our monitoring over the past several months indicated the spring floods expanded the dead zone region,” said Rabalais. “However, sampling the hypoxic bottom layer on a ship rolling in 6-10 foot waves presented safety and sampling issues that interfered with precise measurements at some stations. For these reasons, the size of the measured hypoxic zone was smaller than just before the storm, and is probably under-estimated.”

The dead zone is fueled by nutrient runoff from agricultural and other human activities in the Mississippi River watershed, which stimulates an overgrowth of algae that sinks, decomposes and consumes most of

the life-giving oxygen supply in bottom waters. The hypoxic zone off the coast of Louisiana and Texas forms each summer and threatens valuable commercial and recreational Gulf fisheries.

These fisheries are critical to the economy. For example, in 2009, the dockside value of commercial fisheries in the Gulf was \$629 million. Nearly three million recreational fishers, taking 22 million fishing trips, further contributed more than \$1 billion to the Gulf economy.

“Despite fluctuations in size due to each year’s weather conditions, these chronic, recurring hypoxic zones every summer represent a significant threat to Gulf ecosystems,” said Robert Magnien, Ph.D., director of [NOAA’s Center for Sponsored Coastal Ocean Research](#). “Until we achieve a substantial reduction in nutrient pollution from the Mississippi River watershed, we will continue to experience extended periods of time each year when critically-needed habitat is unavailable for many marine organisms.”

Earlier this summer, NOAA-sponsored forecast models developed by R. Eugene Turner, Ph.D., Louisiana State University and Donald Scavia, Ph.D., University of Michigan, predicted that the hypoxic zone would be the largest on record. Despite the presence of tropical storms, which can temporarily provide oxygen to bottom waters through mixing of the water column, the continued high discharge from the Mississippi River after the prediction provided strong conditions for a large dead zone.

The models used to forecast the area of the dead zone are most influenced by the amount of May nitrate-nitrogen delivered to the Gulf from the Mississippi and Atchafalaya Rivers and are constructed to inform managers of the underlying causes of the dead zone and the effectiveness of alternative approaches to mitigate the problem over the long-term. These models currently do not incorporate short-term variability due to weather patterns that can affect the timing or positioning of the hypoxic zone in any given year.

Prior to the Louisiana Consortium cruise, a NOAA-supported Texas A&M survey, led by Steven DiMarco, Ph.D., found a moderately sized dead zone during a June shelf-wide survey, and subsequent measurements during NOAA’s Southeast Monitoring and Assessment Program’s summer survey indicated the dead zone was growing larger in the areas that were likely re-oxygenated by Tropical Storm Don. Texas A&M will be conducting a NOAA-funded follow-up cruise in mid-August to provide an update on the size of the dead zone as scientists work to understand size fluctuations and duration of hypoxic conditions in the Gulf. The July cruise, however is the only survey mandated by the Hypoxia Task Force to determine the annual extent of the dead zone.

Visualize Inundation in the Coastal Inundation Toolkit

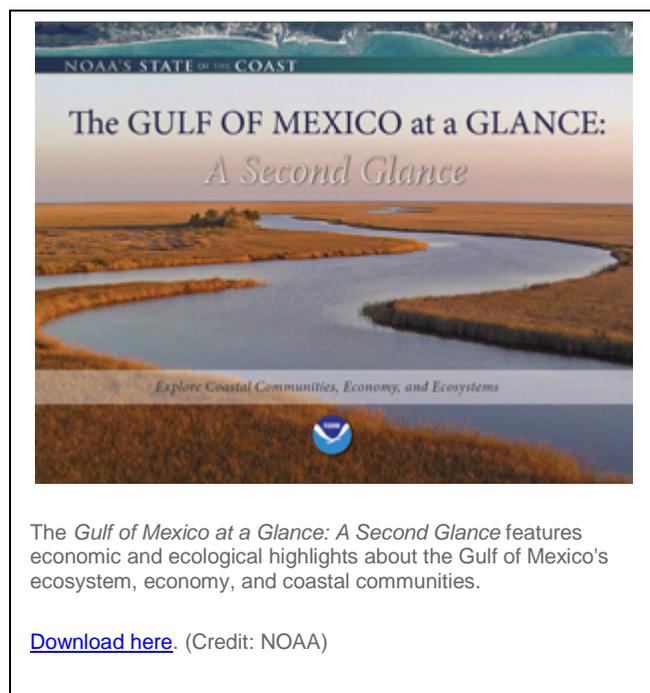
The "Visualize" section is now available in the [Digital Coast's Coastal Inundation Toolkit](#). Learn how different types of visualizations can help communities understand their inundation risks and vulnerabilities. The "Picture It" page offers tools and local examples of how photos, maps, and mapping viewers can be used to visualize the extent and impacts of inundation. The "Graph It" page directs users to tools and websites that can be used to visualize trends, such as sea level rise, and spatial relationships for complex data sets.

For the more technically advanced, the "Build It" page directs users to training, data, and guidance that can get them started with creating their own visualizations. Visualizing inundation is important in understanding the potential extent of inundation and the risks it poses on the community. Being able to visualize inundation allows communities to prepare and plan for these events in the future.

New NOAA Report Highlights Economic and Ecological Value of the Gulf coastal region

'A Second Glance' is valuable tool for regional managers and the public

August 2, 2011



A new report released today [The Gulf of Mexico at a Glance: A Second Glance](#), will provide coastal managers, planners, policy officials, and others with a reference to support regional decision-making and communications about the importance of healthy Gulf coastal ecosystems to a robust national economy, a safe population, and a high quality of life.

The [report](#), released by NOAA, in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, provides economic and ecological highlights about the Gulf's coastal communities, economy, and ecosystems. This report is an update to NOAA's original *Gulf of Mexico at a Glance*, published in June 2008.

The updated version includes nineteen topics that reveal highlights about the region, such as changes in the Gulf's coastal population from

1970 to 2020, the impact the Gulf's coastal areas have on the U.S. economy, the extent of land-based and marine protected areas in the Gulf coast region, and the vulnerability of the Gulf coast to long-term sea level rise. Highlights of the report's summary facts include:

Gulf Communities:

- Population in the 141 coastal watershed counties of the Gulf Coast Region, has increased 109 percent since 1970, compared to a 52 percent increase in total U.S. population.
- 17 percent of the population in the Gulf Coast region lives below the poverty level, compared to 13 percent nationally.

Gulf Economy:

- If they were their own country, the five U.S. Gulf states—Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas—would together rank seventh in global Gross Domestic Product.
- The Gulf Coast Region had 13 of the nation's 20 leading ports for tonnage in 2009.
- In 2009, three of the top six commercial fishing ports in the U.S. by pounds landed were in the Gulf Coast region.

Gulf Ecosystems:

- More than 15,000 plant and animal species are found in Gulf of Mexico waters.
- 31 percent of the Gulf of Mexico coastal watershed area is comprised of wetlands, a total of 28,372 square miles of this valuable natural resource.
- Nearly 60 percent of the U.S. Gulf of Mexico shoreline is considered very vulnerable to sea level rise.

“The natural disasters the Gulf of Mexico has endured over the past decade have cast a national spotlight on the strong interconnection between the Gulf economy and ecosystems and its people,” said Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. “This report provides a valuable snapshot of the region for our partners, government and non-government alike, who work to protect lives and property, sustain the resilient Gulf ecosystem, and advance the scientific and stewardship goals outlined in the President’s National Ocean Policy.”

Created by [NOAA’s National Ocean Service](#), The Gulf of Mexico at a Glance: A Second Glance, as well as other NOAA [State of the Coast website](#) resources, can be viewed and downloaded online.

Enhanced Resources for Coastal and Waterfront Smart Growth website

In late July, 2011, new resources for coastal and waterfront smart growth were added to NOAA's coastal and waterfront smart growth website. The additional resources provide information for communities to get started in implementing policies, tools and techniques for the coastal smart growth element: "strengthen and direct development toward existing communities and encourage waterfront revitalization." The coastal and waterfront smart growth web team plans to roll out resources for additional smart growth elements over the coming months. Partners include OCRM, the National Sea Grant Program Office, the Coastal Services Center, and NOS Communication and Education Division. See <http://coastalsmartgrowth.noaa.gov/> then select the "Getting Started" toolbar.

New Curriculum Demonstrates Economic Benefits of LID

Forging the Link (FTL) is a free, comprehensive curriculum that demonstrates the economic benefits of combining low impact development (LID) and traditional stormwater management approaches for municipalities and commercial developers. Designed for organizations that educate municipal decision makers, the FTL consists of a series of case studies from around the country presented in a resource manual, PowerPoint presentation, and delivery and facilitation guides.

A project team from the University of New Hampshire Stormwater Center (UNHSC), Virginia Commonwealth University, and Antioch University New England developed this curriculum, with funding from CICEET in partnership with groups including: Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials (NEMO), Coastal Training Programs (CTPs), Sea Grant, Cooperative Extension, National Estuary Programs (NEP), and other municipal decision makers. FTL can be found at <http://www.unh.edu/unhsc/forgingthelink>.

NOAA Announces Aquaculture Initiative to Enable Domestic Seafood Production and Create Jobs in Coastal Communities

July 11, 2011

NOAA’s administrator today will announce a new aquaculture initiative to help meet our country’s growing demand for seafood, while creating jobs and restoring healthy ecosystems. The agency’s Aquaculture Technology Transfer Initiative will foster public-private partnerships on regional projects that showcase innovative sustainable practices, jump start private sector investments, and create employment opportunities in coastal communities.

NOAA Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco will announce the initiative following meetings at the Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute in Carlsbad, Calif., a private research institute north of San Diego with extensive aquaculture research facilities. At Hubbs-SeaWorld, she will tour the facility and meet with aquaculture practitioners, researchers, and other partners.

“Aquaculture is a critical component to meeting increasing global demand for seafood,” said Lubchenco, who is also under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere. “Job creation is a major focus of this administration. This initiative provides an opportunity to support innovation and growth in the private aquaculture sector, resulting in a healthy, local seafood supply and job growth at our working waterfronts.”

In June, the Department of Commerce and NOAA released national policies that support sustainable marine aquaculture in the United States. Americans import about 84 percent of their seafood, half of which is from aquaculture. The U.S. trade deficit in seafood currently exceeds \$10 billion and continues to grow.

“Aquaculture can be a significant contributor to a ‘blue-green’ economy that both contributes to and benefits from healthy oceans and coasts,” Lubchenco said. As part of this initiative, NOAA will work with its partners in the private sector, academia, government and communities to advance technology, monitor performance indicators, and showcase best practices and market-based standards. The initiative will be implemented with the active involvement of NOAA’s regional offices and science centers, Sea Grant Extension, and other federal, state, local and non-governmental partners. Jointly, NOAA and its partners will identify and pursue projects that promote sustainable domestic marine aquaculture. American expertise and innovation has played a significant role in the development of aquaculture in foreign countries. The DOC and NOAA policies and this new initiative will promote sustainable practices and developments in the U.S. so that American ingenuity can be applied here at home.

The domestic aquaculture industry, both freshwater and marine, currently supplies about five percent of the seafood consumed in the U.S. The cultivation of shellfish, such as oysters, clams, and mussels, comprises about two-thirds of U.S. marine aquaculture. Salmon and shrimp aquaculture contribute about 25 percent and 10 percent, respectively. Current production takes place mainly on land, in ponds, and in coastal state waters.

In the Gulf States

Governor Bentley Announces Alabama Receives Two Grants for Export Promotion

MONTGOMERY—Governor Robert Bentley today announced that Alabama has won two separate grants totaling \$240,600 to increase exports in the state and create jobs. At a press conference in Montgomery, Governor Bentley was joined by Alabama Development Office Director Greg Canfield to make the announcement.

“These two grants will allow Alabama to provide funding for our state’s companies to sell more Alabama products and services overseas and create jobs through increasing our exports,” said Governor Bentley.

In 2010, international trade was a \$15.5 billion industry in Alabama with manufactured goods from Alabama shipped to 198 foreign destinations—a strong increase of 25.5% from 2009. Over 300,000 jobs for Alabama citizens were supported by the \$15.5 billion in manufactured exports from the state to the rest of the world.

The grants, \$100,000 from the Appalachian Regional Commission's (ARC), and \$140,600 from the U.S. Small Business Administration's State Trade and Export Promotion Grants Program (STEP), will focus on the state's small and medium-sized companies.

The ARC Global Appalachia initiative is designed for a 37-county region of Alabama Appalachia and will encourage a stronger partnership between ARC-member states, the federal government, and Appalachian businesses to increase the number of businesses that want to export and increase the value of exports for Appalachian businesses currently exporting.

The STEP Grant Program is a three-year pilot program that aims to increase the number of small businesses across America that are exporting goods or providing services.

Programs will provide funding for companies to gain a foothold in overseas markets through participating in trade missions and trade shows in emerging markets such as China, Eastern Europe and Latin America. The grants will work to increase the number of companies exporting by providing hands-on assistance through market research, trade leads and identifying qualified international buyers. A portion of the grants will focus on increasing higher-education exports, an industry sector which ranks among the country's top 10 service exports.

Alabama Development Office Director Greg Canfield said the two grants awarded to Alabama "will help fuel the organic process for job creation in our state through the growth of export opportunities and increased sales for Alabama companies and their products. We know that 70% of Alabama companies exporting are small to medium sized businesses and we know that companies which export add jobs 18% faster than companies that choose not to export." The grants will be coordinated through the Alabama Development Office's International Trade Division.

Florida DEP Celebrates National Estuaries Day

~ Family and educational activities celebrate "Where Rivers Meet the Sea"~

Sept. 24, 2011



Freshwater inflows make for lush islands at Rookery Bay Estuarine Research Reserve.

TALLAHASSEE - The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) celebrated National Estuaries Day with special events at the state's three National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERR) and the Indian River Lagoon Aquatic Preserves (IRLAP). The celebrations focused on the importance of Florida's estuaries – the valuable natural areas where rivers meet the sea.

Among the most productive ecosystems on earth, estuaries serve as nurseries for fish and shellfish and provide vital nesting and feeding grounds for coastal birds, sea turtles and marine mammals. Governor Rick Scott

issued a [proclamation](#) declaring Sept. 24, 2011, as National Estuaries Day, in recognition of the important role estuaries play to both Florida's environment and economy.

“I encourage our residents and visitors to enjoy these unique ecosystems throughout the year, and to help preserve and protect them,” said DEP Secretary Herschel T. Vinyard Jr. “Florida’s estuaries are vital to coastal communities, providing millions of dollars through tourism, recreational sport fishing and boating.”

The country’s 28 National Estuarine Research Reserves celebrate National Estuaries Day each year to bring attention to these beautiful coastal environments. DEP’s Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas (CAMA) hosted events at the state’s three NERRs to give visitors an opportunity to learn more about Florida’s valuable estuarine ecosystems and what Florida’s citizens can do to help protect them.

Visitors to the Guana Tolomato Matanzas NERR enjoyed a guided archeological bike ride, guided kayak trips led by Ripple Effects, a pirate invasion, hands-on science and live music by the Saltwater Cowgirls. All event proceeds will be used to support the education, research and stewardship programs of the Reserve. The Rookery Bay NERR provided visitors with half-hour boat trips through the Rookery Bay Reserve, half-hour guided kayak trips along Henderson Creek, tours of the science labs, marine critters touch tank, guided trail walks, and face painting as part of the festivities. The Apalachicola NERR event took place Friday, Sept. 23, and included activities such as live reptile demonstrations, environmental scavenger hunts, simulated oyster tonging (oyster harvesting) and a wacky waterfront race. The Apalachicola NERR’s focus was on students and education. DEP’s Indian River Lagoon Aquatic Preserves (IRLAP) hosted a planting event at Brevard County Spoil Island BC47, located in Grant, on Wednesday, Sept. 21. The event was coordinated by the Shoreline Restoration Project, a grant-funded project administered by IRLAP’s office. Volunteers from IRLAP and the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program planted salt marsh grasses and red mangroves along the critically eroding island.

Florida DEP’S Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve Open For Research and Educational Programs

~DEP Secretary Herschel T. Vinyard Jr. attends as special guest~

August 17, 2011



DEP Secretary Herschel T. Vinyard Jr. cuts a ribbon ceremoniously opening the new Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve Nature Center.

EASTPOINT – The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) today officially opened the new Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve (ANERR) Nature Center with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and media tour. The ANERR Nature Center features 18,000 square feet of learning space, including two working wet and dry research laboratories. Representing the river, bay and gulf habitats found in Apalachicola, the center features three large walk-around tanks that each hold over 1,000 gallons and house a variety of native plant life and creatures. The new building is built to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) silver certificate standards.

“For more than 30 years, the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve has done an incredible job protecting one of Florida’s most productive water bodies,” said Secretary Vinyard. “Education and outreach are important parts of the Reserve’s work, and this new facility will help us share the important work we do with even more students, residents and tourists.”

ANERR, spanning approximately 246,000 acres, is located in Franklin, Gulf and Liberty counties on the Florida panhandle, approximately 75 miles southeast of Tallahassee and 60 miles east of Panama City. ANERR is managed by the DEP Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas (CAMA) and is part of a nationwide network of 28 research reserves overseen by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). ANERR was established in 1979 to protect the region's biological diversity, as well as the economic value of the natural resources and pristine conditions. Between 60 to 85 percent of the local population make their living directly from the fishing industry, most of which is done in reserve waters.

“The design and the exhibits in the new facility are meant to give visitors an orientation to where they are in Florida and in this important watershed,” said Lee Edmiston, ANERR Director. “The exhibits demonstrate the connectivity among the river, bay and gulf habitats, and guests can explore the idea of a continuum of habitat versus discreet, separate systems.”

Research projects that target commercial fisheries management and the food web are a high priority at ANERR. In addition to its water quality monitoring program, the new facility has a highly sophisticated geographic information systems (GIS) database, which is used to educate coastal managers and visiting researchers about the area and its ecology. Other educational offerings include ongoing guest lecturers for the community and coastal management workshops for environmental professionals. ANERR's K-12 educational activities are divided between classroom and on-site programs. For more information about the research and education programs offered, please contact the Reserve at (850) 670-7700 or visit the website: <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/sites/apalachicola/>.

Florida DEP Program Partners with Communities to Clean Up Pollution and Revitalize Economy

~DEP's Brownfields Program Annual Report highlights successes~

August 10, 2011

TALLAHASSEE —The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) recently released the Florida Brownfields Redevelopment Program Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2010 - 2011. Submitted each year to the Governor, President of the Senate and Speaker of the House of Representatives, the report describes DEP's progress and level of activity in implementing the Florida Brownfields Redevelopment Act. The report documents the Program's continued success in revitalizing brownfield areas despite current economic challenges.

“The Florida Brownfields Program empowers communities, local governments and other stakeholders to work together to assess, clean up and reuse sites that have been previously impacted by pollutants,” said DEP Secretary Herschel T. Vinyard Jr. “Once the cleanup is complete and the site is redeveloped, brownfields can significantly benefit local economies through job creation and capital investment opportunities.”

Brownfields are properties where expansion, redevelopment or reuse may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of environmental pollution. Established in 1997, the Florida Brownfields Redevelopment Program utilizes economic and regulatory incentives to encourage the use of private revenue to clean up and redevelop sites, create new jobs and enhance the local economy. To make the program's incentives available to a community, a local government must designate a brownfields area by resolution. Currently, 279 brownfield areas have been designated statewide, some of which are located in economically depressed neighborhoods.

Program highlights from July 2010 through June 2011 include:

- From January 2010 through December 2010, 2,372 projected new direct jobs, 3,057 projected new indirect jobs and over \$128 million in projected new capital investment were attributable to the Program. To date in calendar year 2011, 1,556 projected new direct jobs, 1,312 projected new indirect jobs and \$76 million in projected new capital investment are attributable to the Program.
- Sixteen municipalities and county governments approved local resolutions that designated 17 additional brownfield areas.
- Thirteen brownfield site rehabilitation agreements were executed, bringing the program total to 159.
- Ten brownfield sites completed cleanup of contamination. Forty-seven brownfield sites have completed cleanup since inception of the program.
- DEP received 40 tax credit applications totaling almost \$5 million for site rehabilitation work completed at brownfields sites in 2010.

To view the report, please visit:

www.dep.state.fl.us/waste/categories/brownfields/default.htm.

Louisiana Office of Coastal Management's Recent Mitigation Initiatives

By Keith Lovell

Evaluation of OCM Mitigation Program

The OCM recently completed a yearlong comprehensive evaluation of the state's entire Coastal Mitigation Program. This evaluation process led to the development of a white paper that provides the research, statistics and other information required to support all recommendations for implementing programmatic change. The OCM formally presented these findings to the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) on Wednesday, December 8, 2010.

The DNR's Coastal Management Program strives to implement sustainable and meaningful mitigation for permitted activities to complement the critical mission and objectives of the Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast (2007). The New Orleans Corps District must be brought to the realization that current federal mitigation rules for Wyoming, Montana and Nebraska are not appropriate for coastal Louisiana. Mitigation Banks need to locate where they more appropriately compensate for habitat impacts. In addition, there is a strong need for a robust and flexible in lieu fee mitigation option; both are necessary to better complement the goals and objectives of the state's Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast. DNR has been garnering stakeholder support through ongoing outreach efforts by initiating conversations with mitigation bank sponsors and investors and has concurrently been actively and directly engaged with other State and Federal agencies seeking programmatic change since this information was presented to the CPRA in December 2010.

Modified Charleston Method (MCM) Update:

On May 1, 2011, the New Orleans District of the Corps of Engineers (NODCOE) Regulatory Branch began utilizing the Modified Charleston Method (MCM) as its primary method of quantifying impacts and determining mitigation needs for projects authorized by Department of the Army permits. Over the upcoming months, OCM will concurrently utilize the MCM and the Wetland Value Assessment (WVA) habitat evaluation methodology to fully research and document the similarities and differences between

these two separate methodologies. OCM's Local Coastal Program staff will comprehensively train Local Coastal Program personnel in any revisions made to state mitigation assessment procedures.

OCM believes the MCM has the potential to offer real solutions for current inadequacies with regard to compensatory mitigation assessment. OCM understands that at a time when our local, state and federal regulatory agencies are being asked to do more with less, the MCM will provide the regulatory community with a habitat assessment tool that is quick, efficient, transparent and predictable. Louisiana administrative procedures require formal rule making processes to be followed in order to implement the use of alternative compensatory mitigation evaluation tools; however, OCM is supportive of the NODCOE's decision to implement the MCM at this time but has offered comments and suggested revisions to the MCM which the NODCOE is currently considering. These suggested revisions and/or adjustments to the MCM that OCM would like for the NODCOE to make would bring mitigation quantities more in line with what OCM feels is appropriate.

Louisiana Coastal In Lieu Fee Program Update:

OCM has been actively and aggressively developing the state's Coastal In Lieu Fee Program Instrument with the cooperation of the NODCOE mitigation staff and the NODCOE's Interagency Review Team (IRT). To fully comply with all requirements of the revised federal mitigation regulations promulgated in 2008, the State must revamp its current in-lieu fee program. Currently, making a contribution to the Louisiana Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Fund serves as the state's in-lieu fee program.

The revised federal regulations also established performance standards and criteria for in-lieu fee programs to improve the quality and success of compensatory mitigation projects. The OCM is in the process of developing, with the cooperation of NODCOE staff, an in-lieu fee program that will comply with these new federal regulations. The In-Lieu Fee Program's Prospectus was placed on public notice on April 26, 2010. Since that time, OCM has been actively developing its Program instrument and responding to IRT agency comments.

On May 19, 2011, OCM submitted its revised In-Lieu Fee Instrument and provided a response to comment document. It is also noteworthy that approximately two-thirds of the time spent developing the program has been devoted to public notice periods and extensive review by the NODCOE and the IRT. For additional information regarding OCM's mitigation program please contact Keith Lovell at 225.342.9052 or by email keith.lovell@la.gov.

Louisiana OCM's Beneficial Use of Dredged Material and Permit Processing Improvements Updates

By Karl Morgan

New rules and regulations for Beneficial Use of Dredged Material went into effect on October 10, 2009. Since that time, there have been a total of 19 instances and approximately 975,000 cubic yards of material associated with those 19 projects. In 14 of those 19 projects/instances, the applicant chose to make a beneficial use contribution in lieu of using the material beneficially. Thirteen of those 14 were received during the year 2010, totaling \$412,503. The total amount received since the new rules went into effect is \$415,262.00. These funds will be used to supplement and enlarge coastal restoration projects on the state or local level. This initiative has resulted in an increase of beneficial use from 22% of the time to 100% while at the same time reducing permitting processing times. In fact, permit processing times have improved by 45% since 2008 and these new regulations have contributed to those improvements.

Part of the permit process involves a three step sequencing process of "avoid, minimize, and mitigate" to first reduce impacts to coastal resources and then to mitigate for those unavoidable impacts. During the review period, for the year 2010, 128 acres of wetland habitat was saved during the permit review process through avoidance and minimization of impacts.

Atchafalaya Basin Natural Resource Inventory Assessment System Now Available Online

Tuesday, July 5, 2011

BATON ROUGE – The Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is pleased to announce that the Atchafalaya Basin Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment System (ABNRIAS) is now available online at <http://abp.cr.usgs.gov/>

“The Department of Natural Resources is proud to have led the collaborative effort of state and federal agencies to develop a system that is useful not only to scientists who collect valuable information for the improvement of the area, but also to the people of Louisiana and its visitors who take advantage of the Sportsman’s Paradise of the Basin, enjoying world class fishing, hunting, canoeing, hiking and other outdoor activities.” said DNR Secretary Scott Angelle

This system that was approved in the FY2010 Annual Basin Plan and funded by the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA), will serve not only as the primary tool for decision making in the Basin for the Atchafalaya Basin Technical Advisory Group, but also as an important information portal for the many stakeholders of the Atchafalaya Basin. This system has been developed as a cooperative effort between the DNR, CPRA, United States Geological Survey (USGS), United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF), and Louisiana State University School of Renewable Natural Resources.

“This system is vital to our restoration and conservation efforts in the Atchafalaya Basin and allows us to plan projects that will improve water quality and are cost effective” said Louis Buatt, Assistant Secretary of DNR’s Office of Coastal Management.

The latest information available on the Atchafalaya Basin may be accessed through the ABNRIAS including Elevation Data (LIDAR), Satellite Imagery, Historical Survey Maps, Project Information, Presentations, and many other items that are of interest. The ABNRIAS was developed with input from a number of stakeholders in the Basin whose suggestions were incorporated into the development of the system. Continued feedback from users will provide a means to continue to improve this system as a user friendly natural resource management system that is beneficial to scientists as well as every day users of the basin.

"The Atchafalaya Basin Program Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment System is a huge step forward in providing visibility into water conditions within the Floodway and the processes that drive the health of the Great Swamp," according to Charles Caillouet of the Friends of the Atchafalaya.

The ABNRIAS is a web based system that serves as a clearinghouse of information that is collected or developed regarding the Atchafalaya Basin. It includes custom tools that will assist users in both navigating the basin, managing resources, identifying public lands and boat launches and review or develop projects for the Annual Basin Plan. The system is also a repository of data that is collected in the Basin so that everyone will be able to view and use this information.

“Those of us who hunt and fish in the Basin will now be able to see and use the information that is collected by the scientific organizations, and compare to what we see. That will help us to take an active role in the project planning process,” said Carroll Delahoussaye, St. Martin Parish Councilman.

“This system is a powerful tool to assist with the management of resources in the Atchafalaya Basin,” added Vic Blanchard, President of the Louisiana Landowners Association.

Mississippi Department of Marine Resources Rebuilds and Restores Oyster Reefs



Photo: Courtesy of Mississippi Department of Marine Resources.

Mississippi oyster reefs are being replenished by dispersing oyster shell and limestone material off the barges onto the reefs.

123 feet long and 30 feet wide. The other is 34,681 cubic yards of limestone material traveling down the Mississippi River, roughly 430 miles, to the Mississippi Gulf Coast on hopper barges, which are 195 feet long and 35 feet wide.

Once the material arrives, high pressure hoses are used to disperse the oyster shell and limestone material off the barges onto the reefs. The oyster reefs being replenished are St. Joe's Reef, Pass Marianne Reef, Telegraph Reef, Henderson Point Reef and Pass Christian Tonging Reef.

Oyster larvae swim around in the water for approximately three weeks, then descend to the bottom of the sound and permanently attach themselves to the oyster shell and limestone material where they will grow. Within 18 to 24 months the oysters will be ready to harvest. So get your lemons and horseradish ready!

The project is funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Emergency Disaster Recovery Programs I and II.

The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources is dedicated to enhancing, protecting and conserving marine interests of the state by managing all marine life, public trust wetlands, adjacent uplands and waterfront areas to provide for the optimal commercial, recreational, educational and economic uses of these resources consistent with environmental concerns and social changes. Visit the MDMR online at www.dmr.ms.gov.

Mississippi CMR Approves Marine Turtle Study Resolution

BILOXI, Miss. – The Mississippi Commission on Marine Resources (CMR) voted unanimously to approve a Marine Turtle Study Resolution, which was presented to them for approval Tuesday, at the Aug. 16 CMR meeting.

The approved resolution was submitted to the U.S. Department of Commerce National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and requested a comprehensive Gulf of Mexico sea turtle population and distribution study to provide vital baseline data on the status of current sea turtle populations and furthermore, to more fully investigate all possible causes of sea turtle mortality.

The Marine Turtle Study Resolution acknowledges that increased turtle strandings are occurring in the northern Gulf of Mexico states, and there is a need to explore all options because timing of increased strandings does not correlate with spatial distribution of shrimping effort. The resolution also acknowledges the numerous proactive precautionary measures that have been taken by the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) to address fisheries interactions, which may affect sea turtles in state waters.

Additionally, the Marine Turtle Study Resolution states that the CMR's management of marine sea turtles is essential, and recognizes the need to know the status and distribution of the listed sea turtle species in the state and all Gulf of Mexico waters before enacting regulations, which may severely impact shrimp fisheries and dependent communities within the Mississippi Coast region.

The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources is dedicated to enhancing, protecting and conserving marine interests of the state by managing all marine life, public trust wetlands, adjacent uplands and waterfront areas to provide for the optimal commercial, recreational, educational and economic uses of these resources consistent with environmental concerns and social changes. Visit the DMR online at www.dmr.ms.gov.

Texas Adopt-A-Beach Volunteers Find the Coast is Pretty Clear

25th Annual Texas General Land Office Adopt-A-Beach Fall Cleanup draws 9,133 volunteers

September 26, 2011

AUSTIN — More volunteers picked up less trash at the 25 th Annual Texas General Land Office Adopt-A-Beach Fall Cleanup Saturday, prompting speculation that - after 25 years - Texans are starting to get the message.

"Despite an amazing turnout, we picked up 20-percent less trash than last fall," said Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson. "From Sabine Pass to Boca Chica, there was just less trash to be picked up. I think people get it: Trashing Texas Beaches isn't Cool."

A total of 9,133 volunteers picked up 136 tons of trash from 28 sites along 180 miles of the Texas coast Saturday. Volunteers this year even reported finding fewer unusual items. Aside from a jock strap on South Padre Island, some Vietnamese toothpaste on Galveston Island, a pornographic video tape at Surfside and some Costa Rican coins in Calhoun County, volunteers mostly picked up a pedestrian mixture of cigarette butts and beer cans and other common items left by careless beachgoers.

The success of the Adopt-A-Beach program is due to the hard work and support of thousands of volunteers, including local coordinators who work many unpaid hours publicizing the cleanups in coastal communities. Since the beginning, 25 years ago, Shell Oil Company has supported the effort. Since 1986, more than 422,000 Adopt-A-Beach volunteers have picked up more than 8,100 tons of trash from Texas beaches, some of it originating from as far away as Asia. Volunteers record data on the trash to learn more about the causes of marine debris and to help mitigate pollution along Texas' 367 miles of coastline.

The next coastwide cleanup will be the Spring Adopt-A-Beach effort scheduled for Saturday, April 28, 2012. To learn more about items collected at the cleanup, and for information on the health of the Texas coast, visit the Adopt-A-Beach program Web site at www.texasadoptabeach.org, or contact the Texas General Land Office at 1-877-TXCOAST (1-877-892-6278). Keep up with all Adopt-A-Beach activities by joining us on Facebook, just search "Texas Adopt-A-Beach" to find our page on Facebook and click "like."

Mission-Aransas NERR Research Coordinator Leads Key Research Project to Study the Effects of DWH Oil Spill

Dr. Ed Buskey, Research Coordinator for the Mission-Aransas NERR and a faculty member at University of Texas at Austin Marine Science Institute (UTMSI), is the lead investigator on a team of scientists who were recently identified as one of eight Research Consortia studying the effects of the Deepwater Horizon (DWH) oil spill on the Gulf of Mexico. The Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative (GRI) Research Board awarded \$7 million to Dr. Buskey's team, who will be investigating the "Impact of Biological, Physical and Chemical Processes on the Fate of Oil Spills – bridging small scale processes with meso-scale modeling". As the lead investigator, Dr. Buskey's a team includes researchers from Johns Hopkins University, University of Pennsylvania, University of Minnesota, SINTEF Norway, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Research Applied Technology Education Services (Rates)/Coastal Oil Spill Simulation System (COSS). Contact: Matt.Chasse@noaa.gov.

State and Corporate Leaders in El Paso for U.S.-Mexico Border Energy Forum

Aug 24, 2011

AUSTIN — Top business leaders will meet with government officials from all ten border states to plan for the future during the U.S.-Mexico Border Energy Forum at the El Paso Convention Center Oct. 27-28.

This year's forum - the 18 th annual - will be bigger than ever, coinciding with the Re-Energize the America's conference focusing on clean energy development for the Paso del Norte region of Texas, New Mexico, and Chihuahua.

"This forum was founded by the General Land Office in 1994 to share information about energy and environmental issues on both sides of the border," said Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson, a speaker at the forum. "The idea is to provide policy planners with the best information available so they can make wise decisions, forge partnerships and work for the region as a whole."

The U.S.-Mexico Border Energy Forum helps top leaders track developments affecting the natural gas markets, seek more interconnections for electricity and natural gas and find new partners for developing renewable resources, especially wind and solar. The Forum strives to bring all sectors to the table - local, state, and federal governments from both sides of the border, energy producers as well as industrial consumers, environmental organizations and academic researchers.

The Forum is intended to promote sensible use of energy throughout the American Southwest and northern Mexico, working together to be leaders for continental cooperation.

Among the key issues on the agenda are wind and solar power, smart grid and electric transmission, doing business in the border states, energy efficiency and water systems, financing energy projects and infrastructure, and energy security.

The forum is a non-profit event coordinated by the Texas General Land Office in collaboration with numerous public and private sector organizations. For more information on the Border Energy Forum, please visit www.borderenergyforum.org.

Mission-Aransas NERR's New Estuarine Research Center

The University of Texas at Austin Marine Science Institute officially opened its newest building, the Estuarine Research Center, this past weekend in Port Aransas, TX. Built in partnership between The University of Texas at Austin, NOAA and the Texas General Land Office; the sustainably designed building will serve as the headquarters for the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR), a 185,708-acre protected area of estuarine habitat established in 2006.

The facility significantly expands the research and educational capacity of the Reserve and the Institute with two floors of state-of-the-art marine laboratories and offices. "This new facility represents a significant expansion of our expertise in coastal ecology, and we are especially proud that it was designed and constructed in an environmentally responsible way," said Dr. Lee Fuiman, director of the Marine Science Institute.

Dr. Larry Robinson, assistant secretary of commerce for conservation and management and NOAA deputy administrator joined more than 150 UT staff, dignitaries and citizens at a ribbon cutting and opening ceremony for the 21 million dollar facility. "Partnerships and cutting-edge facilities such as this one are concrete examples of science, service and stewardship in action," said Dr. Larry Robinson. "This facility will bring the reserve's research, training and monitoring capabilities under one roof and allow scientists to conduct research critical to protecting and sustaining Texas' coastal communities and ecosystems."

The building is the first educational facility in South Texas constructed for certification by Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) at the silver level, and includes a number of innovative features that decrease its impact on the sensitive coastal environment while also protecting it from hurricanes and extreme coastal temperatures and winds. Contact: Matt.Chasse@noaa.gov.

Changes Put Ike and Dolly Rebuilding Efforts on Fast Track

Jul 08, 2011

AUSTIN — Hurricane disaster recovery in Texas will be put on the fast track as the Texas General Land Office expands its rebuilding role following Dolly and Ike. The Land Office is now the lead state agency managing disaster recovery grants through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Gov. Rick Perry informed federal officials the change - effective July 1 - would bring more accountability to the state's multi-billion dollar hurricane disaster recovery efforts.

The Land Office already has an extensive background in disaster recovery. After hurricanes Dolly and Ike, the agency successfully coordinated the cleanup of the Texas coast. The Land Office's management of the additional disaster recovery grants will provide local communities a single contact, cut bureaucratic red tape and reduce administrative costs.

Disaster recovery efforts from Dolly and Ike affect more than 11 million Texans - or about 45 percent - in 62 counties. The Land Office will continue to contract with HNTB for program management. The San Antonio-based, employee-owned engineering, architecture and planning firm has played a crucial role in the state's success in recovering from Dolly and Ike.

Transition to Land Office management of the state's post-hurricane disaster recovery grant programs has been smooth. In July, the Land Office will award more than \$197 million worth of disaster recovery grants for Round 2, Phase 1 of the ongoing program. Previous awards from this program have gone to

rebuild the main wastewater treatment plant in Galveston, three bridges in Jefferson County, a community emergency shelter in Nacogdoches County, a new fire station in Orange, and backup generators for La Feria and Midway among other things.

The Land Office will work to quicken the pace of rebuilding and repairing damaged homes. When completed the disaster recovery program will repair or replace more than 10,000 single-family homes or rental homes.

Other News

Gulf Coast Task Force Releases Ecosystem Restoration Strategy For Public Review

Agenda outlines blueprint for reversing decline of Gulf Coast ecosystem

October 5, 2011

WASHINGTON - The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force, chaired by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa P. Jackson, today released for public review and feedback its comprehensive preliminary strategy for long term ecosystem restoration. The strategy, which will be presented to President Obama at the end of the public review period, represents an historic opportunity for addressing long-standing issues contributing to the decline of the Gulf's critical ecosystem. The preliminary strategy is the first effort of its kind to be developed with the involvement of parties throughout the region, including the states, tribes, federal agencies, local governments and thousands of interested citizens and organizations. The plan strategy, which builds upon on-going efforts underway in the Gulf Coast states includes specific steps for on-the-ground action and represents the Task Force's commitment to putting Gulf coastal restoration on an equal footing with other national priorities.

One year ago today, President Obama established the Task Force by executive order, in response to recommendations from a report by Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus, to continue the Administration's ongoing commitment to the Gulf region. The group is made up of representatives from the five Gulf States and 11 federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, Council on Environmental Quality, Department of the Interior, Department of Commerce, Department of Defense, Department of Agriculture, Department of Justice, Department of Transportation, Office of Management and Budget, Office of Science and Technology Policy and Domestic Policy Council.

"Even before last year's oil spill, the Gulf of Mexico endured decades of decline that threatened the environmental and economic health of this region. This strategy is designed to prepare the region for transitioning from a response to the spill into a long-term recovery that supports the vital ecosystem and the people who depend on it," said Administrator Jackson. "The health of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem starts and ends with its people and its communities. The individuals and families who visit the Gulf, who work in the region, who depend on its resources, and especially those who call it home, know its needs and challenges best. They will be integral to creating and executing this long-term strategy."

"The Task Force's draft strategy identifies fundamental obstacles that have plagued restoration and protection efforts in Louisiana and other states for decades. The report attempts to begin reversing 80 years of mismanagement," said Garret Graves, Task Force vice-chair and chair of the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana. "It identifies critical issues such as changes in river management, the use of dredged sediment, navigation channel bank stabilization, and the need to expedite the snail's pace process of implementing water resources projects. History has proven that being reactive on disaster

mitigation costs exponentially more. This report is an important first step in moving toward a proactive strategy as recognized through the implementation of the state's coastal master plan. There is much work still left to be done and we look forward to continuing to work with Task Force agencies and our fellow Gulf States to finally stabilize our coast and protect the Gulf communities.”

The natural resources of the Gulf’s ecosystem are vital to many of the region’s industries that directly support economic progress and job creation, including tourism and recreation, seafood production and sales, energy production and navigation and commerce. Among the major initiatives with specific actions recommended by the preliminary strategy to protect and restore those natural resources are:

1) Stopping the Loss of Wetlands

Stopping the loss of critical wetlands, sand barriers and beaches is a key recommendation of the preliminary strategy. Key habitats for a wide range of fish and other animals are being lost or reduced across the Gulf. The creation of channels and levees from dredging in the Lower Mississippi often can “disconnect” the vast wetland delta from the source of sediments that built the delta over thousands of years. The strategy aims to restore the supply of sediments needed to build up eroding wetlands and to ultimately reconnect these valuable resources to their historic source of sediments, particularly in the Lower Mississippi. To help do this, the strategy recommends placing ecosystem restoration on an equal footing with historic uses such as navigation and flood damage reduction by approaching water resource management decisions in a far more comprehensive manner that will bypass harm to wetlands, barrier islands and beaches. The strategy also recommends implementation of several congressionally authorized projects in the Gulf, including the Louisiana Coastal Area authorization, that are intended to reverse the trend of wetlands loss.

2) Reducing the Flow of Nutrients into the Gulf

The strategy calls for working in the Gulf and upstream in the Mississippi watershed to reduce the flow of nutrients into the Gulf by supporting state nutrient reduction frameworks, new nutrient reduction approaches, and targeted watershed work to reduce agricultural and urban sources of nutrients. The strategy recommends addressing the complex issues surrounding the transport of nutrients in excess to our Gulf coast by broadly supporting action-oriented innovations from all sectors that address both the environmental as well as the economics of effective nutrient management.

3) Enhancing Resiliency Among Coastal Communities

The strategy calls for enhancing the quality of life of Gulf residents by working in partnership with Gulf with coastal communities themselves -- the living laboratories for facing the challenges posed. The strategy specifically recommends working with each of the States to build the integrated capacity needed through effective coastal improvement plans to better secure the future of their coastal communities and to implement existing efforts underway, such as the Mississippi Coastal Improvement Plan.

Additionally, the Task Force will begin immediately reviewing existing policies, programs and regulations that are slowing down restoration progress, particularly in the habitat restoration area. The Task Force will also explore innovative ways to implement restoration, measure success and support the restoration with science.

This preliminary strategy represents the Task Force’s strong commitment to the restoration of the Gulf Coast. The strategy was developed following more than 40 public meetings throughout the Gulf to listen to the concerns of the public. It is available to the public for review and feedback at www.epa.gov/gulfcoasttaskforce, until 11:59 p.m. EST October 26, 2011. The Task Force will release the final version in December.

July 2011 Coastal Management News

The July 2011 edition of Coastal Management News is now available. Coastal Management News is a quarterly newsletter highlighting activities from state and territory coastal management programs. Check out the newsletter online at <http://coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/news/czmnewsletter.html>. Inside you'll find the following stories:

- Maryland Builds Resilience to Climate Change Through CoastSmart Communities
- Ohio Releases New Design Manual for Coastal Structures
- Beach Restoration on Marianas Preserves Access
- OCRM Incorporates Ocean Plan into Rhode Island's Coastal Program
- Alaska Withdraws from the National CZM Program
- New York Implements Consistency Review Data Management System
- Updated MPA Mapping Tool Available from MPA Center
- CELCP Updates
- NOAA Spotlight: NOAA Coastal Storms Program Helps Protect Coastal Communities

CZMA Climate Change and Coastal Hazards E-News Update

New CZMA Climate Change and Coastal Hazards E-News Updates are now available [online](#). The Coastal Programs Division of NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management distributes the CZMA Climate Change and Coastal Hazards E-News Update to keep state and territory coastal program managers and climate change/coastal hazards staff informed about climate change (as it pertains to coastal hazards) and coastal hazards activities.

Conferences and Workshops

21st Biennial CERF Conference -- Societies, Estuaries and Coasts: Adapting to Change

November 6-10, 2011
Daytona Beach, Florida, USA

This year's theme reflects a growing realization that human societies are an integral component of ecosystems and the dynamics of these societies and ecosystems are interactive - their futures are interdependent. Nowhere is this more evident than in the estuaries and coastal zones of the planet, where human populations are concentrated, typically dominating estuarine watersheds and affecting their linkage with the local, regional, and global dynamics of the coastal ocean. CERF as a professional scientific society has increasingly focused not only on understanding causes of ecosystem change but providing information necessary to manage anthropogenic changes that have impacted the biodiversity and sustainability of estuarine and coastal systems.

This conference will highlight new findings and perspectives of the interactive dynamics of diverse ecosystems and human societies, and in particular, explore how these dynamics can only be understood and managed when addressed at regional and global scales. To a greater extent than in previous CERF conferences this will include an effort to specifically address socioeconomic drivers and responses.

Contact Information:

Conference Management
5400 Bosque Blvd Ste 680 • Waco, TX, 76710
Ph: (254) 776-3550 • Fax: (254) 776-3767
cerf2011@sgmeet.com

Home Page URL: <http://www.sgmeet.com/cerf2011/>

ECM12: Twelfth International Conference on Estuarine and Coastal Modeling

Using Modeling to Solve Engineering and Environmental Assessment Problems

November 7 - 9, 2011

Specific topics and sessions will be confirmed upon review of the abstracts. Suggestions for topics are welcomed. Please contact the conference chairman for further coordination. A variety of presentation possibilities will be available. Three concurrent sessions will be underway each day. Sessions will be a mix of traditional technical sessions, panel discussions, poster/computer presentations, and mini-symposia. Accepted abstracts, conference program, and instruction to the authors for preparation of manuscripts will be posted at www.regonline.com/920730 when they are available.

Online Registration

The coordinator for this conference is Joseph Pittle. A website has been developed that includes online registration, hotel information, online abstract form, access to submitted abstracts for further editing and currently submitted abstracts. The address is: www.regonline.com/920730

Location:

The Renaissance Resort
500 South Legacy Trail
St Augustine, Florida 32092
Tel: +1 904-940-8635

Conference registration fees:

- Professional \$495 (Early Bird by Sept. 1, 2011), \$550 After Sept. 1, 2011
- Student \$145 (Early Bird by Sept. 1, 2011), \$180 After Sept. 1, 2011
- Onsite registration will be available for an additional fee of \$100. Please pre-register to attend ECM12.

6th Symposium on Harmful Algae in the U.S.

November 13-17, 2011
Austin, Texas, USA

The 6th Symposium on Harmful Algae in the US will be convened in Austin, Texas near the University of Texas. We will begin Sunday evening with a Welcome Mixer. Scientific sessions will run Monday-Thursday from 8-4, poster sessions 4- 6 on M & T, Banquet & Dancing Wednesday evening 6:30 - midnight, and Thursday night will be free to enjoy Austin. This Symposium is open to all researchers and managers working on HABs in the US.

Contact Information: Deanna Erdner: ushabsymposium@gmail.com
Lisa Campbell: ushabsymposium@gmail.com
Home Page URL: <http://oceanz.tamu.edu/~campbell/6thUSHAB/welcome.html>
Links to Event resources: [Abstracts and registration](#)

State of the Gulf of Mexico - Summit II

Hosted by the Harte Research Institute (HRI)

December 4-8, 2011

Omni Galleria Hotel, Houston, Texas

Visit the conference website: <http://www.sgmsummit.org/>

Registration for the State of the Gulf of Mexico Summit 2011 is open.

[Register Now!](#)

2011 State of the Gulf of Mexico Summit Overview

The Harte Research Institute, an endowed research component of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi dedicated to sustainable use and conservation of the Gulf of Mexico, hosted the first State of the Gulf of Mexico Summit in 2005 in Corpus Christi, Texas.

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in spring 2010 has brought new urgency to reconvening the Summit in 2011. The diversity of public and private actors working on conservation and recovery in the Gulf and the very broad range of issues involved (including loss of wetlands, hypoxia, coastal resiliency, ecosystem health, marine protected areas, international cooperation, oil spill recovery, and social and economic recovery) suggests a strong need for a platform to develop a shared vision of a healthy Gulf. The 2011 State of the Gulf of Mexico Summit will provide this platform, allowing government, NGO and academic experts to share knowledge and lessons learned and to formulate a roadmap for restoring the Gulf.

The Summit will be preceded by a number of events and processes that will inform the Summit on the most current authoritative technical and scientific on key Gulf topics, including in July 2011 at the one-year anniversary of the capping of the Deepwater Horizon well.

Other Sources of Information for the Gulf of Mexico Region

The following websites provide information about activities, announcements, and events in the Gulf of Mexico region.

[Restore the Gulf](#)

RestoretheGulf.gov is the official federal portal for the Deepwater BP oil spill response and recovery. This site provides the public with information on the response, current operations, news and updates, how to file a claim and obtain other assistance, and links to federal, state and local partners.

[NOAA Gulf Spill Restoration](#)

NOAA and [other federal and state agencies](#) are leading efforts to assess impacts to, and determine appropriate restoration for, Gulf resources injured by the Deepwater BP oil spill. We are in the process of identifying the types of restoration activities that will be appropriate to restore the natural resources impacted by the spill. This is a key step in the ongoing [Natural Resource Damage Assessment](#) for the spill. Through the process, you will have the chance to give us your feedback on what projects are important to restore the affected resources after the spill. You can make your voice heard by [submitting a project idea](#). You can also [view projects](#) that have been submitted for consideration.

The restoration planning process involves many steps and includes input from scientists, experts, and the public. Restoration can take many years and requires the work of many dedicated people. NOAA will continue this work until the Gulf of Mexico is restored to its pre-spill condition. Over the years, NOAA has been involved with 380 restoration projects in the Gulf. NOAA's restoration scientists and specialists in the Gulf states have been providing technical assistance, coordination, and funding for restoration to many local organizations. Learn more about NOAA's restoration projects in the Gulf using our interactive [Restoration Atlas](#).

[Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force](#)

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force was created by President Obama through an [Executive Order](#) (PDF) (5pp, 69K, [About PDF](#)) on October 5, 2010, and is the result of a recommendation made in [Secretary Mabus' report](#) (PDF) (122pp, 9MB, [About PDF](#)) on long term recovery following the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. By October 5, 2011, the Task Force is charged with development of a restoration strategy that proposes a Gulf Coast ecosystem restoration agenda. The task force is directed to:

- Define ecosystem restoration goals and describe milestones towards reaching those goals;
- Consider existing research and ecosystem restoration planning efforts;
- Identify major policy areas where coordinated actions between government agencies is needed; and
- Evaluate existing research and monitoring programs and gaps in data collection

The Task Force is an advisory body comprised of lead officials from the five Gulf states appointed by the President upon recommendation of each Governor, and 11 Federal agencies and White House offices. The Environmental Protection Agency's [Administrator, Lisa P. Jackson](#), serves as Chair of the Task Force and the Chair of the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana, [Garret Graves](#), serves as Vice-chair. [John Hankinson](#) serves as Executive Director.

[Gulf of Mexico Alliance](#)

[The Gulf of Mexico Alliance](#) is a partnership of the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, with the goal of significantly increasing regional collaboration to enhance the ecological and economic health of the Gulf of Mexico.

Other Gulf of Mexico Alliance Related Links

Partnerships throughout the Gulf-region are developing between universities, governments, businesses, and others. Local non-profits are becoming more and more a part of the decision-

making process in the gulf. Some of the partnerships and organizations listed below provide opportunities for collaboration with the Alliance.

[Alliance Environmental Education Network Website](#)

[Support the Gulf](#)

[Alliance Diversity Website](#)

[Alliance Environmental Education Network digital library](#)

[Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative](#)

The mission of the Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative (GRI) is to improve society's ability to understand and mitigate the impacts of hydrocarbon pollution and stressors of the marine environment, with an emphasis on conditions found in the Gulf of Mexico. In addition, the knowledge accrued will be applied not only to resolve, but also to improve the long-term environmental health of the Gulf of Mexico.

[Gulf of Mexico Coastal Training](#)

Gulf of Mexico Coastal Training is a unique collaboration between the five Gulf Coast National Estuarine Research Reserve Coastal Training Programs. Through the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas are now working together to address priority issues affecting the entire Gulf of Mexico region. Gulf of Mexico Coastal Training is educating professional audiences and coastal communities across each of the five Gulf States using shared information and technology. From coastal community resilience to habitat conservation, topics covered in Gulf of Mexico Coastal Training workshops address priority issues and promote activities that improve the health of the Gulf of Mexico.

Gulf of Mexico Coastal Training hosts regular workshops that cover one or more Gulf of Mexico Alliance priority issues. [You can view and sort through upcoming and past workshops on the Workshops page.](#)

Did you find this edition useful? Please send suggestions, comments, and new items for publication to



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<http://www.coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/>

<http://coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/news/gomexnews.html>