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NOAA Gulf of Mexico News

NOAA Report Shows Rich Diversity Across U.S. Fishing Communities

March 26, 2009



The Fishermen's memorial in Gloucester, Mass.
[High resolution](#) (Credit: NOAA)

A new report by [NOAA's Fisheries Service](#) detailing the diverse demographics of 222 American saltwater fishing communities will help the agency design management strategies that will lead to more sustainable fisheries.

“Fisheries management depends on an understanding of how people in coastal communities interact with marine ecosystems and how their economies work,” said Jim Balsiger, NOAA assistant administrator for NOAA’s Fisheries Service. “This report gives a clearer picture of the people living in America’s fishing communities and their needs.”

Fishing Communities of the United States, 2006 is NOAA’s first national reference guide featuring snapshots of selected fishing communities and ports from the nation’s 23 coastal states. The ports that are profiled were chosen by experts around the country, primarily on the basis of commercial fisheries landings in 2006 and the historical significance of fishing in a community. The report is a companion to the recently released Fisheries Economics of the United States, 2006.

The report shows that fishing communities range in size from small Downeast communities such as Winter Harbor, Maine, pop. 988, to cities such as San Diego, Calif., pop. 1,223,400. Some have large populations of people who speak a language other than English at home such as Ni’ihau, Hawaii (93.1 percent), while others have far fewer such as Theodore, Ala. where all but 2.8 percent of persons speak English at home.

Statewide trends from 1997 to 2006 about the number of building permits issued, fishery disaster declarations made, and unemployment rates also are included. This helps show which communities are experiencing some of the most rapid development or the most economic distress.

The report also contains information on education levels, poverty levels and ethnicity to help paint a clearer picture of each of these coastal towns and cities and how they compare to other communities in their states and the nation.



Fishermen mending nets in Dulac, La.
[High resolution](#) (Credit: NOAA)

The report is the culmination of several years of data collection and analysis. NOAA plans to update this report once the agency has information from the upcoming 2010 national census.

Fishing Communities of the United States, 2006 is available [online](#). Hard copies are forthcoming. NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources.

NOAA - Emergency Managers to Test Atlantic/Gulf Tsunami Warning and Response

First Coordinated Drill for Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Locations

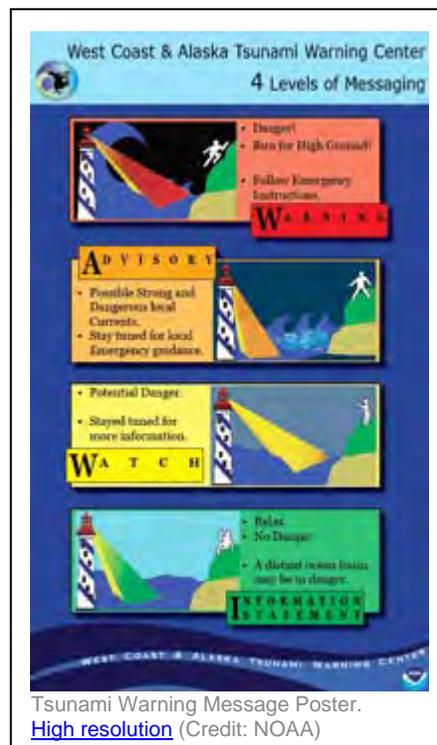
Residents and visitors along the Atlantic coasts of the United States and Canada, the Gulf of Mexico, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands should not be alarmed when they hear tsunami test messages broadcast over their televisions and radios on Thursday, April 2, 2009. That day, at 9:00 a.m. EDT (8:00 a.m. CDT), officials will test the region's communication and response plans to help communities prepare for a tsunami.

Co-sponsored by NOAA and the [U.S. National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program](#), this is the first region-wide tsunami warning test to include the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coasts of the United States, Canadian Atlantic Provinces, and the U.S. Caribbean Territories and Commonwealths. [NOAA's Tsunami Warning Center in Palmer, Alaska](#), will commence the exercise by issuing a test bulletin through tsunami warning communication channels. The test bulletin, clearly marked "test message", will prompt local officials to implement their tsunami response plans.

During this exercise, some communities in Puerto Rico will conduct evacuation drills while participating emergency management agencies on the U.S. East and Gulf coasts will conduct preparedness activities, such as workshops and table-top exercises. Upon completion of the exercise, participants will evaluate the effectiveness of their tsunami preparedness plans and make adjustments as necessary.

The United States expanded its tsunami warning system and preparedness activities in 2005 after a devastating tsunami in the Indian Ocean struck the coasts of several countries including Sumatra, Indonesia, with little or no warning, killing nearly 230,000 people. The Indian Ocean region was considered to have a relatively low risk for a destructive tsunami.

"The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami raised awareness about the urgent need to be prepared," said Jack Hayes, director of [NOAA's National Weather Service](#). "This important exercise will test the Tsunami Warning System to identify operational strengths and weaknesses in each community that takes part." The exercise will increase tsunami preparedness and improve coordination throughout the regions. Coastal residents and visitors are encouraged to prepare their personal tsunami plans prior to this exercise and locate their community's tsunami evacuation routes. The exercise will be cancelled if a real tsunami threat occurs within 24 hours of the test.



Tsunami Warning Message Poster.
[High resolution](#) (Credit: NOAA)

“Don’t Feed Wild Dolphins” Says New Public Service Announcement

Illegal feeding harms both animals and humans

March 11, 2009



Image from animated dolphin public service announcement.

[High resolution](#) (Credit: NOAA)

“Just stop feeding me!” says an animated dolphin in a new public service announcement released today that highlights the dangers of dolphins getting hooked on human handouts. The PSA was produced by a coalition of government agencies and private organizations.

The PSA reminds viewers that feeding wild dolphins is not only illegal, it is harmful to dolphins, even causing some to rely on begging for food from humans, upsetting their natural role as hunters and altering their diets. Feeding wild dolphins is a threat to humans, too. Dolphins sometimes become aggressive when

seeking food and are known to bite when teased.

“Feeding wild dolphins triggers a domino effect of harmful behaviors as dolphins learn to associate people with food and free handouts,” said Stacey Horstman, bottlenose dolphin conservation coordinator for [NOAA’s Fisheries Service](#). “We are at a point where we honestly need to change our behavior so we don’t change theirs, and we hope this PSA provides a compelling plea for the public’s help.”

The health and welfare of wild dolphins is severely compromised when humans feed them. Human-fed dolphins change their normal wild behavior and run a greater risk of being injured by boats, becoming entangled in fishing gear, or ingesting dangerous items such as fishing hooks and contaminated food. Some dolphins have become so accustomed to receiving routine handouts, they are now taking fishing bait and catches from recreational and commercial fishermen. In one recent instance off the Florida panhandle, a bottlenose dolphin distracted by taking fish from a recreational fisherman was attacked by a large shark.

Many scientists have observed illegal dolphin feeding throughout the southeast, especially since NOAA’s Fisheries Service prohibited feeding of wild marine mammals in 1993 under the [Marine Mammal Protection Act](#) (MMPA). Wild dolphin experts were also alerted to this problem through routine complaints from concerned citizens viewing the illegal behavior, and most recently through new videos posted to YouTube showing people feeding wild dolphins off Florida and South Carolina.

“Scientists have known for years that dolphin feeding was a problem in certain hotspot areas in the southeast,” said Laura Engleby, NOAA’s Fisheries Service southeast marine mammal branch chief. “But the citizen complaints and self-implicating Internet media has shocked our experts and further validates that feeding is an increasing and more wide-spread problem than we thought.”

Feeding and harassing wild marine mammals is illegal under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and can result in severe penalties with fines up to \$20,000 and one year in jail for the most serious violations. The PSA can be viewed [online](#), which also has more information on dolphin conservation and guidelines for viewing dolphins responsibly in the wild.

Members of the coalition who helped fund development and distribution of the PSA include NOAA's Fisheries Service, the Marine Mammal Commission, the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution's Protect Wild Dolphins License Plate fund, Mote Marine Laboratory, and members of the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums. Tinsley Advertising of Miami, Fla., created the PSA in partnership with Wit Animation of Santa Monica, Calif.

Supporting Alliance members include Chicago Zoological Society, Disney's Animal Programs, The Dolphin Connection, Dolphin Research Center, Dolphin Quest, Gulf World Marine Park, Marineland's Dolphin Conservation Center, and SeaWorld & Busch Gardens Conservation Fund.

To report marine mammal violations, such as feeding wild dolphins or harassment, please contact NOAA's Fisheries Service Enforcement Hotline at 1-800-853-1964.

NOAA and Partners Recognize Newest Business to Join Dolphin SMART Program

Tour Company Pledges to Follow Wildlife Viewing Guidelines

March 5, 2009

[NOAA's Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary](#), NOAA Fisheries Service and their partners today accepted the fourth charter operator into a program created to help protect wild dolphins in the Keys. Sea Bear Aquatic Adventures officially joined the Dolphin SMART program after successfully meeting standards that promote responsible viewing of dolphins in the wild.

“We are pleased to welcome Sea Bear Aquatic Adventures as the newest Dolphin SMART operator,” said Cmdr. Dave Score, sanctuary superintendent. “The Dolphin SMART program highlights tour operators who promote responsible and sustainable viewing of wild dolphins, ensuring their health and wellbeing for future generations.”



[High resolution](#) (Credit: NOAA)

The Dolphin SMART program was developed by the [NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries](#), [NOAA Fisheries' Protected Resources Program](#), Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and Dolphin Ecology Project. The project is funded by [NOAA Fisheries](#) and the “Protect Wild Dolphins” license plate funds through Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution. The acronym “SMART” is a reminder of the basic principles of dolphin viewing etiquette:

- Stay at least 50 yards from dolphins,
- Move away slowly if the dolphins show signs of disturbance,
- Always put your vessel engine in neutral when dolphins are near,
- Refrain from feeding, touching or swimming with wild dolphins,
- Teach others to be Dolphin SMART.

“The continuing success of our Dolphin SMART program is very gratifying,” said Stacey Horstman, NOAA Fisheries' bottlenose dolphin conservation coordinator. “Safeguarding the local population of wild dolphins requires a community-based approach involving all our various stakeholders, and we greatly appreciate the commitment Dolphin SMART operators are making to help protect the dolphins for future generations.”



[High resolution](#) (Credit: NOAA)

Dolphin SMART-approved charters receive flags and stickers and permission to use the Dolphin SMART logo in their advertising. Each year, participants are evaluated to ensure they continue to meet program standards. By looking for the current year on flags and logos and checking the updated participant list, visitors to the Florida Keys seeking the thrill of seeing dolphins in the wild can ensure the tour operator they select is Dolphin SMART. For more information, visit the [Dolphin SMART](#) Web site or contact program coordinator Megan Harber at 305-809-4700.

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary protects 2,896 square nautical miles of important marine habitat, including maritime heritage resources, as well as coral reef, hard bottom, seagrass meadows, mangrove communities, and sand flats. NOAA and the state of Florida manage the sanctuary. NOAA Fisheries has additional responsibilities for protecting wild dolphins under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources.

NOAA Responds to Urgent Coast Guard Request for Surveys to Prevent Oil Spill Incidents

The Office of Coast Survey (OCS) recently supported the U.S. Coast Guard with rapid response hydrographic surveys following a recent incident when the supertanker SKS Satilla, carrying 41 million gallons of crude oil, struck a submerged hazard in a lightering area south of Galveston Bay. Though the supertanker's port side was ripped open, the double hull and emergency offload of oil prevented a major oil spill. Fearing a second, more disastrous incident, the Coast Guard made an urgent request to NOAA to survey other critical zones for marine debris in this lightering area. Within 24 hours of the request, OCS and NOAA Acquisition and Grants Office had issued a task order to C&C Technology to survey the highest-priority Coast Guard requirements, and 12 hours later, C&C was on site. The Coast Guard's concern was high because the single hull vessel Mirfak Star was scheduled to arrive soon to offload oil to smaller vessels in this lightering zone. Ensuring the safe arrival and lightering operations of the Mirfak Star and other vessels is both a Coast Guard and NOAA priority. The lightering areas off of Texas see very large crude oil ships making regular stops to the area to supply oil to the refineries of Galveston and Port Arthur. For more information, contact [Howard Danley](#).

Tide and Water Level, Storm Surge Training for Gulf Stakeholders

From March 24-26, the Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services (CO-OPS), National Geodetic Survey (NGS), and Office of Coast Survey (OCS) provided training along with the Louisiana State University's Center for Geoinformatics to Gulf Coast stakeholders. The workshop consisted of three, one-day training seminars on the use of tide and water level data for coastal restoration, coastal protection, and coastal/hurricane storm surge projects and programs. Sea level rise, the use of tide and water level data relative to Continuously Operating Reference Stations and the North American Vertical Datum of 1988 were among the number of topics discussed. Applications and issues related to geodesy, surveying, and hydrographic surveying were also covered. This collaboration allows stakeholders to identify NOAA products and services dealing with tides, water levels, storm surveys, and sea level. For more information, contact [Renee Shields](#).

Confirmation of Toxic Shellfish Informs Resource Managers of New Threat to Northern Gulf of Mexico

The recent discovery of a widespread bloom of the toxic algae *Pseudo-nitzschia* along the northern Gulf of Mexico coast by National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) volunteers has been followed by NCCOS scientists' confirmation of the algal toxin domoic acid in oysters and mussels collected from Mississippi. They found concentrations of domoic acid, which is a neurotoxin that causes amnesic shellfish poisoning, fall below the regulatory limit for human consumption of seafood, but these results constitute the first event in which this algal toxin has been detected in shellfish from this region. NCCOS scientists alerted wildlife resource managers to the presence of the toxic bloom and will use this event to study the effects of harmful algae on this ecosystem. For more information, contact [Steve Morton](#) or [Spencer Fire](#).

Workshop to Enhance Coordination for Gulf of Mexico Disaster Response Center

On March 19-20, a team from the Office of Response and Restoration (OR&R) convened a group of 30 NOAA stakeholders from NOS, the National Weather Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service, for a strategic planning workshop that used logic model theory to develop a cross-NOAA model for the Gulf of Mexico Disaster Response Center. The logic model approach uses an intuitive framework and planning process to describe the sequence of events and chain of reasoning that links investments to tangible results. This workshop helped to illustrate how limited resources and investments are linked to achieving sustainable improvements in NOAA's regional and national preparedness, response, restoration, and recovery operations in the Gulf of Mexico. The Gulf of Mexico Disaster Response Center will be the cornerstone of a NOAA Disaster Response Initiative in the Gulf region, an area that is particularly vulnerable to natural and human-induced disaster events. Lessons learned from recent hurricane seasons clearly define that coordination between agencies and across every level of government is critical. For more information, contact [Brendan Bray](#).

NOAA Participates in NSTA Conference

Staff from the National Ocean Service (NOS) Communications and Education Division, NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program, Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, and other NOAA offices presented at the National Science Teachers Association annual conference in New Orleans. Staff provided sessions to teachers and informal educators about teaching resources related to climate change, coral ecosystems, and invasive species. In addition, presentations highlighted online digital tools for digital natives; NOAA Waterways: a problem-based learning initiative for middle school students; and the newly released estuaries game: [WaterLife](#). NOS Education and the Coral Reef Conservation Program delivered a half-day symposium on coral ecosystems and climate change, with a focus on remote sensing and ocean acidification. A "share-a-thon" for informal educators highlighted the NOAA Education sampler DVD, NOAA Teacher-at-Sea Program, and Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) education resources. The Ocean Today Kiosk and NOAA Science on a Sphere were featured at the conference in the exhibit hall, which drew over 8,000 educators from across the United States. For more information, contact [Bruce Moravchik](#) or [Paulo Maurin](#).

Reserve System Education, Coastal Training Coordinators Meet in Texas

National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) Education Coordinators and Coastal Training Program (CTP) Coordinators will meet in Port Aransas, Texas, March 31 to April 3, to review recent developments and share information in a joint annual sector meeting hosted by the Mission-Aransas Reserve. The CTP coordinators will discuss how to incorporate comments and recommendations from a recent external review into future growth and direction of the program. They also will review existing performance measures and discuss the best ways to write measurable performance indicators.

The Education Coordinators will discuss the burgeoning Teachers on the Estuary (TOTE) program of teacher training, as well as the Web interface connecting educators with System-Wide Monitoring Program data. Other topics will include the Estuaries 101 curriculum project and professional sharing on best ways to educate the public about climate change issues.

The two groups also will meet in joint session to discuss coordinating their programs, and both will also take field trips to visit the 185,000-acre Mission-Aransas Reserve, the newest of the 27 reserves in the system. Contact: Matt.Chasse@noaa.gov, (CTP); Atziri.Ibanez@noaa.gov.

Gulf of Mexico Alliance Nutrient Workshop Brings Together Gulf Researchers and Coastal Managers

NOAA and the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, Nutrients Team held a successful workshop on March 10-12 in New Orleans focused on Nutrient research in Gulf estuaries and coastal waters. The workshop brought together researchers working in the Gulf of Mexico region and state coastal managers charged with establishing water quality standards to reduce nutrient pollution in estuaries and coastal waters. Sixteen presenters were selected to provide a synthesis of research and their working knowledge of Gulf estuaries and near-shore waters from Texas to the Florida panhandle. The research will help managers decide where to place pilot studies, and identify available tools, for developing specific, numerical nutrient criteria for the Gulf of Mexico. These criteria will help Gulf States develop total maximum daily loads, conduct assessments, improve permitting, and the overall management of nutrients in the system. Scientists from Texas A&M University, University of Texas Marine Science Institute, and Louisiana State University presented hypoxia research supported by the NOAA, National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science. In addition, scientists from the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Dauphin Island Sea Lab, EPA Gulf Ecology Division, University of Houston, University of New Orleans, and the University of Southern Mississippi presented research on eutrophication in Gulf ecosystems.

This workshop was the third in a series by the Gulf of Mexico Alliance to develop a regional Nutrient Criteria Research Framework. The Research Framework proposes a regional approach to characterize nutrient sources, dynamics, and their impact on ecosystem health. The information and networks developed at the March workshop will be used to further refine the framework and to select areas for the first year of its implementation. Information from the workshop is available on the Nutrients Team website at <http://www2.nos.noaa.gov/gomex/nutrients/welcome.html>. For more information contact Laurie.Rounds@noaa.gov.

Ecological Impact of Potential River-Diversions Presentation Informs Louisiana Coastal Restoration Community

Eugene Turner, a Louisiana State University scientist, gave a presentation on “Ecological Assumptions of Diversions” to senior-level river diversion decisionmakers on March 3. His talk drew heavily from a recently completed five-year, National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science-supported research project analyzing how nutrients and other stressors affect Louisiana wetlands. Mississippi and Atchafalaya river diversions are being considered as a mechanism for supplying restorative sediments to Louisiana’s eroding coastline. However, river water also carries high levels of nutrients which have been shown to cause damage and erosion to wetlands through a variety of biological mechanisms. Senior-level decisionmakers represented the Louisiana Governor’s Office of Coastal Activities, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency, NOAA, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey. For more information, contact Libby Jewett at Libby.Jewett@noaa.gov.

Confirmation of Harmful Algal Bloom Informs Resource Managers of Possible Threat to Biloxi

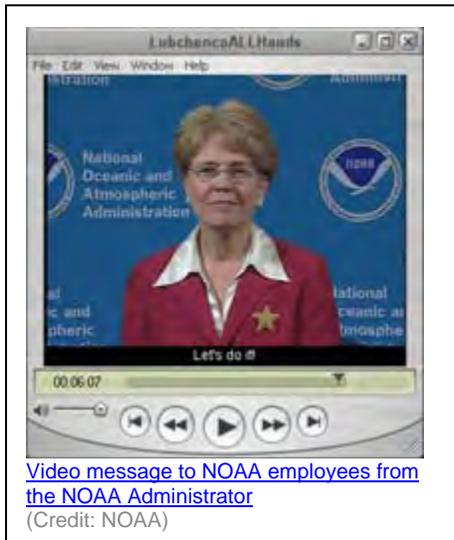
On March 5, 2009, researchers from the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science notified partners at the NOAA Northern Gulf Institute of an unusually abundant harmful algal bloom (HAB) in coastal waters near Ocean Springs, Mississippi, following observations made by volunteers affiliated with the Phytoplankton Monitoring Network (PMN). Subsequent analysis of water samples by the Marine Biotoxins Program confirmed the presence of *Pseudo-nitzschia* and its associated toxin, domoic acid. The bloom has now moved westward close to Biloxi and additional water samples have been received for analysis and culture initiation. The PMN is a NOAA-sponsored program that serves to increase the awareness of constituent groups about harmful algae and directly involves volunteers in coastal stewardship by alerting regional managers and the research community of HAB events. For more information, contact Steve Morton Steve.Morton@noaa.gov.

Other NOAA News

Jane Lubchenco Confirmed as NOAA Administrator

Pledges to lead with the "best science as our guide"

March 19, 2009



Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D., was confirmed by the U.S. Senate this evening as the under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere. In this capacity, she will serve as the ninth administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the nation's top science agency for climate, oceans, and the atmosphere. Dr. Lubchenco is the first woman and the first marine ecologist to lead NOAA.

"Dr. Lubchenco is an outstanding and accomplished environmental scientist with a proven ability to communicate, lead a dynamic team, and inspire action," White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Nancy Sutley said. "Dr. Lubchenco joins a distinguished group of scientific leaders in the Obama administration that will ensure that science plays its proper role in shaping policy."

With a budget of \$4 billion, and 12,800 employees in every U.S. state and locations around the world, NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources.

"I am truly honored and humbled to be part of the NOAA team," Lubchenco said. "With hard work and the best science as our guide, NOAA can spur the creation of new jobs and industries revive our fisheries and the economies and communities they support, improve weather forecasting and disaster warnings, provide credible information about climate change to Americans, and protect and restore our coastal ecosystems."

Lubchenco, a Denver native, is a graduate of Colorado College, received her Masters degree from the University of Washington and Ph.D. from Harvard University in marine ecology, taught at Harvard for two years, and prior to assuming her new duties as NOAA administrator has been on the faculty at Oregon State University since 1977.



"Jane is the rare person who is both a top flight scientist and skilled policy-maker. Her years of public service with the National Academy of Sciences and the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative and many other organizations have prepared her well for taking the helm of NOAA," Co-chairman of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative Admiral James D. Watkins.

As an advocate for science, Lubchenco is well known in international and national arenas. She is a former president of the International Council for Science, the American Association for the Advancement of



[High resolution](#)
(Credit: Oregon State University)

Science and the Ecological Society of America. She was a presidential-appointee for two terms on the National Science Board, which advises the president and Congress and oversees the National Science Foundation. Lubchenco is an elected member of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, the Royal Society, and the Academy of Sciences for the Developing World. She served on the Pew Oceans Commission and the Joint Oceans Commission Initiative.

Lubchenco has received numerous awards including a MacArthur ("Genius") Fellowship, nine honorary degrees, the 2002 Heinz Award in the Environment, the 2003 Nierenberg Prize for Science in the Public Interest, the 2004 Environmental Law Institute Award and the 2005 American Association for the Advancement of Science's Award for Public Understanding of Science and Technology.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources.

Major Midwest Flooding Highlighted in U.S. Spring Outlook

March 19, 2009

Flooding in the upper Midwest, which could rival the high water levels experienced in 2006 and possibly 1997, and continued drought in the South and West are among the highlights in [NOAA's National Weather Service](#) Spring Outlook issued today.

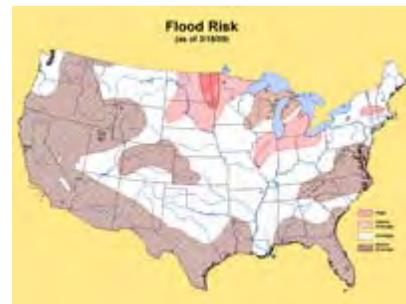
A deep snowpack and recent heavy rain have elevated the spring flood threat in parts of the Midwest:

Water released by melting snowpack that is deeper than normal – while running off the already saturated and frozen ground – poses an imminent serious flood threat in the Red River Valley. Forecasters say flooding will begin next week and that the Red River of the North in Fargo and Grand Forks, N.D., will ultimately reach major flood stage and has a strong likelihood of a crest measuring among the top five highest on record. Away from rivers, widespread over-land flooding is expected due to the flat terrain and frozen drainage networks in the Red River Basin.

The threat in this area is so great that the National Weather Service created a new category – “High Risk” – to distinguish it from the existing “Above Average” category for flooding potential.

Recent flooding caused by heavy rain from Illinois to Ohio has begun receding, but the now saturated ground is prone to additional flooding with renewed rainfall.

Flooding – Midwest on Watch

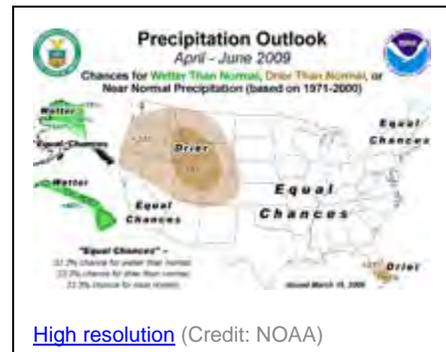


[High resolution](#) (Credit: NOAA)

“We are looking at a situation with all the ingredients for near record flooding in the upper Midwest,” said Jack Hayes, director of the National Weather Service. “Sudden snowpack melts due to warm temperatures or a heavy rain could further complicate the flooding on the northern plains.” Supported by advanced water and weather science and early warnings from NOAA, local officials and emergency managers in the Red River Valley are taking action to prepare their communities, according to Hayes. River levels – past, current and/or projected – at nearly 4,300 stations across the United States are available through the Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Service at weather.gov/water. The National Weather Service Web site has the latest flood advisories, watches and warnings with localized information.

Temperature and Precipitation – A Waning La Niña

The spring (April- June) temperature and precipitation outlook issued today by the Climate Prediction Center – a division of the National Weather Service – indicates warmer-than-normal temperatures from Texas westward to the California deserts north to central Utah with cooler-than-normal temperatures in the Northwest, Hawaii and much of Alaska. Odds favor below-average precipitation across the northwestern U.S. and South Florida and favor above-average precipitation in Hawaii and northern Alaska. Elsewhere across the country there are equal chances of above-, near- or below-normal temperatures and precipitation because there is no strong large-scale climate signal to guide long-range forecasts.



“The current La Niña will likely have some effect on this spring as it continues to weaken. Although La Niña tends to have a smaller influence on U.S. weather during the warmer months, lingering effects are not uncommon in spring,” said Ed O’Lenic, long-range forecaster with the Climate Prediction Center. La Niña – associated with cooler than average sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean – can alter the typical temperature and precipitation patterns across the United States.

Drought’s Grip Loosening in South, West, but Intensifying in Florida

Texas remains in the bulls-eye of the most widespread and intense drought, followed by California, the Southeast and Wisconsin, but the recent record rain brought much-needed moisture to the Lone Star state, according to recent updates to the weekly U.S. Drought Monitor. Storms in February and early March across northern California provided some relief to the drought, but storage in major reservoirs is much below average and spring runoff is forecast to be below average with less than a month left in the wet season.

The Climate Prediction Center’s newly updated Seasonal Drought Outlook highlights these areas of drought as generally persisting through June with limited areas of improvement. Though with continued dryness, drought may develop from northern Virginia to New Jersey.



Underscoring the severity of the Texas drought, the state just emerged from its driest winter since records began in 1895. Even with the recent rain, cumulative rainfall during the past six months remains as much as a foot below normal in parts of Texas and Oklahoma. Therefore, severe drought has not ended and is

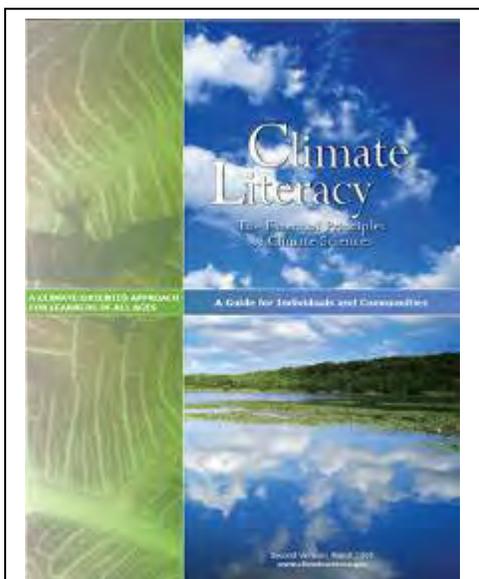
expected to linger well into spring. Severe drought has been increasing in Florida, where some cities had their driest winter on record, and where an increasing risk of wildfires has developed. The Florida drought is likely to persist and intensify until the thunderstorm season gets underway in late May and June.

Staying Safe during Tornado Season

Spring is also the season for tornadoes as April, May and June are, on average, the busiest months for twisters. Though the severity of this year's tornado season is influenced by short-term weather patterns that are only predictable out to a week in the future, it is imperative to know when the atmosphere is ripe for severe thunderstorms to produce tornadoes. "If you don't already have a [NOAA Weather Radio](#), get one now," added Hayes. "This is a fast and reliable way to get life-saving warnings from the National Weather Service."

New Guide Aims to Improve Public Climate Literacy

March 18, 2009



Climate Literacy: The Essential Principles of Climate Science. ([high](#) and [low](#) resolution report) [High resolution still](#) (Credit: NOAA)

A guide is now available to help individuals of all ages understand how climate influences them -- and how they influence climate. A product of the U.S. Climate Change Science Program, it was compiled by an interagency group led by NOAA.

"As climate policy is being discussed, it is very important for the citizens of our nation to have an appreciation for some of the fundamental aspects of climate and climate change," said [Tom Karl](#), director of [NOAA's National Climatic Data Center](#) in Asheville, N.C., and lead for NOAA's climate services. "This guide is a first step for people who want to know more about the essential principles of our climate system, how to better discern scientifically credible information about climate, and how to identify problems related to understanding climate and climate change."

Climate Literacy: The Essential Principles of Climate Science is available online at: <http://www.noaa.gov/climateliteracy.html> and <http://www.climatescience.gov>. It is also being distributed to teachers attending the National Science Teachers Association meeting this week in New Orleans.

"There is so much misinformation about climate. We want to provide an easily readable document to help everyone make the most informed decisions," said Karl. "Having one product endorsed by the nation's top federal science agencies, as well as leading science centers and associations, makes this document an essential resource."

The 13-page guide includes information on how people can help reduce climate change and its impacts. It also defines important terms and concepts used when talking about climate and approaches to adaptation and mitigation. For print copies of the guide, e-mail [NOAA Outreach](#) or call 301-713-1208. NOAA, the National Science Teachers Association, and TERC, an educational non-profit organization, are working with education leaders to revise state standards using this framework. The materials also will provide the basis for educator resources and professional development.

NOAA's National Ocean Service Launched a New Educational Online Game "WaterLife: Where Rivers Meet the Sea"

Developed through a partnership with Montgomery (Maryland) College's Computer Gaming and Simulation program and designed in cooperation with NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserve System for students at the fourth through seventh grade level, the web-based game provides science instruction through a series of challenges and animations.

"Our students had the opportunity of a lifetime to design a game that will make a difference in the education of middle school students," said Deborah Solomon, the professor at Montgomery College.

"This year-long project provided my students with some true real-life work experience that will benefit not only them but future generations." The game occurs inside the ecosystem of an estuary on the West Coast of the United States. Following a young girl named Valerie, players interact with Oscar the sea otter, and the fictional Claminator, a geoduck clam. To succeed, players must learn about the factors that produce healthy estuaries, food webs, and why estuaries are essential to both ocean life and to humans. Students recycle and clean up trash, remove obstructions in waterways, replant the habitat to bring back food webs, and battle pollution monsters to restore Oscar's home. The game is available at <http://games.noaa.gov>

"This educational tool provides a series of possibilities for students to explore our nation's biologically rich and economically important estuaries and learn more about NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserve System," according to Atziri Ibañez, national education coordinator for the reserve system which incorporates 27 estuarine reserves in 21 states and Puerto Rico. "The game will work together with the newly developed Estuaries 101 Curriculum to create awareness and knowledge of the rich biological and physical processes of estuaries."

"WaterLife: Where Rivers Meet the Sea" is being launched in conjunction with the National Science Teachers Association conference in New Orleans. Each year thousands of science educators meet to bring the very latest science content, research findings, and teaching techniques to the classroom teacher. NOAA's National Ocean Service is an active partner with NSTA in the development of teacher training materials using NOAA content.

Montgomery College is a public open admissions community college with three campuses, plus workforce development and continuing education centers and off site programs throughout Montgomery County, Maryland. The college serves nearly 60,000 students a year through both credit and non-credit programs in more than 100 areas of study.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

On the Web:

Estuaries game featured on [NOAA](#) homepage [National Ocean Service Education](#)

National Estuarine Research Reserve System - [Estuaries.Gov](#)

Montgomery College Computer Simulation and Gaming Program: <http://www.studygaming.com>

NOAA Training Programs Receive Excellent Review

The [final report](#) of a joint external review team, that examined NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) and the NOAA Coastal Services Center's (CSC) training programs, was released last week and affirmed the excellence of both programs in training coastal decision makers. The reviewers cited both programs for providing science-based information and skill-building opportunities to professionals and decision makers who manage coastal resources, while building organizational capacity to protect those resources. The Center's national-level training program and the NERRS's locally oriented coastal training program form a partnership that is complementary and mutually supportive. For more information, contact [Ginger Hinchcliff](#) or [Laurie McGilvray](#).

In the Gulf States

Alabama Office of Water Gets Nearly \$6 Million from FEMA To Update Flood Maps

ATLANTA, Ga. -- A federal grant of more than \$5.8 million will help the state of Alabama improve its flood maps. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is providing \$5,829,290 in federal funds toward the total project cost of \$7,089,290 million. The resulting maps will be even more reliable, updated and current digital products. These updated Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps (DFIRMs), track actual risk more closely and assist new development and rebuilding efforts.

The Alabama Office of Water's Floodplain Mapping Program will update the DFIRMs for the counties of Baldwin, Elmore, Madison, Mobile, Montgomery, Shelby and Tuscaloosa. "With these funds, our state partners in Alabama can improve the flood risk maps so that they more accurately reflect recent development and natural changes in the environment," said Phil May, administrator for FEMA Region IV. "The new maps make communities safer for years to come by helping home and business owners assess their flood risk and make informed decisions about protecting property from the risk of flood loss."

To learn more about flood hazard mapping, DFIRMs or the Cooperating Technical Partner Initiative visit www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/fhm/ctp_main.shtm. To download FEMA's Guidelines and Specifications for Flood hazard Mapping Partners, visit www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/fhm/dl_cgs.shtm.

Using Climate Change Education to Empower Kids in the Gulf of Mexico

[Coastal Services, March/April 2009](#)

Climate change is expected to increase the severity of tropical storms and hurricanes. While no individual storm can be attributed to climate change, Hurricane Katrina illustrated the vulnerability of the Gulf Coast to extreme storm events, leaving many coastal residents—particularly children—feeling defenseless in the face of the changing climate.

Last summer, a group of 24 teenagers who experienced the devastation of Katrina firsthand went from powerless to empowered during a two-week Climate Change Camp in coastal Alabama, where they learned about the science, environmental impacts and responses, and policy questions resulting from climate change. "We wanted to give them a proactive attitude about what they can do about climate and weather events in their future," says Kate Graves, former Southeast Climate Program officer for the World Wildlife Fund–U.S. (WWF) and organizer of the camp, which was part of the organization's Southeast Climate Witness Program. While the Climate Camp was a one-time WWF event, Graves hopes that coastal resource management and other organizations will be able to take the program and reproduce it on a local level.

With funding for the camp from the Allianz Foundation for North America, Graves first developed an interdisciplinary climate change curriculum for high school classes. She worked with educators in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi to promote the program and developed criteria for selecting the students. All the participants were between the ages of 15 and 18, and had been displaced by Hurricane Katrina. During the program, the teens met with researchers from the University of South Alabama at Mobile and regional and national scientists to learn about climate change issues and the coastal ecosystem. They also participated in restoration projects organized by the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program.

"My role," notes Tom Herder, science communicator for the Mobile Bay Estuary Program, "was to put them to work and involve them in some activity to remediate the effects of the storm."

Herder partnered with U.S. Fish and Wildlife staff members at Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge in southern Alabama, where half the students completed a dune-plant restoration. Two days later, the rest of the students completed a marsh-grass restoration in Mobile Bay. Getting hands-on with the restoration projects "really gave the kids power over the circumstances of Katrina," Herder says. "They got to give back some of what the storm had taken away. After the camp, the kids were empowered, connected, and educated, which is what you want from a project involving public outreach."

"Definitely other organizations could do this program in the future," Graves says. "We did this on a large scale because we had the opportunity, but it could be done on a much smaller scale."

She adds, "There is value in keeping it local and helping kids understand what's happening with climate change in their own ecosystems."

For more information on the WWF Allianz Climate Camp, point your browser to www.worldwildlife.org/climate/curriculum/item5943.html. You may also contact Kate Graves at kgraves@islandpress.org, or Tom Herder at (251) 431-6409, or therder@mobilebaynep.com.

LuLu's at Homeport Marina to Receive First-Ever Dauphin Island Sea Lab Seventh Generation Award

In the spirit of these inspiring words of wisdom, the Dauphin Island Sea Lab (DISL) is proud to announce the establishment of the DISL Seventh Generation Award. This award will be given annually to the person/organization that embodies the tenets of sustainability, stewardship and pro-active practice in considering our natural resources for the seventh generation.

This year, the first DISL Seventh Generation Award will be given to Lulu's at Homeport Marina. From its installation of an environmentally-friendly windmill to serving only grass-fed, Alabama-raised beef in its award-winning restaurant, LuLu's at Homeport Marina is proof positive that saving the planet is thinking globally and acting locally. LuLu's was one of the first public venues to incorporate the rain garden concept into their parking lots, dramatically improving the quality of stormwater runoff into the Intracoastal Waterway.

Dr. George F. Crozier, Executive Director of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, said, "Considering the number of people that visit LuLu's, we might actually get a 'change in attitude' before global warming forces a 'change in latitude.' This is an example of good business that benefits everyone."

"LuLu's effort to introduce environmentally-forward policies is a collaboration of ideas from the owners to the management to the staff. We have always 'made it up as we go.' With the volume of business that we have enjoyed in Gulf Shores, it was a natural progression for us to think of how we could operate from a more environmentally friendly point of view to help take care of the absolutely gorgeous natural beauty of Gulf Shores. "Making positive changes at home is the first place to start in helping our planet. What we have done at LuLu's has brought awareness and sparked conversations between all types of people and agencies. Plus, it is just a lot of fun," remarked Lucy Buffett.

The DISL's Seventh Generation Award will be awarded at the Sea Lab's Discovery Day Open House on Saturday, April 18. The Award presentation to owner Lucy Buffet and General Manager Johnny Fisher will be at 11:00am, immediately following a 10:30am demonstration of the USCG Aviation Unit's Water Rescue by helicopter. Discovery Day is from 10am to 2pm, and many activities are free, including children's admission to the Estuarium. For more information, call 251-861-2141 or visit www.disl.org.

ADEM Promotes Water Saving Event

MONTGOMERY – The Alabama Department of Environmental Management is working to preserve water resources and prevent water leaks as a "Water Sense" program partner. ADEM has joined with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to promote "Fix a Leak Week," March 16-20. The promotion is designed to help remind Alabamians to check for water leaks in their household fixtures and irrigation systems and make the appropriate repairs leaks.

Minor household water leaks are a big drain on valuable water resources and also cost homeowners money. On average, a U.S. household wastes more than 11,000 gallons of water per year, which is enough to fill a backyard swimming pool. Common leaks found in the home include toilet flappers and dripping faucets. These types of leaks can be easily fixed and in many cases require only a few tools and hardware. Repair costs are easily recovered due to water savings.

Should a homeowner discover a significant leak that merits replacement of an older toilet or faucet, they should consider installing a new “Water Sense” labeled product that will increase water efficiency. Fixtures that carry the “Water Sense” label use 30 percent less water without a noticeable difference in flow.

“Water Sense” is a partnership program sponsored by EPA that seeks to protect the future of America’s water supply by promoting efficiency and enhancing the market for water-efficient products. The program helps consumers identify water-efficient products, which carry the “Water Sense” label indicating they meet efficiency and performance criteria. “Water Sense” products help homeowners save money and also encourage innovation in manufacturing.

Homeowners can read their water meter before and after a two-hour period when no water is being used in order to discover if any leaks are occurring. Additional tips and information about “Fix a Leak Week” can be found at www.epa.gov/watersense.

Web Page Offers Links to Essential Gulf Fishing Information

A new Web page from the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium (MASGC) offers a pathway to many Internet sites that provide valuable information to recreational and commercial fishermen. The page, www.masgc.org/fishing, includes links to information about Northern Gulf Coast tides, reefs, water temperatures, fishing regulations, boating and fishing forums and more.

“There is a lot of good information on boating and fishing available on the Web,” said Rick Wallace, Professor Emeritus with the Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center. “However, there are not many Web pages that provide a simple, straightforward directory of links to some of the most essential fishing information for the northern Gulf of Mexico.”

Northern Gulf Coast fishermen will find most of the information they need to know from the links provided on the page, he said. To check out the site, go to www.masgc.org/fishing.

Miller to Work with Communities on Water-quality Issues

Christian Miller has joined the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium (MASGC) as an extension specialist focusing on nonpoint pollution issues. He works out of the Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center (AUMERC) in Mobile, Ala., and serves as the Alabama- Mississippi Clean Marina Program coordinator and the Coastal Alabama Clean Water Partnership facilitator. His newly created position is funded through the Alabama Clean Water Partnership, AUMERC, MASGC and the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, which are involved in various water-quality programs.

Miller received a bachelor’s degree in biology from Jacksonville State University and a master’s degree in fisheries science and applied aquacultures from Auburn University. Prior to joining MASGC, Miller served as an extension agent at the Miami-Dade County Extension Service in Florida from 2004 to 2008, primarily organizing informal outreach and education programs in the areas of aquaculture and water science. He also enjoyed organizing annual youth sportfishing programs for the local 4-H youth development program.

“I’m excited to have the opportunity to come back home to Alabama and work on water quality issues that are important to protecting the natural resources of the Gulf coastal communities,” he said.

Waterfronts Florida Partnership Program Announces the Opening of its Application Period

~ Coastal communities can apply to become designated as a Waterfronts Florida Partnership Community and receive valuable assistance and funding ~

TALLAHASSEE - The Department of Community Affairs (DCA) today announced the Waterfronts Florida Partnership Program application cycle is open and available for coastal communities to apply for Waterfronts Florida Partnership designation. The statewide program provides technical assistance, training and small planning grants to working waterfront communities to assist in revitalization efforts. The deadline for submitting applications is Tuesday, May 19. "Florida's waterfront communities play a vital role in local economies, and this program connects these coastal communities to their past as well as charts a positive course for them into the future," said DCA Secretary Tom Pelham. "I encourage any interested communities to apply and take advantage of the opportunity to be designated as a Waterfronts Florida Partnership Community."

Eligible applicants include local governments that are required to include a coastal element in their comprehensive plan. Non-profit organizations that can prove a strong partnership with their local government can also apply for designation. The community must recognize the waterfront as a special place and be committed to developing policies that encourage the preservation of recreational and commercial working waterfronts. Additional requirements are outlined in the application.

The program designates up to three communities every two years to receive state assistance that results in the formulation of a community-designed vision plan to guide the revitalization of traditional working waterfront communities. Each plan is designed to ensure public access to the waterfront area, prevent losses from disasters, protect environmental and cultural resources, and enhance the waterfront economy. Last year, the cities of Carrabelle and St. Marks, and the community of Steinhatchee joined 18 other Florida communities that have been selected for the program since its inception in 1997. Under current federal guidelines, each designated community receives up to \$25,000 per year for two consecutive years to establish its local Waterfronts Florida Program. Communities must provide a dollar-for-dollar match, either cash or non-federal funds or in-kind services. Communities must also provide a local program manager.

The Waterfronts Florida Partnership Program is funded with federal grants provided by the Department of Environmental Protection's Florida Coastal Management Program and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. DCA's Division of Community Planning provides staff to implement the program and provide hands-on technical assistance and training. Interested applicants can receive an application and more information by contacting the Program Coordinator at (850) 921-4801.

DEP Encourages Boaters to Safeguard Florida's Seagrasses

DEP Northwest District Office celebrates seagrass protection successes DEP's

PENSACOLA – The Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Northwest District is working to protect Florida's important seagrass communities through successful restoration and education efforts. As more boaters prepare to enter the warmer spring waters DEP is reminding both commercial and recreational boaters of their role in protecting our seagrasses, and the vital role these plants play in a healthy ecosystem. While strengthened environmental regulations are effectively addressing the environmental impacts to our marine environments, large areas of seagrass beds are lost each year due to prop scarring and accidental groundings.

“Even with all the success of our restoration program, there is no solution better than prevention,” said Dick Fancher, Director of the DEP’s Northwest District. “It is much more cost effective to prevent the damage to our seagrass beds than to restore them.”



"It is much more cost effective to prevent the damage to our seagrass beds than to restore them." ~ Dick Fancher

To prevent impacts from occurring, boaters can take five simple steps, such as:

1. Know your boat and be familiar with the boat’s draft. As a general rule, there should be at least a foot between the boat’s propeller and the top of the seagrasses.
2. Be familiar with the local waterways. Estuarine and coastal environments change constantly, making navigation tricky.
3. Be aware of how tide and wind conditions affect boating. It is common for seagrass beds to be completely exposed during low tides.
4. Turn the motor off and drift into deeper water, if you run aground.
5. Use a trolling motor and push pole for fishing in shallow water.

A boat’s hull, anchor or propeller can uproot seagrasses, ripping several inches into the soft sediment and creating a path several meters long. Recovery is slow and research has shown it may take up to 10 years for damaged areas to regenerate. Seagrasses are protected by Florida Statute and boaters can face federal and state fines as well as costs associated with restoration efforts for damaging the vegetation.

“Loss and decline of seagrasses has been well documented throughout Perdido Bay, the Pensacola Bay System, Choctawhatchee Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. Stormwater discharge, fugitive sediments and physical stressors such as prop scarring and dredging are some of the potential factors that have resulted in secondary and cumulative impacts to these seagrass communities,” said Fancher. “This is where the district’s restoration program has been so important.”

DEP’s success in seagrass restoration has been made possible, in part, from funding from the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Gulf of Mexico Program, the Florida Coastal Management Program, the Garcon Point Restoration Trust Fund, the Gulf of Mexico Foundation, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Ocean’s Initiative.

Seagrass restoration efforts in Northwest Florida include:

- DEP Northwest District’s Seagrass Restoration Program is working to reduce seagrass degradation and restore seagrass beds along the Gulf Coast of the Florida panhandle through a multi-faceted restoration program which consists of salvage, laboratory tissue culture and aquaculture. In 2008, laboratory renovation and expansion efforts resulted in a threefold increase in annual production from 15,300 plants to 60,000 plants which are used for restoration efforts at sites in the Florida panhandle that have lost their historic seagrass beds.
- One of the district’s most successful restoration projects is Project Green Shores, a multi-million dollar habitat restoration and creation project located in Pensacola. This habitat restoration effort is a community-partnership among the City of Pensacola, Escambia County, the EPA Gulf of Mexico Program, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA, Gulf Power, local agencies, businesses, many volunteers and DEP in an effort to restore oyster reef, salt marsh and seagrass habitat within the Pensacola Bay. The seagrass beds will provide habitat for many fish and invertebrate species. It will also help stabilize the bay bottom

thus reducing turbidity, and serve as a nursery area for 70-95% of the commercially harvested species in this region.

- The district's seagrass salvage program recovers seagrasses which would otherwise be lost as a result of marine construction (i.e. docks, piers) and transplants the grass to areas of similar habitat where beds are in need of restoration. The program's seagrass salvage project works with marine contractors and property owners to salvage seagrass impacted by marine construction.

Florida's coastal waters are home to approximately 2.7 million acres of seagrass meadows, primarily located in the Florida Keys and from Tarpon Springs to Apalachee Bay. Seagrasses are important to Florida's aquatic communities because, similar to lawn grasses, they absorb nutrients from runoff, stabilize the soil to reduce erosion and attract and support wildlife. Unlike lawn grasses, seagrasses are extremely sensitive and do not recover very well once impacted. For more information on the DEP Northwest District Restoration Program visit <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/northwest/Ecosys/section/restoration.htm>.

Florida Celebrates Oceans Day

~Florida Oceans and Coastal Council reports featured as focal point of celebration~

TALLAHASSEE - The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) joined a host of public and private partners today to celebrate Florida Oceans Day at the Capitol. Sponsored by the Florida Ocean Alliance (FOA), the theme of this year's celebration was "Florida's Ocean Assets in a Changing Climate and Economy" and aims to make our oceans and coasts cleaner, healthier and more productive.

"Attracting millions of visitors each year, Florida's clear waters, world-class beaches and coral reefs are national treasures providing food, recreational and economic opportunities," said DEP Deputy Secretary Bob Ballard. "It is our responsibility as environmental stewards to protect our oceans by managing and enhancing their fragile resources effectively."



As part of this year's Florida Oceans Day celebration, the Florida Oceans and Coastal Council (FOCC) hosted an exhibit in the Capitol Rotunda featuring displays from their report, *The Effects of Climate Change on Florida's Ocean and Coastal Resources*, which was presented to the Governor's Energy and Climate Commission on January 26, 2009. Additional exhibits featured Florida's Ocean and Coastal Economies Report, Phase II, which was generated for the council by the National Ocean Economics Program and presented to the Governor and Cabinet in September 2008.

The events also included a roundtable discussion entitled, *Guidelines for Enhancing Florida's Ocean and Marine Resources*, which included a presentation by Robbin Peach of the Massachusetts Ocean Partnership Fund on Massachusetts' management strategies.

The Florida Oceans and Coastal Council was created in 2005 by the Oceans and Coastal Resources Act and is comprised of 18 individuals who coordinate coastal and marine research in Florida, identify research gaps, create an annual research plan and recommend new strategies and tools to enhance

management and conservation efforts for the state's coastal and marine resources. For more information on the FOCC visit www.FloridaOceansCouncil.org.

To view Florida's Ocean and Coastal Economies Report, Phase II and The Effects of Climate Change on Florida's Ocean and Coastal Resources report, visit <http://www.floridaoceanscouncil.org/reports/default.htm>

“Our Lives...Our Water” Educational Video

Award-winning film, “[Our Lives...Our Water](#)” was produced as an educational tool stressing the importance of environmental stewardship of water resources throughout the state.

Public and private schools, science teachers, and civic leaders have been receiving this video at no cost from the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources since August of 2008.

Newcomer, Morris and Young Productions, Inc. of Monroe was honored with a Silver Addy at the American Advertising Federation Addy Awards meeting in March 2009, for their work on the film. Learn more about where ground water is found, what is an aquifer, and get some tips from a fifth grader on conserving water for generations to come.

MMS Approves \$168,000 Grant for Louisiana Shoreline Protection

St. Mary Parish to receive grant for Bayou Sale Ridge habitat near Point Chevreuil

NEW ORLEANS – The Interior Department's Minerals Management Service (MMS) has approved a \$167,861 grant to St. Mary Parish in Louisiana. The grant, provided through the Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP), is for the Point Chevreuil Shoreline Protection project.

The grant money will be used to help reduce and reverse shoreline erosion rates and protect the natural marsh habitat at Bayou Sale Ridge, located approximately 55 miles southeast of Lafayette, LA in the vicinity of Point Chevreuil. Construction is planned for a foreshore rock dike parallel to the eastern shoreline of East Cote Blanche Bay. When completed, the project will protect about 4,250 linear feet of shoreline, preventing the loss of 26 acres of habitat over a 20 year period.

“MMS is committed to helping Louisiana in its vital coastal restoration efforts through the CIAP program,” said MMS Gulf of Mexico Regional Director Lars Herbst. “We are proud to partner with St. Mary Parish in supporting important conservation projects like the Point Chevreuil Shoreline Protection Plan.”

The CIAP was created by the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and provides \$250 million annually, from 2007-2010, to six eligible Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas producing states – Louisiana, Alabama, Alaska, California, Mississippi, and Texas. The funding to Louisiana included \$127.5 million for each of the fiscal years 2007 and 2008. Nineteen Coastal Political Subdivisions (parishes) share in the funding of projects outlined in the state's approved plan.

Minerals Management Service Donates 200-year Old Shipwreck Artifacts to State of Louisiana

Protecting and preserving the nation's historic treasures

NEW ORLEANS – The Department Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) donated a large collection of historic artifacts to the Louisiana Department of Culture Recreation and Tourism's Division of Archaeology today at the Louisiana State Museum, the Cabildo. "The Minerals Management Service is committed to preserving significant cultural resources found on the Outer Continental Shelf," said MMS Gulf of Mexico Regional Director Lars Herbst. "We want to protect these items so that future generations can better understand their heritage."

The artifacts, scattered in the wreckage of a small wooden-hulled ship lying in 4,000 feet of water 40 miles off the coast of Louisiana, were discovered near the site of an Okeanos Gas Gathering Company (OGGC) pipeline, as a result of the permitting process required by MMS for laying pipelines. The collection was brought up from the seafloor in 2007 by archaeologists from Texas A&M University working under a contract funded by OGGC as part of an agreement reached with MMS to preserve this historic site.

Archaeologists researching the shipwreck concluded that the ship was most likely a two-masted schooner that sank sometime around the War of 1812. Artifacts recovered from the seafloor date the wreck from after 1808 and before 1820. The small vessel was heavily armed with a six-pounder cannon, muskets, pistols, and swords either to protect itself from the countless pirates that infested Louisiana waters during this era, or because it was one itself. Even after years of rigorous research, the actual name of the ship remains a mystery and it has been dubbed the "Mardi Gras Wreck" after OGGC's Mardi Gras Pipeline. Historical research to try to identify the ship will likely continue for years.

"The artifacts were recovered from the seafloor using a robotic Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) and immediately underwent cleaning and chemical treatment at Texas A&M's Conservation Research Lab at College Station," explained Dr. Jack Irion, MMS marine archaeologist. "After completing the painstaking process to stabilize and catalog the artifacts that can take anywhere from months to years, the material can now begin to be transferred to the Louisiana Division of Archaeology," he added. The Louisiana State Museum will bring this discovery to the public in a series of exhibits.

An informative report on the shipwreck, written by Texas A&M staff, has been published as MMS Report 2008-037 on the MMS web site at <http://www.gomr.mms.gov/index.html>. Additional information on the Mardi Gras Wreck can be found at the project web site <http://www.flpublicarchaeology.org/mardigras/> and at A&M's Center for Maritime Archaeology and Conservation website <http://nautarch.tamu.edu/mardigras/>.

Lawyers Discuss Water Issues at Symposium

OXFORD, Miss. — The National Sea Grant Law Center at The University of Mississippi hosted its second annual Sea Grant Law and Policy Journal Symposium on March 24-25. This year's theme was "Water Quantity: Ongoing Problems and Emerging Solutions." Twenty-nine individuals participated, and the responses were overwhelmingly positive. The geographic diversity of the presentations included a speaker from each region in the United States except the southwest.



The symposium opened with a keynote address discussing the ongoing litigation between the State of Mississippi and the City of Memphis regarding water withdrawals from the Memphis Sands Aquifer. The second day included presentations on the Great Lakes compact, water supply planning in Chicago and Washington state, the incorporation of agricultural irrigation into Georgia's water planning process, a water dispute between North Carolina and South Carolina and New Jersey's water management legislation for the Highlands Region.

Papers based on the presentations will be published in the June 2009 issue of the Sea Grant Law and Policy Journal, which will be available at <http://www.olemiss.edu/orgs/SGLC/National/SGLPJ/SGLPJ.htm>.

The symposium provided attendees, many of whom were water managers from Mississippi agencies, with an opportunity to learn from the water quantity planning experiences of other states and regions. "It isn't always obvious what Mississippi can learn from the experiences of Chicago or the Pacific Northwest, but I hope our symposium provided attendees with some additional policy and regulatory tools that could help Mississippi manage water resources more effectively in the future," said Stephanie Showalter, director of the National Sea Grant Law Center.

DMR Awards Young Marine Scientists for Excellence

BILOXI, Miss. – The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR) presented five local students with the DMR Excellence in Marine Sciences Award at the Region VI Science and Engineering Fair held March 18, 2009, at the Mississippi Gulf Coast Coliseum. This is the 13th year the DMR has sponsored the award.

The DMR's Excellence in Marine Sciences Award was established to encourage local students to develop research projects involving Mississippi's coastal resources. With this award, the DMR hopes to encourage students to identify and find solutions to the Coast's environmental problems. Each winner received a certificate and monetary award.

"The winners of the younger classes each receive \$100.00. The older winners each get \$200, because they will most likely be advancing to the state competition. The extra money will enable them to enhance their exhibits, so they will have a better chance of winning at that next level of competition," said Jennifer Buchanan, education coordinator for the DMR/Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Class I entries represent students in grades kindergarten through three; Class II, grades four through six; Class III, grades seven and eight; Class IV, grades nine and ten; and Class V; grades eleven and twelve.



Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources: (From left to right) Jennifer Buchanan, education coordinator for the DMR/Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve; **Stephen Denning**, St. Patrick Catholic High; **Margaret Eaves**, Ocean Springs High; **Elizabeth Moore**, Ocean Spring Middle; **Nicholas Wagner**, East Central Upper Elementary; **Alana Freimanis**, South Hancock Elementary.

Winners of this year's Excellence in Marine Sciences Award, in order of class:

- Alana Freimanis, South Hancock Elementary, for her "Clean Up Oil Spills and Save Marine Mammals," Class I entry, \$100.
- Nicholas Wagner, East Central Upper Elementary, for his "Oil is Not So Slick – Three Methods of Oil Spill Cleanup," Class II entry, \$100.
- Elizabeth Moore, Ocean Spring Middle, for her "Healthy or Sick – A Baseline Study of My Backyard Pond," Class III entry, \$200.
- Margaret Eaves, Ocean Springs High, for her "E. coli in Coastal Water or Bayou of Ocean Springs," Class IV entry, \$200.
- Stephen Denning, St. Patrick Catholic, for his "Can Oysters Save the Gulf Coast," Class V entry, \$200.

The award is presented by the DMR to outstanding Region VI science fair entries that deal with a marine-related issue. In consideration for the award, all project titles are reviewed and each student with a marine-related project is interviewed and questioned about his or her project. Finally, DMR judges rate the eligible projects and the ratings are compiled to determine the overall winners.

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.

Bay BridgeFest 2009 Adds Arts Village

An Arts Village will spring to life in Old Town Bay St. Louis on Saturday, May 16th as a new feature of Bay BridgeFest 2009. From 11am – 8pm, the special section of booths will display creations by local and regional artists. The call for participating artists is being issued through The Arts, Hancock County and through other regional arts organizations. "We have limited space," said Sherri Bevis, Arts Village coordinator. "So we're encouraging artists to register immediately." In addition to serving as Village Coordinator, Bevis is also the director of "Hancock Hometowns," a local program that is a Hancock Chamber initiative and is partnered with the Mississippi Main Street Association.

"The Arts Village fits right in with the Main Street Association's approach," Bevis said. "The goal is to revitalize communities and promote economic development. The program will help us make the arts aspect of Bay BridgeFest a major part of the event."

Bevis believes that Hancock County's active arts colony, scenic attractions and central location provide all the elements needed to host a top regional art show. "BridgeFest can provide the venue," she asserted. "In a few years, we want to see the Arts Village become an Arts City."

Artists who wish to apply for space should contact the Hancock Chamber offices at (228) 467.9048 or go to the Chamber website for a downloadable application (www.hancockchamber.org). Booth space is limited and being assigned on a first-come, first-serve basis. The fee for a 10'X10' booth space is \$100 for artists belonging to the Hancock or Pass Christian Chambers or The Arts, Hancock. The fee is \$150 for non-members. Vendors are responsible for providing their own tent and displays.

Leaders Ask for Reliable Models to Predict Sea-level Rise, Flooding

Professionals know what they need to help them manage issues related to sea-level rise in Mississippi and Alabama. They told government agencies about those needs during two workshops held March 10 and March 11 in Biloxi, Miss. Professionals who develop technologies also discussed what tools, data and models they are using to examine sea-level change.

Representatives from many fields, such as utilities, transportation, emergency management, science, city planning and floodplain and natural resource management identified the need for local sea-level rise models. The models should predict how flooding from tidal and storm events, as well as increased development north of the coast, would change over time, the representatives said.

Some participants also said they would like to see monitoring of Mississippi and Alabama natural resources to see if climate change will cause changes. They also said models to predict sea-level change should include a number of possible scenarios so that risk analyses can be completed. Professionals need reliable tools to help them better predict sea-level change and its impacts, participants said. Once developed, those tools should be shared with residents and planners.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium sponsored the workshops to identify climate planning needs. Participants' input from the workshops will become part of a national effort to identify climate-related needs. The workshops were one of only three pilot programs in the country. A federal group plans to begin customizing and delivering tools to Mississippi and Alabama within the next three to six months.

Another Milestone in Recovery: FEMA Completes Marine Debris Operations in Harrison, Hancock Counties

Release Date: March 9, 2009

[» More Information on Mississippi Hurricane Katrina](#)

BILOXI, Miss. -- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recently completed its final contract for marine debris operations by removing approximately 88,000 cubic yards of debris from a marsh area north of Bay St. Louis in eastern Hancock and western Harrison counties. The completion of the contract marks the conclusion of the debris removal mission in Mississippi. The mission has been a joint effort of FEMA, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR), the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE), the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and local contractors.

A permit was obtained from USACE to implement the cleanup mission of the marsh in the spring of 2007. FEMA, along with state and other federal agencies, investigated the area and determined that the debris piles - up to eight feet in height in some places - needed to be removed due to the potential threats to both human and environmental health.

Nearly 400,000 cubic yards of marine debris have been removed from the coastal and inland waterways of Jackson, Harrison and Hancock counties:

Jackson: 74,350 cubic yards.

Hancock: 116,253 cubic yards.

Harrison: 199,331 cubic yards.

Overall, more than 46 million cubic yards of storm debris have been removed in Mississippi in the three years since Hurricane Katrina struck. This is equal to a football field stacked nearly five miles high.

Overall Debris Removal in the three coastal counties:

Jackson: 8.5 million cubic yards.

Hancock: 8.1 million cubic yards.

Harrison: 14.5 million cubic yards.

"This is truly another milestone in the recovery from Katrina," said Alec Watson, acting director of FEMA's Mississippi Transitional Recovery Office (TRO). "It is a testament to the team effort of local, state and federal agencies as we all work together to move closer to our goal of a full recovery for Mississippi."

The project was funded by a grant from FEMA's Public Assistance Program, which helps states and eligible non-profit organizations pay for disaster-related cleanup and rebuilding to pre-disaster condition. MEMA administers Public Assistance funds. FEMA has already obligated more than \$2.9 billion in grants to Mississippi through the Public Assistance program.

Visit www.fema.gov or www.msema.org to learn more about Public Assistance.

Before and after photo links:

www.photolibrary.fema.gov/photolibrary/photo_details.do?id=33185

www.photolibrary.fema.gov/photolibrary/photo_details.do?id=40139

FEMA leads and supports the nation in a risk-based, comprehensive emergency management system of preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation, to reduce the loss of life and property and protect the nation from all hazards including natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters.

Hurricane Ike: HRI conducts surveys, assesses the impacts

Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies
Winter 2009 newsletter, [Dr. James Gibeaut](#)

HRI's Coastal and Marine Geospatial Lab (CMGL) is assessing the impacts of Hurricane Ike in terms of Gulf shoreline erosion and recovery processes. Shortly after the storm, the CMGL began analyzing pre- and post-storm vertical aerial photography and working with the Texas General Land Office, the U.S. Geological Survey, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and The University of Texas at Austin (UT) to coordinate ground and airborne surveys.

Many people recall when Hurricane Ike struck the upper Texas coast on September 13, 2008. Ike made landfall on the eastern end of Galveston Island as a large and strong category 2 hurricane. Sustained winds were nearly 110 mph and storm surge reached at least 17 feet, inundating the barrier islands and pushing water miles inland.

In October, a field crew from HRI and UT Austin conducted surveys of the beaches along Galveston Island. In December, the HRI/UT team conducted an airborne lidar survey to acquire highly detailed and accurate topographic data of the Gulf shoreline.

Ike caused 40- to 90-meter shoreline retreat. Some of the sand eroded from the beaches and dunes was deposited on top of the barrier islands. The thickness of these extensive sand deposits was more than 60 cm in places and served to raise the elevation of the Gulf edge of the islands to compensate for long-term sea-level rise. HRI/UT surveys conducted along the west beach of Galveston Island one month after the storm revealed little beach recovery, and important questions remain regarding where and how long it will take for the beaches and dunes to reestablish. Longer term research projects by HRI scientists will study the beach and dune recovery process and provide information and recommendations for managing the shoreline.

Other initial observations of the impact of Hurricane Ike include:

- Improved construction standards and evacuation procedures made Ike less damaging than it would have been.
- The extensive damage caused by Hurricane Ike, a category 2 hurricane, emphasizes that the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale is not the best indicator for hurricane impacts.
- We are still building and rebuilding in hazardous locations.
- The upper Texas Gulf shoreline is highly vulnerable to storms and this vulnerability is increasing because of:
 - Ongoing shoreline retreat
 - Small or non-existent foredune complexes
 - New and old shoreline development
- Storm overwash deposits help maintain coastal environments undergoing long-term relative sea-level rise.
- “Rolling” setback policies that provide space for overwash deposition and dune development are needed.
- Levels of damage caused by Ike is just the beginning as we enter a period with likely increased frequency and strength of hurricanes that follows a period of intense coastal development.

Galveston Island State Park Reopening Bay Side March 21

GALVESTON, Texas — Galveston Island State Park, shut down for the last six months due to extensive damage from Hurricane Ike, will welcome day users to the bay side of the coastal park on Saturday, March 21. The beach side of the park, which sustained significant damage, remains closed to the public for facilities demolition and debris removal.

Hundreds of volunteers have pitched in to clean up storm damage and remove considerable debris on the bay side of the 2,000-acre park, and to convert the Nature Center into a Welcome Center. The bay side of the park will be open from sunrise to sunset on Saturdays and Sundays through November. The Welcome Center, which will be operated by the Friends of Galveston Island State Park, will be open weekends from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. No entry fees are being charged.

"The friends group and volunteers have been of great assistance in helping the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department accomplish its goal of allowing public access to [Galveston Island State Park](#) while we obtain funding, finalize our master plan and complete necessary environmental clearances to build a new park," said Justin Rhodes, regional director of state parks in southeast Texas.

For the time being, there is no overnight camping at the park, but visitors can enjoy bird watching, hiking, fishing, crabbing, paddling and other outdoor activities. No license is required to fish inside the state park. The fish-cleaning station on the bay side was severely damaged, but a kayak club is in the process of rebuilding it in time for the March 21 opening.

The Texas Department of Transportation, operating under a directive from Governor Rick Perry to assist governmental entities impacted by the massive hurricane, has been leading efforts to demolish structures and remove debris on the gulf side of the park. TxDOT's assistance is estimated to have saved the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department money it didn't have budgeted, while TPWD waits for assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

TPWD is looking into possibly moving beachside facilities further back from the shoreline and re-establishing a larger dune field and dune line. Preliminary estimates place the cost of rebuilding the park in excess of \$60 million.

"Not only has TxDOT saved Texas taxpayers about \$2.5 million, but they enabled us to meet critical FEMA deadlines for debris removal," said Tony Bettis, TPWD's regional project manager. "It also will enable us to meet a deadline to have all beach debris removed by month's end when sea turtles are expected to return to lay eggs."

Galveston Island State Park occupies a sliver of land at the midway point of the barrier island about six miles southwest of the western tip of the popular sea wall. The bay side provides public access to about 600 acres of grasslands with coastal scrub and scattered oak mottes, as well as hundreds of additional acres of saltwater sloughs, wildlife-rich wetlands and tidal bayous. Visitors can access the Galveston Island State Park's bay side from FM 3005 (Seawall Boulevard). For more information, call the park at (409) 737-1222.

13th Annual Great Texas Birding Classic Aids Declining Songbirds

Fun Event Beckons Birders, But Highlights New Reports of Birds in Decline

LAKE JACKSON, Texas — Corporate-sponsored teams from across the USA that include some of the nation's birding elite will once again take part in what organizers call the world's longest, wildest birding competition along the entire Texas coast April 26-May 3. The Great Texas Birding Classic raises funds to protect bird habitat and promotes the fun and excitement of one of nature's great spectacles, but it also highlights a growing concern: the decline of migratory songbirds. To date, the GTBC has contributed \$651,000 to avian habitat conservation along the Texas Gulf coast through Conservation Grants funded through team sponsorships and donations. Prior to each year's competition, various organizations submit conservation project proposals to seek funding through grants awarded by the winning teams. This work focuses on habitat loss caused by human development, the biggest problem facing wildlife in Texas and around the world.

Conservation scientists say the grants could not come at a more urgent time. Last week, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior released the first ever "U.S. State of the Birds" report. This shows nearly a third of the nation's 800 bird species are endangered, threatened or in significant decline due to habitat loss, invasive species, and other threats. It also shows half of all coastally migrating shorebirds have declined; for example, red knots have declined by an alarming 82 percent, and clapper, yellow, black and king rails are either federally endangered or of high concern. The Interior report reveals troubling declines of bird populations over the past 40 years in all ecosystems — grasslands, wetlands, forests and prairie.

"The U.S. State of the Birds Report is a warning signal of the failing health of our environment," said Carter Smith, Director of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. "At the same time, there is heartening evidence that strategic land management and conservation action can reverse declines of birds as evidenced from the increase of hunted migratory waterfowl and other success stories such as the bald eagle and wild turkey."

An initial motive for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to create the Great Texas Birding Classic was to raise money to arrest the decline of migratory song birds along the Texas coast by funding habitat conservation projects. The Gulf Coast Bird Observatory became the lead partner operating the competition in 2005, working with local communities along the Texas coast.

"There has been a long term, steady decline in many bird species that pass through or reside some part of the year here in Texas" said John Arvin, GCBO research coordinator. "Anything that slows that process is a good thing. Birding Classic conservation grants have made a positive difference for birds at habitat hot spots along the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail." For millions of birds that migrate between North, South and Central America, the Texas coast provide critical stopover habitat, although many natural areas have been lost to human development. The worst losses hit areas most important for birds and wildlife, such as wetlands.

The study "Texas Coastal Wetlands; Status and Trends, Mid-1950s to Early 1990s" was produced jointly by TPWD and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Aerial photos and other sources show the 12.8 million-acre study area contained about 4.1 million acres of wetlands in 1955 and less than 3.9 million acres in 1992, a net loss of about 210,000 acres. The greatest losses were of freshwater emergent and forested wetlands, with significant but relatively smaller losses of saltwater wetlands. One of the most sobering trends is the loss of forested wetlands, including hardwood bottomlands along rivers and streams, one of Texas' most important wildlife habitat types in terms of the density and diversity of species it supports — these declined by 96,000 acres, a 10.9 percent decrease.

For birds, birders and coastal communities, the habitat hot spots which remain are vital — recreationally, environmentally and economically. Research in spring 1992 showed 6,000 birdwatchers visited High Island east of Galveston within a six-week period, spending \$2.5 million on lodging and travel-related activities. Total economic impact over a two-month period was estimated at \$4-to-\$6 million.

The 13th annual birding classic will be celebrated at the contest awards brunch in Corpus Christi on Sunday, May 3. Tickets are available to the Brunch for \$20 per person and may be purchased in advance from GCBO at (979) 480-0999 or from the Corpus Christi Convention and Visitors Bureau at (800) 678-6232. More information is on the birding classic Web site. The Gulf Coast Bird Observatory is a 501(c) 3 organization dedicated to conserving coastal habitat for birds through science and international partnerships.

On the Net:

<http://www.birdingclassic.org>

<http://www.gcbo.org>

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us>

President Bush and Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson to Kickoff Bolivar Adopt-A-Beach Spring Cleanup April 25

AUSTIN — The Texas General Land Office's Adopt-A-Beach Program, Bush Clinton Coastal Recovery Fund and the Points of Light Institute have joined forces to bring national attention to the Bolivar Peninsula. Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson is honored to announce that former President George H. Bush will join volunteers with the Texas General Land Office Adopt-A-Beach Spring Cleanup on the Bolivar Peninsula Saturday, April 25, for the first joint effort of these three community-based organizations. "It is vital we continue to focus attention on the Bolivar Peninsula, which is still struggling more than six months after Ike," Patterson said. "This effort will draw national attention to Bolivar and bring many hands to help. We expect more than 1,000 volunteers."

The 23rd annual Adopt-A-Beach Spring Cleanup will take place at 27 sites along the Texas coast. The all-volunteer event is coordinated through the Adopt-A-Beach Program of the Texas General Land Office. President Bush and Commissioner Patterson will work with volunteers in Bolivar, a community still struggling to rebuild after sustaining a devastating blow from Hurricane Ike nearly six months ago. More details will follow about this historic partnership of the Bush Clinton Coastal Recovery Fund and the Texas General Land Office Adopt-A-Beach Cleanup as they develop. Registration for the cleanup begins at 8:30 a.m. on April 25 and will be at the Chamber of Commerce, 1760 Highway 87 on Crystal Beach, about 11 miles from the ferry landing.

The clean-up itself will last from 9 a.m. to noon. For more information about how you can get involved, call 1-877-TXCOAST or visit our Web site at www.texasadoptabeach.org. Those who want to help Bolivar but cannot participate in the cleanup may make a donation on-line to the Bush Clinton Coastal Fund by visiting their website at www.BushClintonCoastalFund.org.

WHO: President George H. Bush and Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson

WHAT: Texas General Land Office Adopt-A-Beach Spring Cleanup

WHEN: 9 a.m. to noon, Saturday April 25

WHERE: Bolivar Chamber of Commerce, 1760 Highway 87 on Crystal Beach, about 11 miles from the ferry landing.

Patterson Launches Beach Watch Media Blitz

Land Office program lets beach-goers know water quality levels at all of Texas' top beaches

AUSTIN — At 10 a.m. Wednesday, April 8 Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson will launch a statewide media blitz for the Texas Beach Watch program with a press event at the University of Texas – Pan American Coastal Studies Lab at Isla Blanca Park on South Padre Island.

Texas Beach Watch is a program that monitors water quality at all of Texas' top recreational beaches. When bacteria levels in the water exceed the acceptable standards established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Land Office works with local officials to issue advisories warning the public not to swim in affected waters.

A humorous TV and radio spot starring Patterson will run state-wide in both English and Spanish, with the goal of driving traffic to an interactive Texas Beach Watch website. There, Texans can find real-time water quality information at any of 167 monitoring sites.

TexasBeachWatch.com is user-friendly, allowing beachgoers to simply click on a map of the Texas coast for a pop-up with important, yet easy to read, water quality data. The site will take the mystery out of what's in the water and help coastal communities identify areas needing focused improvement .

Texas Beach Watch is funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and administered by the Texas General Land Office. The summer ad-blitz is a nearly \$300,000 effort to spread the word about this important program.

WHO: Jerry Patterson, Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office

WHAT: Rollout of a humorous new TV and radio PSA and TexasBeachWatch.com

WHEN: 10 a.m. Wednesday, April 8

WHERE: University of Texas - Pan American Coastal Studies Lab at Isla Blanca Park on South Padre Island; 100 Marine Lab Drive, South Padre Island, Texas 78597

WHY: To raise public awareness of Texas Beach Watch

Other News

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program Now Accepting Nominations for 2009 Gulf Guardians!



The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program (GMP) partnership developed the Gulf Guardian awards as a way to recognize and honor the businesses, community groups, individuals, and agencies that are taking positive steps to keep the Gulf healthy, beautiful and productive. The Gulf Guardian Award exemplifies what the Gulf of Mexico Program is all about; innovative solutions that come about when we pool resources and look for creative ways to positively impact our quality of life and economic well being.

There are many companies, organizations, and individuals in the Gulf States that are "Gulf Guardians." The GMP partnership believes they should be awarded for their stewardship of this national resource from which we all derive so much benefit.

The first Gulf Guardian Award winners were recognized in 2000. Every year since, a first, second and third place award are given in seven categories: Business, Civic/Non-Profit Organization, Partnerships, Youth/Education, Individual, Government, and Bi-National. All 21 winners in seven different categories receive an impressive marble and glass memento, press coverage on their project, and recognition by their peers. All winners receive a professional video about their project and/or effort that is presented on the evening of the Gulf Guardian Awards ceremony.



The Gulf of Mexico Program began in 1988 to protect, restore, and maintain the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem in economically sustainable ways. The Gulf of Mexico Program is underwritten by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is a non-regulatory, inclusive consortium of state and federal government agencies and representatives of the business and agricultural community, fishing industry, scientists, environmentalists, and community leaders from all five Gulf States.

To complete a nomination application for 2009, go to the Gulf of Mexico Program's web site at <http://www.epa.gov/gmpo> and click on the Gulf Guardian Application button. Applications are available in both English and Spanish. Nominations are due May 15th, 2009. If you have any questions, please contact Diane Altsman at (228) 688-7015 or email her at altsman.diane@epa.gov

EPA Launches Guidance on Environmental Models

EPA has released a guidance document on the development, evaluation and application of environmental models used to inform environmental decision making. This new resource also provides greater transparency of EPA's use of models and guidance on the use of proprietary tools and software. EPA develops and uses a wide range of computer models to simulate the fate of various pollutants, estimate pollution's impact on public health and the environment, and evaluate the cost and benefits of alternative policies. EPA has been a global leader in the development and use of environmental computer models for environmental protection and continues to improve model development and use. More information: <http://www.epa.gov/crem>.

EPA Makes \$565 Million in Recovery Act Funds Available to Provide Clean and Safe Water, Create Jobs

Release date: 03/17/2009

(Dallas, Texas – March 17, 2009) State and tribal governments in Environmental Protection Agency Region 6 will receive more than \$565 million under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 for water projects that will create jobs in addition to protecting public health and the environment. EPA Region 6 is headquartered in Dallas and includes the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and 65 federally recognized tribes. This is the first installment of EPA funding available to support states and tribes in Region 6 under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which President Obama signed into law on February 17, 2009.

"This new funding will provide a much-needed boost to state, tribal and EPA efforts to restore an aging water and wastewater infrastructure," said Lawrence E. Starfield, Acting EPA Regional Administrator. "Not only will it help state and local governments to finance many overdue improvements, but it will also

promote green projects that provide additional benefits to the environment.”

The individual amounts directed to state and tribal governments will be delivered via existing programs: the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, and the Tribal Clean Water and Drinking Water Set-Aside programs. Arkansas will receive \$50.4 million, Louisiana will receive \$71.1 million, New Mexico will receive \$38.9 million, Oklahoma will receive \$63.4 million, and Texas will receive \$341.6 million. In addition, EPA Region 6 will provide approximately \$7 million for tribal water and wastewater infrastructure projects.

These funds will supplement existing annual EPA SRF grants to the states. The states use these funds to issue loans for enhancing, upgrading and rebuilding public drinking water systems and public wastewater systems, as well as funding non-point source projects. The new law provides states with additional flexibility in loan terms by requiring that at least fifty percent of the funding be provided in subsidies such as principal forgiveness or negative interest rates. States and watershed planning organizations will also benefit from the new law through the provision of small planning grants to address specific water quality problems. At least 20 percent of the Recovery Act water funds EPA grants to states should be used for green infrastructure, water or energy efficiency improvements or other environmentally innovative projects.

The States and Federal Agencies are working to identify the best projects for Recovery Act funding. Opportunities for public comments on each state’s proposed list of projects will occur in the next several weeks. As soon as the process is complete and applications are received, EPA will provide the funding. EPA officials expect the funding to flow to the states beginning in April.

Funding for Tribal drinking water and wastewater infrastructure occurs in a partnership between EPA, Tribes and the Indian Health Service (IHS). EPA’s funding will transfer to IHS, who manages the water-related infrastructure construction for Tribes. IHS expects to be able to begin using the funding in April.

While not yet scheduled, similar funding announcements for regional hazardous waste or, “Superfund,” cleanup, “Brownfields” re-development, Diesel Emission Reduction Act (DERA) projects and Leaking Underground Storage Tanks will follow in the near future.

Additional information on EPA Region 6 recovery activities is available at <http://www.epa.gov/region6/eparecovery/index.htm>. To learn more about national American Recovery and Reinvestment Act efforts, please visit <http://www.recovery.gov/>

FEMA and USACE Develop Points of Distribution Tools for State/Local/Nongovernmental Partners

Release Date: March 26, 2009

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) are making available several new, user-friendly tools to partners to enhance state and local capability to stand up and operate Points of Distribution (POD) during and immediately after disaster events.

The products include a new independent study course, a video and guide. These products were developed with input from several states, including Florida, Washington and Texas, and incorporates best practices and lessons learned from the experiences of recent hurricane seasons.

"This guide, video and training class will assist all the partners and stakeholders involved in distribution of assets during times of disaster. Best practices have been compiled and are illustrated in an easy to follow format. This material will help communities, states and tribes work in even better coordination with federal and non-governmental partners as they provide needed supplies to the public, in a timely and consistent manner," said FEMA Logistics Management Directorate Assistant Administrator Eric Smith. The independent study training materials provide an overview into the planning, operations, and demobilization stages needed for a state or local community to successfully execute a POD mission. The lessons detail the staffing and procedures any state or locality will need to plan for, execute, and deactivate POD operations. The guide also includes key operational practices such as how to address safety, equipment management, and resource accountability and informs the reader about the innovative "Adopt a POD" program being used by the state of Washington.

FEMA is using new media techniques to reach state, local and nongovernmental partners in disasters by offering the video on its multimedia site at www.fema.gov/medialibrary. The video is downloadable and also easily embedded on the websites of the state and local partners. The DVD, POD guide and online test are available at training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is26.asp. Beginning April 1, the DVD and POD guide may also be ordered, at no cost, for mail delivery through the FEMA Publications Warehouse (1-800-480-2520).

FEMA is also developing a "Train the Trainer" course that will be held at the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) to provide detailed hands-on experience to state and local emergency managers who can then go back to their communities to train others. FEMA is reaching out to state and local emergency managers to participate in a focus group hosted at FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI) to develop the "Train the Trainer" course. FEMA expects to have this completed by December 2009.

FEMA's multimedia library provides audio, video and photography captured during disaster federal response and recovery missions, instructional and training content, as well as preparedness and mitigation stories. FEMA leads and supports the nation in a risk-based, comprehensive emergency management system of preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation, to reduce the loss of life and property and protect the nation from all hazards including natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters.

Celebrate American Wetlands Month 2009!

This May will mark the 19th anniversary of American Wetlands Month, a time when EPA and its partners in federal, state, tribal, local, non-profit, and private sector organizations celebrate the vital importance of wetlands to the Nation's ecological, economic, and social health. It is also a great opportunity to discover and teach others about the important role that wetlands play in our environment and the significant benefits they provide - improved water quality, increased water storage and supply, reduced flood and storm surge risk, and critical habitat for plants, fish, and wildlife.

In organizing its activities, EPA is placing special emphasis on encouraging Americans to: Learn about wetlands. This is a great time to better understand what a wetland is, where wetlands can be found, and the importance of wetlands. Activities may include reading and studying about wetland areas, drawing maps or illustrations of wetlands, and identifying native species found in wetlands. Information on wetlands and the important benefits they provide is available on this website, through EPA's [wetlands fact sheets](#) series, or by visiting the websites of [our partners](#).

Explore a wetland near you. Unless you live in the most extreme climate zones, there is a good chance a scenic wetland exists nearby for you to visit and explore during American Wetlands Month and throughout the year. To find a wetland near you, consult your local parks department, state natural resource agency, or the [United States Fish and Wildlife Service](#). If you live in the Washington, DC area, a [guide](#) has been created to highlight wetlands and wildlife sanctuaries.

Take action to protect and restore wetlands. Support and promote wetlands informing community members about wetlands' vital roles, "adopting" a wetland, joining a local watershed group, or participating in a wetland monitoring, restoration, or cleanup project. There are many other actions Americans can take to help conserve wetlands. To learn more about what you can do to help protect and restore these valuable natural resources in your state or local area, visit [What You Can Do to Protect and Restore Wetlands](#).

Training and Conferences

National Environmental Education Week April 12-18, 2009

National Environmental Education Week (EE Week) is the nation's largest organized environmental education event. Held each April, EE Week promotes understanding and protection of the natural world by actively engaging K-12th grade students and educators of all subjects in an inspired week of environmental learning and service before Earth Day. Join the thousands of schools, nature centers, zoos, museums, and aquariums nationwide who have made a commitment to engage students in environmental learning through participation in EE Week!

This year's EE Week theme is Be Water Wise! Registered partners will have access to a wide variety of FREE environmental education resources, including:

- Standards-based environmental education lessons and activities, including water conservation, watershed, and water quality curricula,
- Access to EE Week's school water audit tool in which students "find the leaks" in water usage at school,
- Opportunities for online communication and knowledge-sharing with educators from across the country, including participation in the EE Week Photo Blog contest and Ask an Expert feature,
- Monthly electronic newsletters highlighting the latest EE curricula, professional development, and funding opportunities,
- Certificates of participation for themselves and their students, and
- A coupon for \$10 off your purchase at Acorn Naturalists, offering over 8,000 science and nature resources for the trail and classroom.

You can join a national network of educators dedicated to increasing environmental literacy, promote environmental learning, and gain national exposure for your school or organization by registering today at www.EEWeek.org. Questions? Contact Jessica Culverhouse at eeweek@neefusa.org or call 202-261-6484.

Firewise Lunch Presentation Set for April 14

BILOXI, Miss. – A free presentation titled “Creating Community Support for Firewise Initiatives” will be held on Tuesday, April 14, 2009, from 11:30 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. at the MSU Coastal Research and Extension Center Auditorium in Biloxi. The meeting will inform community leaders, homeowners, planners, building inspectors, neighborhood associations, natural resource managers, fire service representatives and others about the national Firewise Communities program, Community Wildfire Protection Plans, and Firewise funding opportunities. A light lunch will be served on a first-come basis.

Speakers include experts from the Mississippi Forestry Commission and Laurie Pierpont, mayor of Snow Lake Shores, Miss. Snow Lake Shores is Mississippi’s premier Firewise recognized community. Mayor Pierpont will discuss her experience working with the Mississippi Forestry Commission to achieve Firewise recognition and the benefits the program has provided her community.

Fire season is here in South Mississippi, and there are many steps communities can take to reduce risks associated with forest fires. The Firewise Communities’ approach emphasizes community responsibility for planning and designing safe neighborhoods and providing effective emergency response. It also recognizes the responsibility of homeowners for safe home construction, landscaping and maintenance. Although many individuals associate wildfire risk with communities in the western United States and Florida, wildfire protection should be a priority for South Mississippians. Many people live or work in areas adjacent to wildlife refuges, parks or national forests, and new construction is continually encroaching upon less developed areas in the northern tier of Mississippi’s coastal counties.

The presentation is hosted by the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources’ (DMR) Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR); Mississippi Forestry Commission (MFC); the Mississippi Coastal Plains RC&D Council; and the Jackson, Harrison, and Hancock counties’ Soil and Water Conservation districts.

Registration for this event is encouraged. Contact Marian Hanisko, Coastal Training Program Coordinator, (228) 475-7047 or marian.hanisko@dmr.ms.gov. 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.

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council to Meet in New Orleans, Louisiana

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council will meet April 14 - 17, 2009, in New Orleans, Louisiana at the W Hotel, 333 Poydras Street. Council Committees will convene Tuesday through Thursday morning, with the full Council convening Thursday afternoon through Friday. Agenda highlights are summarized below. For a copy of the detailed agenda or to review briefing book materials, please visit www.gulfcouncil.org or call 888-833-1844.

On Tuesday the Data Committee will hear presentations on an electronic logbook pilot project; a text message-based reporting pilot project; and satellite-based environmental data collection. The Committee will also hear a report of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission’s Fisheries Information Network (FIN) Committee Meeting.

Wednesday the Sustainable Fisheries-Ecosystem Committee will review a discussion paper for a generic amendment addressing the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSRA) requirement to incorporate annual catch limits and accountability measures into all fishery management plans. The Committee will also select locations for scoping meetings, which will be held sometime this summer to garner public input on how to proceed with the amendment.

Also on Wednesday, the Reef Fish Management Committee will review a draft of Reef Fish Amendment 31, which addresses the issue of turtle interactions with bottom longline gear in the Gulf of Mexico. A recent report by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center shows the estimated take of sea turtles in the bottom longline fishery in the Gulf of Mexico exceeds the authorized bycatch allowance. The Council is required by the Endangered Species Act to take action to provide protection for threatened loggerhead sea turtles from interactions with fishing gear. Similarly, National Standard 9 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires the Council to reduce bycatch to the extent practicable, and where it cannot be reduced, to reduce bycatch mortality.

Other issues coming before the Reef Fish Management Committee include:

- A summary report of Socioeconomic Panel meeting
- A discussion on the allocation of species included in Reef Fish Amendments 30A and 30B
- A status report on the gag and red grouper update assessments

Wednesday evening the Council and NOAA Fisheries will host an informal Question and Answer Session on Gulf of Mexico fishery management issues. Thursday morning the Administrative Policy Committee will review draft changes to the Council's Statement of Organization Practices and Procedures (SOPPs) based on the MSRA requirements, and the Outreach & Education Committee will hear a report of the Outreach & Education Advisory Panel meeting.

On Thursday afternoon, April 16, 2009, the full Council will convene at 1:30 p.m. Public testimony is scheduled to begin at 1:45 p.m. Testimony will be accepted on Exempted Fishing Permits (if any). The Council will also hold an open public comment session to give members of the public an opportunity to address the Council on fishery issues that may not be on the agenda. Open public comment will be taken for one hour immediately following public testimony.

Beginning at 2:45 Thursday and running through Friday afternoon, the full Council will meet to deliberate and take action on committee recommendations made earlier in the week.

Although other non-emergency issues not on the agenda may come before the Council and Committees for discussion, in accordance with the M-SFCMA, those issues may not be the subject of formal action during these meetings. Actions of the Council and Committees will be restricted to those issues specifically identified in the agendas and any issues arising after publication of this notice that require emergency action under Section 305(c) of the M-SFCMA, provided the public has been notified of the Council's intent to take action to address the emergency.

The established times for addressing items on the agenda may be adjusted as necessary to accommodate the timely completion of discussion relevant to the agenda items. In order to allow for such adjustments and completion of all items on the agenda, the meeting may be extended from, or completed prior to the date established in this notice. Meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Tina O'Hern at the Council five days prior to the meeting.

Master Naturalist Program to Offer Training in Habitats, Wildlife

BILOXI, Miss. — Mississippi Master Naturalist Program courses will be held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Thursdays from April 16 to June 4 at the Mississippi State University Coastal Research and Extension Center in Biloxi. Class enrollment is limited, and pre-registration is required. The course fee is \$65, which includes program costs, supplies, course notebook and other educational materials.

The program helps participants expand their knowledge of local habitats and helps them identify ways to protect land and water resources. Master Naturalists receive 40 hours of training in natural resource and wildlife management. They also must complete 40 hours of volunteer service to meet certification requirements.

Natural resource professionals, university professors and extension agents will conduct classes and field trips about archaeology, native plants, habitats, insects, watershed management, forestry, fisheries, soils and birds. To register, contact Chris Boyd, an assistant extension professor who works with MSU and the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, at (228) 546-1025 or cboyd@ext.msstate.edu.

Learn to be an Oyster Gardener

Anyone interested in volunteering with the Mobile Bay Oyster Gardening Program must attend one of two upcoming workshops. Program volunteers grow oysters in cages off their wharves in “conditionally open” waters. The oysters later are planted on reefs.

A Baldwin County workshop will take place at 10 a.m., Saturday, April 18, at the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau in Orange Beach. A Mobile County workshop will be held at 10 a.m., Saturday, May 2, at the Auburn University Shellfish Laboratory on Dauphin Island. Workshops typically last for one to three hours.

Volunteers with cages in need of repair are encouraged to bring them to the parking lot at the workshop site. Contact Extension Specialist P.J. Waters at 251-438-5690 or waterph@aces.edu for more information or to reserve a seat.

Earth Day, Saturday, April 18th!



Location: Old Town Bay St. Louis on Main Street

Time: 11am - 5pm

Earth Day is seeking vendors to set up on the Town Green on Saturday, April 18th. The event features food, music and earth-friendly vendors, including building, solar, insulation and natural products. If you'd like to register for booth space, don't delay! The cost is \$100 per space, \$75 for members of the Hancock Chamber of Commerce or to those belonging to our LOAM alliance organizations. Non-profits may set up a booth for free! Spaces are 10'X10' and participants are responsible for providing their own tents, tables and chairs. If you or someone you know is interested in a booth, please contact Judy Voght, at judyvoght@yahoo.com.

1st Annual Great Green Expo

Date: April 22, 2009 (Earth Day)

Time: 9AM – 1PM

Location: Marina, Keesler Air Force Base

What is the Great Green Expo?

Keesler Air Force Base is organizing a Green Exposition involving various businesses and vendors, government offices, local nonprofits, etc. to support, participate and educate on a multitude of environmental and sustainable topics, to include, renewable energy, environmental restoration, wildlife, sustainable living, recycling, green building, local environmental programs and how to get involved.

Who will be at the Great Green Expo?

Local schoolchildren will be invited to attend the Expo between 9AM-11AM. Local base populace, along with local media and other invited guests will be invited to bring a brown bag lunch to the Marina and visit the Expo between 11AM-1PM.

What other Earth Day Activities is Keesler Air Force Base planning?

Besides the Great Green Expo, we will be offering tours of the Recycling Center on base, as well as tours of the LEED Certified Housing Project. Transportation will be provided to both of these tours from the Expo area. There will also be a Tree Planting Ceremony at 10:30AM.

Where can I get more information about this event?

For additional information, to donate to the project and/or to register to volunteer, please call Marcella Whitfield at 228-218-7867 (Marcella.whitfield@keesler.af.mil) or Beth Osgood at 228-377-1262.

Call for Abstracts: Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation

The Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation 20th Biennial Conference, "Estuaries and Coasts in a Changing World" call for abstracts and registration are now open.

Location: Oregon Convention Center, Portland, Oregon

Dates: November 1-5, 2009

Early Registration Deadline: October 1, 2009

Abstract/Proposal Submission Deadline: May 15, 2009

Contact Information: CERF 2009 Conference Management, cerf2009@sgmeet.com

Home Page URL: <http://www.sgmeet.com/cerf2009/>

Links to Event resources:

[Call for Abstracts](#)

[Online Conference Registration](#)

[Scientific Program Session Topics](#)

Did you find this edition useful? Please send suggestions, comments, and new items for publication to Laurie.Rounds@noaa.gov.