



GULF OF MEXICO NEWS

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November-December 2009



NOAA Gulf of Mexico News

.....	3
NOAA Commissions New Fisheries Survey Ship and Dedicates New Fisheries Service Building in Pascagoula, Miss.	3
Dr. Lubchenco Visits Grand Bay Reserve.....	4
Slow Atlantic Hurricane Season Comes to a Close.....	4
Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper Recovering.....	5
Collaborative Project Seeks Feedback on Sea Level Rise	6
New NOAA Effort to Connect Agency with its Customers.....	6

Other NOAA News

.....	8
New Study Uncovers Key Role of Bacteria in the Formation of 'Red Tide' Algal Blooms	8
NOAA Releases Expanded World Ocean Database.....	9
Summary of the NOAA Workshop North Carolina Sea Level Rise Project: Application to Management.....	9
NOAA Encourages Use of Catch Shares to End Overfishing, Rebuild Fisheries and Fishing Communities	10
List of Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program Projects Released.....	12
National Estuarine Research Reserve System Launches Revamped Web Site.....	12
National Ocean Service: Making Waves Podcasts	13
Marine Spatial Planning Web Resource Goes Live.....	13
CICEET's Fall 2009 Progress Reports Online.....	14

In the Gulf States

.....	14
Three Manatees in Local Waters Off-season	14
Land Trust Accreditation Awarded to Weeks Bay Foundation	15
New Gulf of Mexico Alliance Training Website.....	16
Gardeners Grow 45,000 Oysters for Restoration	16
SW Florida District Completes Springs Coast Seagrass Mapping Project.....	17
LA Officials Take Step to Require the Corps of Engineers to Beneficially Use Lower Mississippi River Dredged Material.....	18
More Louisiana Marinas Join an Elite Group.....	19
Louisiana Scientists Continue Study of Gulf of Mexico "Dead Zone"	20
Grand Isle Diaries – An Oral History Available.....	21
Bay St. Louis Historic Walking Tour Brochure Kick-Off	22
DMR, Partners Sink Omega Protein Vessel for Artificial Reef Habitat.....	23
Honored Guests to Attend, Speak at NERR’s New Coastal Resources Center Dedication.....	24
MS Secretary of State Returns More Than \$7 Million to Gulf Coast from Tidelands Leases and New Assessment Collections	24
North Deer Island Partners Honored by Presidential Award.....	25
TCEQ Establishes Office of Water	26
Oyster Recycling	27
Harte Research Institute-NOAA Expedition	27

Other News

.....	28
Landrieu: FDA Agrees to Commonsense Solution on Gulf Coast Oysters	28
Assessing Interest in a Southeast Smart Growth Network.....	29
Secretary Vilsack Announces 41 Watersheds to Take Part in Mississippi River Basin Initiative.....	30
Entergy, RAE Join Forces to Rebuild Louisiana Wetlands	31
New Aquatic Habitat Restoration Projects Funded	32

Conferences and Workshops

.....	33
Habitat Priority Planner: GIS Training for Coastal Resource Professionals.....	33
21st Annual Alabama Nonpoint Source Conference.....	33
EPA Adaptation Workshop Announcement.....	34
Freshwater Inflows: 2010 and Beyond	34
Texas Coastal Bend Living Shorelines.....	34
International Conference on Sea Level Rise in the Gulf of Mexico: Impacts, Adaptations, and Management.....	35
Sea Level Rise 2010 Conference: Special Gulf of Mexico Alliance Session on Sea Level Rise.....	35
Mark Your Calendars for the Louisiana State of the Coast Conference	36

NOAA Gulf of Mexico News

NOAA Commissions New Fisheries Survey Ship and Dedicates New Fisheries Service Building in Pascagoula, Miss.

November 6, 2009



NOAA Ship *Pisces* is the third of four newly constructed fisheries survey vessels and is homeported in Pascagoula. [High resolution](#) (Credit: NOAA)

Senior NOAA officials today commissioned NOAA Ship *Pisces*, the nation's most advanced fisheries research vessel, and dedicated a new fisheries laboratory in Pascagoula, Miss. The vessel and the NOAA laboratory will support fisheries research in the Gulf of Mexico, southeastern United States and the Caribbean.

"Our fisheries and the marine ecosystems that support them are vital to our nation's economy," said Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator, who attended today's ceremonies. "The knowledge we'll gain from *Pisces* and the Pascagoula laboratory will greatly enhance our understanding and stewardship of these precious resources."

Pisces, built by Pascagoula based VT Halter Marine, is equipped with high tech research equipment and quiet-hull technology. The vessel is so quiet and so advanced that scientists can study fish populations and collect oceanographic data with minimal impact on fish and marine mammal behavior.

The 208-ft ship is the third of four newly constructed [NOAA fisheries](#) survey vessels of the same class. *Pisces* is operated by the [NOAA Office of Marine and Aviation Operations](#) and is homeported in Pascagoula.

Pisces was named by a team of students from Sacred Heart School in Southaven, Miss., and christened by Dr. Annette Nevin Shelby, professor emerita at Georgetown University and wife of U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby.

The new Southeast Fisheries Science Center's Pascagoula laboratory replaces the laboratory that was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. At approximately 55,000 square feet, the building contains office space for 104 scientists, a library, and meeting rooms. This enables NOAA to consolidate several previously dispersed programs in the Pascagoula area including the Pascagoula Laboratory; National Seafood Inspection Laboratory; and the Documentation, Approval and Supply Services office.



NOAA's new Southeast Fisheries Science Center's Pascagoula laboratory. [High resolution](#) (Credit: NOAA)

One new feature at the facility is an environmental laboratory that will allow scientists to analyze environmental data such as temperature/depth profiles, oxygen data, and other environmental data

collected on all survey cruises. These data will be useful in monitoring environmental factors such as hypoxia, but also will be incorporated into ecosystem models.

The structure is also designed to be more hurricane resistant, with a first floor elevation of 17 feet and is capable of withstanding winds up to 150 mph. Walton Construction, LLC, based in Kansas City, Mo., with an office in Harahan, La., led the design and construction team which includes partners such as HDR in Alexandria, Va., and Gibbens Drake Scott in Kansas City.

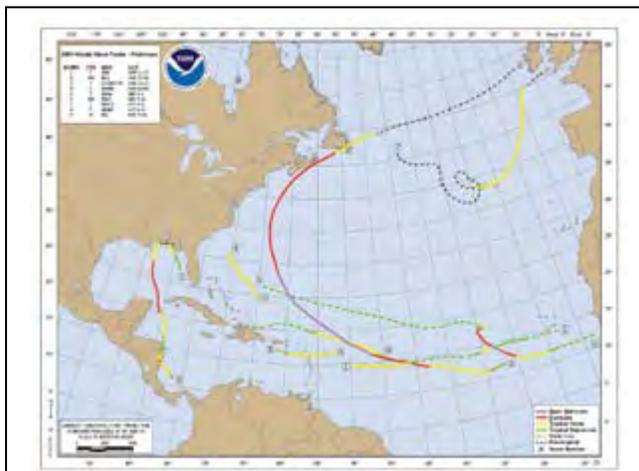
NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources.

Dr. Lubchenco Visits Grand Bay Reserve

On November 6, NOAA Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco visited the Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Mississippi, meeting the staff, visiting the new Grand Bay Coastal Resources Center, and touring some of the reserve's waterways by boat. Dr. Lubchenco visited the reserve after participating in the commissioning of NOAA's newest fisheries research ship, the *Pisces*, in Pascagoula earlier that day.

Her visit preceded by about a month the formal dedication of the Coastal Resources Center, which will serve as the reserve's headquarters, with a visitor's center and education facilities. The building includes a number of environmentally friendly features designed to conserve both water and energy and it replaces facilities that were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. For more information, contact [Matt Chasse](#).

Slow Atlantic Hurricane Season Comes to a Close



2009 Atlantic Storm Tracks - Preliminary.
[High resolution](#) (Credit: NOAA)

November 30, 2009

The 2009 Atlantic hurricane season officially ends today marking the close of a season with the fewest named storms and hurricanes since 1997 thanks, in part, to El Niño.

Nine named storms formed this year, including three hurricanes, two of which were major hurricanes at Category 3 strength or higher. These numbers fall within the ranges predicted in NOAA's mid-season outlook issued in August, which called for seven to 11 named storms, three to six hurricanes, and one to two major hurricanes. An average season has 11 named storms and six hurricanes, including two major hurricanes.

"The reduced activity was expected and reflects the development of El Niño during the summer,"

said Gerry Bell, Ph.D., lead seasonal hurricane forecaster at NOAA's Climate Prediction Center, a division of the National Weather Service. "El Niño produced strong wind shear across the Caribbean Sea and western tropical Atlantic, which resulted in fewer and shorter-lived storms compared to some recent very active seasons."

Two systems, Claudette and Ida, brought tropical storm force winds to the U.S. mainland. For the first time in three years, no hurricanes hit the U.S. There were 38 hurricane hunter aircraft reconnaissance

missions flown by NOAA and the U.S. Air Force over the Atlantic Basin this year compared to 169 in 2008 – another indication of a less active season.

“El Niño is expected to reach peak strength this winter, and will likely continue into the spring. It is far too early to say whether El Niño will be present next summer,” added Bell. NOAA will issue its initial 2010 Atlantic Hurricane Outlook in May, prior to the official start of the season on June 1. 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.

Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper Recovering

December 11, 2009

A recent scientific update on Gulf of Mexico red snapper shows that fishermen may be able to catch more fish next year. This news shows that when fishermen follow management measures based on science, they lead to rebuilding of fish populations and increased opportunities to fish.

“The update showed harvest levels were still a bit too high in 2008; however, scientific projections are promising for 2009, indicating that the stock may improve enough to support higher harvest levels,” said Dr. Bonnie Ponwith, Southeast Fisheries Science Center director for [NOAA’s Fisheries Service](#). “This is very exciting news and is evidence of how science and management can work together to protect our natural resources.”

Historical records indicate fishermen have targeted red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico since the late 1800s as a subsistence fishery. However, fishing pressure became too great throughout the mid-1900s as coastal populations increased and saltwater sport fishing became more popular. Heavy fishing since then brought this population to a level that could not be sustained or reproduce as much as it could.

In response to the poor condition of this once prolific population, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council began to address the issues in the mid-1980s. The actions taken by the council have ranged in variety and degree, from adjusting recreational size limits to implementing a catch share program for commercial fishermen in 2007.

“This has been our most challenging fishery issue in the Gulf of Mexico to date,” said Dr. Roy Crabtree, southeast regional administrator for NOAA’s Fisheries Service. “The Gulf Council deserves a lot of credit for making some very difficult decisions and commercial and recreational fishermen deserve equal credit for complying with the regulations to help this species recover.”

The red snapper population is still a long way from making a full recovery, but reducing fishing pressure has expedited the recovery process and continues to provide long-term benefits to the fish, as well as to those dependent upon it for business and recreation. As the species’ condition continues to improve, fishermen are reporting red snapper in areas where they haven’t been seen in many years, such as off of Tampa Bay, Fla., and southward.

The scientific update was completed by a panel of experts selected by the Gulf Council and comprised of academic, state, and federal scientists. This panel presented their results to the Gulf Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee in early December.

The Gulf Council may review this information at their next meeting in February in Mobile, Ala., and make a recommendation to NOAA’s Fisheries Service to increase the current red snapper catch levels. The update suggests the current catch level can be increased from five million pounds to slightly more than 6.9 million pounds.

While this is good news, an increase to the total allowable catches may not support an increase to the length of the recreational fishing season. Preliminary data indicate the recreational fishery exceeded its annual quota by more than one million pounds in 2009. Any decision regarding the length of the 2010 recreational fishing season will need to take into account final information on the extent of that overage. NOAA's Fisheries Service will determine the length of the recreational season early next year; however, the season will begin on June 1.

NOAA is committed to responding as quickly as possible to any Gulf Council proposals to reward fishermen for their sacrifice while ensuring continued success in rebuilding this population. It is important to note that red snapper are managed separately in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic (North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida's east coast). Earlier this month, NOAA's Fisheries Service announced a temporary rule to protect red snapper in the South Atlantic as its population is in poor condition, much like the Gulf of Mexico population once was. The temporary measures for the South Atlantic become effective on Jan. 4, 2010, and will not apply in Gulf of Mexico waters.

Collaborative Project Seeks Feedback on Sea Level Rise

A collaborative project related to climate change outreach for the Gulf of Mexico (GOM) is being conducted by Sea Grant, NOAA Fisheries, NOAA Coastal Services Center, the National Estuarine Research Reserve System in cooperation with other NOAA programs, state and federal agencies and local governments. This project will produce an outreach 'toolkit' for use by extension, outreach and education experts around the GOM, focused on effects of sea level rise (SLR) and strategies that coastal communities can use to plan for and adapt to SLR. It also is the first step in building a long-lasting Community of Practice (CoP) among extension, outreach and education experts in the GOM to support ongoing collaborative programs dealing with climate change.

In order to maximize the utility of the outreach tool kit, the project leaders are conducting this survey of extension, outreach and education experts around the GOM to assess their knowledge about climate change, their viewpoints on usefulness of particular tools for conducting climate change extension, outreach and education, and to better understand the composition of their target audiences. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes and all information will remain anonymous. To participate in the survey: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=u9GNhPIH84ZdFE_2fskynEEg_3d_3d.

New NOAA Effort to Connect Agency with its Customers

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Extension, Outreach and Education (EOE) Pilot Program officially began in October with the hiring of three project team members. Matthew W. Capps, Stacy J. Ray and LaDonna "L.D." Hinesley will work to help NOAA improve its ability to have meaningful, two-way conversations with the public and strengthen teamwork and information sharing across NOAA agencies throughout the Gulf Coast region.

"We are pleased to have hired such qualified personnel to implement such an important NOAA engagement program in the Gulf of Mexico," said LaDon Swann, director of the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, who will serve as the leader of this project along with Tony Zodrow, executive director of GulfQuest, an interactive maritime museum set to open in 2011 in Mobile, Ala. "The success of this pilot could lead to a significant change in the way NOAA engages its constituents."

Capps, Ray and Hinesley are working from offices on the fourth floor of the International Trade Center on North Water Street in downtown Mobile, Ala. GulfQuest's offices are also located at the International

Trade Center, which fosters collaboration between the two organizations. The Trade Center is the headquarters of the Alabama State Port Authority.

The EOE Pilot Program was established in response to a Science Advisory Board report that called for the creation of a program to reinvent NOAA's approach to extension, outreach and education activities. "The EOE pilot will lead to a set of recommendations to NOAA for improving its ability to engage with constituents across all eight NOAA regions nationwide," Swann said.

When GulfQuest opens on Mobile's downtown waterfront, the EOE Program will move to that location. The EOE program and GulfQuest educators will work together to develop programs for the general public and school groups that address environmental issues that are important to both organizations. "With a projected annual attendance of 300,000 visitors, GulfQuest will provide unique opportunities for the EOE program to reach current constituents as well as future generations of NOAA constituents," Zodrow said.

Capps to focus on climate, resiliency

Capps will serve as a NOAA climate and resiliency engagement specialist. He will work with NOAA agencies that deal with climate and resilience issues to help them better connect with the people who use NOAA's information and products.

One of his first tasks is creating a climate and resiliency engagement panel with people from all types of industries, government agencies and non-government organizations to work with NOAA's Gulf of Mexico Regional Collaboration Team.

"The panel will play a vital role for the team by providing input and guidance to address regionally relevant climate and resilience issues that impact the Gulf of Mexico's built and natural environments," he said.

Capps has a master's degree in landscape architecture and a bachelor's degree in landscape horticulture, both from Auburn University. While earning his master's degree, Capps worked with the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium and the Town of Dauphin Island, Ala., to design a master plan for the Town of Dauphin Island's working waterfront and central business district that was grounded in the principles of resiliency and sustainability.

Ray to focus on nutrients, hypoxia

Ray, who is the NOAA nutrients and hypoxia engagement specialist, will work closely with the NOAA Gulf of Mexico Regional Collaboration Team. She also will work with the Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA) to implement a social marketing plan with the help of Master Gardeners about residential fertilizer application practices.

"I am looking forward to bringing these two groups of people together to accomplish a practical, on-the-ground project involving local citizens," she said.

Along with the GOMA Nutrients Team, she will help develop an exchange program involving NOAA constituents in the Corn Belt states. Ray has a master's degree in environmental studies from the College of Charleston and a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of Arkansas at Monticello. She also served as a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer in Morokwaneng, South Africa.

Hinesley to focus on communication

Hinesley was hired as a communications specialist to establish a regional engagement working group to develop an engagement strategic plan for the Gulf of Mexico that integrates and utilizes existing NOAA EOE programs and personnel.

The EOE program is partnering with GulfQuest (the National Maritime Museum of the Gulf of Mexico) because it has some of the same objectives: to enhance public awareness and understanding of ocean,

coastal and atmospheric science and stewardship, Hinesley said. Hinesley has a master's degree in public and private management from Birmingham Southern College and is the former communications director for the South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce.

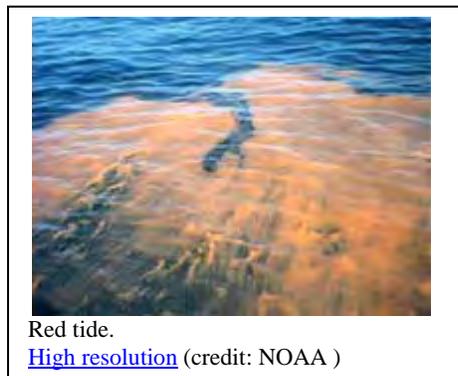
The NOAA EOE program is a cooperative agreement between the NOAA Office of Education, GulfQuest, the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium and the NOAA Regional Collaboration Team. The EOE pilot program has \$500,000 in Congressional funding for its first year of operations and intends to seek continued funding through NOAA to in subsequent years.

Other NOAA News

New Study Uncovers Key Role of Bacteria in the Formation of 'Red Tide' Algal Blooms

Implications for Climate Modeling

November 16, 2009



Red tide.
[High resolution](#) (credit: NOAA)

According to a [new study](#) published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, NOAA and NOAA-funded university scientists are closer to understanding why “red tides,” called harmful algal blooms form. These toxic harmful algal blooms threaten marine ecosystems, human health, and cost local and regional economies millions of dollars annually through fishery closures and recreation and tourism losses.

The study looked at the impact that the cooperative interactions between marine microalgae and bacteria have on the growth of harmful algal blooms. Scientists have long recognized that

certain species of bacteria are closely associated with the microalgae that form the harmful algal blooms, but didn't understand why the blooms formed or what role the bacteria play. The researchers found that certain species of bacteria form a mutually-beneficial relationship with the algae that promotes the growth of each. The bacteria release a chemical which helps the algae absorb iron, a critical nutrient for photosynthesis. The algae, in turn, release organic compounds to support the growth of the bacteria.

The potential impacts of the study are extensive, and could result in improved modeling and forecasting of harmful algal blooms or potential strategies for prevention, according to William Sunda, Ph.D., of [NOAA's Beaufort Laboratory](#), a co-author of the report. “The results of the research have global implications,” said Sunda. “If we can find a way to inhibit the bacteria we should be able to help communities around the world deal with problematic and costly algal blooms.”

The study also offers new insight for climate change models, since dimethylsulfide, a gas produced by the bloom-forming algae, plays a critical role in the process of cloud formation and the ability of clouds to reflect sunlight back into space. The degree to which light is reflected in turn influences solar heating of the Earth, affecting global climate.

NOAA Releases Expanded World Ocean Database

November 16, 2009



Large wave breaking over bow of NOAA ship.
[High resolution](#) (Credit: NOAA)

NOAA today released the [World Ocean Database 2009](#), the largest, most comprehensive collection of scientific information about the oceans with records dating as far back as 1800. This product is part of the climate services provided by NOAA.

The 2009 database, updated from the 2005 edition, is significantly larger providing approximately 9.1 million temperature profiles and 3.5 million salinity reports. The 2009 database also captures 29 categories of scientific information from the oceans, including oxygen levels and chemical tracers, plus information on gases and isotopes that can be used to trace the movement of ocean currents.

“There is now more data about the global oceans than ever before,” said Sydney Levitus, director of the [World Data Center for Oceanography](#), which is part of [NOAA’s National Oceanographic Data Center](#). “Previous databases have shown the world ocean has warmed during the last 53 years, and it’s crucial we have reliable, accurate monitoring of our oceans into the future.”

Climate scientists use the World Ocean Database to track changing conditions which adds to the international science community’s understanding of global climate change. Forecast centers, such as [NOAA’s Ocean Prediction Center](#), also use the information for quality control of real-time oceanographic information. The database is a crucial part of the Integrated Ocean Observing System and the [Global Earth Observation System of Systems](#), or GEOSS, as a reliable source of oceanic information. The information was compiled by scientists at the [Ocean Climate Laboratory](#), part of the [NOAA Satellite and Information Service](#).

Summary of the NOAA Workshop North Carolina Sea Level Rise Project: Application to Management

A [white paper](#) summarizing the NCCOS-sponsored workshop, *NOAA North Carolina Sea Level Rise Project: Application to Management* is now available on the CSCOR web site. The workshop was convened to facilitate the syntheses, communication, and integration of funded sea level rise scientific results to interested managers.

The white paper results make obvious the enormous benefit of providing opportunities for management and researcher interaction during the planning and execution of a research project. The results demonstrate a need for more attention and funding provided for improved visualizations, geospatial tools, and mapping representations developed through the involvement of potential users, as well as a continuing need for end-user training. For more information, contact Carol Auer at Carol.Auer@noaa.gov.

NOAA Encourages Use of Catch Shares to End Overfishing, Rebuild Fisheries and Fishing Communities

December 10, 2009

NOAA released today for public comment a draft national policy encouraging the use of catch shares, a fishery management tool that aims to end overfishing and rebuild and sustain fishing jobs and fishing communities. In doing so, NOAA recognized that catch shares are not a panacea or one-size-fits-all solution, but are a proven way to promote sustainable fishing when designed properly at the fishing community level.



Removing halibut in Sitka, Alaska. The halibut catch share program has been in place more than a decade. [High resolution](#) (credit: NOAA)

“We have made great progress in rebuilding many fisheries, but more than 20 percent of our fish stocks have not been rebuilt, and even larger proportion of our fisheries are not meeting their full economic potential for the nation,” Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke said. “Catch shares is a tool that can help us realize the full economic and biological benefits of rebuilt fisheries.”

Catch share programs, which include Limited Access Privilege programs and individual fishing quotas, have been used in the U.S. since 1990 and are now used in 13 different commercial fisheries. Four new programs will begin over the next year. NOAA estimates that

rebuilding U.S. fish stocks would increase annual commercial dockside values by an estimated \$2.2 billion, a 54-percent increase over current dockside values of \$4.1 billion, and help support jobs in the seafood industry and across the broader economy.

“From Florida to Alaska, catch share programs help fishing communities provide good jobs while rebuilding and sustaining healthy fisheries and ocean ecosystems,” said Dr. Jane Lubchenco, under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. “Although this is a national policy, our emphasis is on local consideration and design of catch shares that take into consideration commercial and recreational fishing interests.”

A catch share program differs from traditional fishery management by dividing up the total allowable catch in a fishery into shares. These shares are typically allocated based on historical participation in the fishery. They may be assigned to individuals, cooperatives, communities or other entities, who would be allowed to fish up to their assigned limit. Catch share participants also agree to stop fishing when they have caught as much as they are allowed.

Under traditional management programs, fishermen compete for a total allowable catch. This has led to fishermen racing each other to catch as many fish as they can before the total catch limit is reached. This results in more boats and gear than necessary, quotas being exceeded, increasingly shorter fishing seasons, unsafe fishing and high levels of bycatch. It also may result in too many fish brought to market at once, reducing their market value to fishermen and coastal communities.

“Catch shares allow fishermen to plan their businesses better and be more selective about when and how they catch their allotment, because they know their share of the fishery is secure,” said Dr. Jim Balsiger, acting administrator of [NOAA’s Fisheries Service](#). “They can plan their fishing schedules in response to weather, market, and individual business conditions. Catch share programs help eliminate the race to fish, reduce overcapacity and bycatch, enhance the safety of fishermen and their vessels, and improve

economic efficiency. They also help ensure fishermen adhere to annual catch limits because the value of their share is directly linked to the overall health of the fish stock and its habitat.”

While catch shares are not always universally embraced when they are first introduced, their benefits have been well proven. “We fought against the program right up until the time it passed,” said Alaska fisherman Rob Wurm, referring to the halibut and sablefish catch share program, which began in 1995. “But to my surprise, it really has worked well. It has created a lot of stability, stopped the race for fish and changed the fishing environment in ways that have made it safer and allowed us to avoid bycatch.”

Halibut fishermen had been reduced to a fishing season of less than a week just before the North Pacific Fishery Management Council introduced an individual fishing quota program. Under this catch share program, fishermen have a quota they can catch over a season that now runs from March to November. The program has dramatically reduced fishing accidents, extended the sale of fresh halibut for a premium price, given fishermen time to avoid bycatch of undersized halibut and other bycatch and promoted sustainable management of the fishery. The program has reduced the number of people holding fishing permits while providing those in the industry with more stable and sustainable jobs.



Fishing boats in New England. A new catch share program based on sectors is being developed in the New England groundfish industry. [High resolution](#) (credit: NOAA)

Members of NOAA’s Catch Shares Policy Task Force, which includes participants from each of the eight councils as well as NOAA experts, provided significant input on the draft policy.

Among the policy’s components:

- Development of a catch share program is voluntary. NOAA will not mandate the use of catch shares in any commercial, recreational, or subsistence fishery.
- The individual fishery management councils will consult fishing communities to evaluate the data, effects, and enforceability of any potential catch share program before moving forward. In some cases, councils may find catch shares not to be the most appropriate management option.
- NOAA will provide leadership and resources and work in partnership with fishery management councils, states and members of the public to help with the implementation of catch shares. This includes assisting fishing communities as they make the transition, and conducting regional workshops, online seminars, and other educational and outreach programs.
- Well thought-out and developed catch share programs will promote sustainable fishing communities by supporting good jobs, and promoting preservation of wharfs, processing facilities, and fuel and ice suppliers.
- Catch share programs can be designed to set aside shares to allow new participants into the fishery, including new generations of fishermen, small businesses, or others.

NOAA encourages those councils adopting catch shares to consider a royalty system to support science, research and management as fisheries become more profitable under the program. NOAA will also seek appropriated funds to supplement what may be collected through cost recovery and royalties to assist in the design, transition period and operation of catch share programs.

“I commend NOAA and its National Marine Fisheries Service on the inclusive makeup of the Catch Share Task Force and its willingness to openly address the concerns of task force members,” said George

Geiger, a recreational fisherman from Florida who served on NOAA's Catch Share Task Force. "From my personal perspective, I do not see catch shares as the secret for ending overfishing, especially in the reef fishery in the South Atlantic. But certainly it is a tool which could be considered for controlling fishing effort. I also encourage the public to take a look at the draft policy and make comments to help improve this national policy."

To read and comment on the draft policy, go to <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/catchshares>. The public may submit written comments until April 10. After reviewing and considering comments, NOAA will issue the final policy.

Listen to the [Catch Shares telephone press conference](#) [MP3].

Listen to the [Catch Shares telephone constituent conference](#) [MP3].

List of Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program Projects Released

NOS Assistant Administrator Jack Dunnigan last week approved a [competitively-ranked list](#) of projects eligible for the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP) funding in FY2010. NOAA will use this list as a guide in selecting projects for funding under both CELCP and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, within the amounts available for project grants.

The list identifies, in ranked order, the 57 projects considered to be ready and eligible for funding in FY 2010 from 28 coastal states and territories. Partial funding was recommended for several of these projects based on eligibility of costs and/or proposed uses. Several projects were determined to be not ready or eligible for funding based on factors set forth in the funding notice and published evaluation criteria. The list has been transmitted to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees and the offices of other interested members of Congress. *Contact:* Elaine.Vaudreuil@noaa.gov.

National Estuarine Research Reserve System Launches Revamped Web Site

The National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) has launched a revamped Web site featuring real-time weather and water quality data from all 27 reserves, interactive maps and generally richer content about the Reserve System programs in research, education, training and stewardship. The overhauled Web site now occupies the Reserve System's Web address at <http://www.nerrs.noaa.gov/>. The goal in rebuilding the Reserve System's Web site was to reflect the breadth and the depth of the system – geographic breadth and programmatic depth. We believe we have achieved that goal.

The new Web site entry page features a slide show of photos from all 27 reserves coupled with a display of water quality and weather data from the reserve being pictured at any given moment. The data are generally less than 60 minutes old. The front page also features an interactive map displaying the locations of and links to all the reserves.

The pages about individual reserves include interactive boundary maps from Google Earth, as well as detailed information about each reserve's programs, activities and contact information. Where available, individual reserves' management plans and detailed site profiles are also included. Calendars display scheduled education and training programs at the reserves for students, teachers and coastal decision makers. The site's background information includes a welcome video from NOAA Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco, as well as the texts of the Coastal Zone Management Act, system regulations, planning documents and designation information.

The Web site's target audience includes users of reserve services, including scientists, teachers, students and decision-makers; NOAA offices; other federal agencies; legislative staff members and non-governmental organizations. The Reserve System last year launched a revised version of the system's education Web site, www.estuaries.gov. Contact: George.cathcart@noaa.gov

National Ocean Service: Making Waves Podcasts



Making Waves is a bi-weekly audio podcast reporting on the latest National Ocean Service news and information.



[Making Waves Episode 39: HAB News](#) — Nov. 12, 2009

Harmful algal blooms. They're called HABs for short. Heard of them? If you live in a coastal area or near the Great Lakes, chances are you have, but you may know them by the more popular name 'red tide.' HABs are caused by microscopic algae — tiny plants in the ocean — that grow out of control. As they bloom, they produce powerful toxins that kill fish and make shellfish dangerous to eat. In this episode, we take a look at three stories about how NOAA is addressing this serious problem.



[Making Waves Episode 40: Thanksgiving Episode](#) — Nov. 25, 2009

What does the National Ocean Service have to do with your Thanksgiving dinner? We bring you the answer in this special holiday edition of *Making Waves*.



[Making Waves Episode 41: Holiday Episode](#) — Dec. 9, 2009

How does the National Ocean Service help Santa on his journey around the country? Tune in to this special holiday edition to find out. (5:50 minutes)

Marine Spatial Planning Web Resource Goes Live

NOAA's new Marine Spatial Planning [Web site](#) enables managers and policy makers to stay current on information and applications of marine spatial planning (MSP) initiatives in the U.S.. Website users learn about helpful tool and data resources as well as real-world examples of marine spatial planning. In addition, the site will include news and resource updates as NOAA moves forward with MSP recommendations that will soon be articulated in a report by the Interagency Task Force on Ocean Policy.

CICEET's Fall 2009 Progress Reports Online

Fall 2009 progress reports for the UNH/NOAA Cooperative Institute for Coastal and Estuarine Environmental Technology (CICEET) active projects, and final reports for completed projects, have been posted online. These projects are dedicated to developing tools that help coastal communities become more resilient in the face of increasing development and climate change.

The focus areas include improved tools for land use planning, habitat restoration and protection, and water quality monitoring. These reports, submitted by the projects' investigators, detail their progress in gathering data, meeting research objectives, reaching out to coastal management, and soliciting feedback from potential end users. Read about these coastal technology [projects in your region](#).

In the Gulf States

Three Manatees in Local Waters Off-season

Three manatees were spotted together in Alabama waters during the past week. These sightings are unusual this time of year because Alabama waters are generally too cold for manatees after mid-November. The group of manatees was first spotted near the Bayou La Batre draw bridge last week. This past Friday they were seen again in a small canal in Fowl River. Personnel from Dauphin Island Sea Lab's Mobile Manatees Sighting Network (MMSN) observed two of the manatees Saturday night in the same location.

"On Saturday, we saw two of the three manatees. They may have separated or we simply may not have seen the third animal. We hope the manatees are moving toward Florida, perhaps from a starting point in Mississippi, and are just passing through Alabama on their way to warmer water", said Dr. Ruth H. Carmichael, Senior Marine Scientist at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab and Founder of the MMSN.

MMSN asks the public to please look for these animals moving in Mobile Bay and nearby waters, including the Intracoastal waterway, and report any sightings as soon as possible. "The manatees are considered at high risk to cold-stress, but appeared to be in good condition based on breathing rates and external appearance on Saturday," said Dr. Carmichael. Residents who encounter these animals should not offer them food or water from a hose or other source. These actions could put the manatees in greater danger by interrupting their migration and prompting them to stay in our area when they should move on.

We hope they head toward the ICW in the next few days, but they could also head toward Dog River or the Delta, and we need everyone's help to let us know immediately if they see these manatees. It is important that we see these animals moving in toward the warm water, or that we check their status and location to determine if they are in distress. Earlier this year, MMSN and collaborators from Florida tagged a manatee for the first time in Alabama waters. That manatee, nicknamed "Bama", returned to Florida in late October. Before leaving Alabama, she also stopped in Fowl River. You can view the path "Bama" took to Florida at <http://manatee.disl.org/bamatrack.html>.

MMSN asks the public to observe the animals and report any sightings as soon as possible to authorities at MMSN, 1-866-493-5803. Federal law prohibits interfering with the manatee's behavior, or harassing them in any way. The best rule is to stay at least 100 feet away and report the sighting. This research and the MMSN are funded by the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries under Traditional Section 6 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. If you would like to support this study and other manatee research in Alabama, please commit to purchase a distinctive license plate. For more information visit <http://manatee.disl.org>.

Land Trust Accreditation Awarded to Weeks Bay Foundation

The Weeks Bay Foundation Board of Directors is proud to report that the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, has awarded accredited status to the Weeks Bay Foundation.

“Accredited land trusts meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever,” said Commission Executive Director Tammara Van Ryn. “The accreditation seal lets the public know that the accredited land trust has undergone an extensive, external review of the governance and management of its organization and the systems and policies it uses to protect land.” “The Weeks Bay Foundation’s accredited status demonstrates our commitment to permanent land conservation,” said Walter C. Ernest, IV, Executive Director. “Our land trust is a stronger organization today having gone through the rigorous accreditation program.”

The Weeks Bay Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 1990 and operates as a land trust in the coastal counties of Baldwin and Mobile in Alabama. The Foundation is also the support organization for the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. The Foundation currently owns 104 acres of coastal wetland property and has worked with the Reserve on all of the Reserve’s land acquisition activities. The Foundation also has the ability to hold conservation easements.

“Land owners wishing to donate property or conservation easements can be assured that the Weeks Bay Foundation meets the highest standards for documenting transactions and for providing stewardship for lands in our care,” said Dr. Ellis Allen, Foundation Board Chairman. The Foundation was awarded accreditation this September along with other land trusts from across the country. The Foundation is one of just 78 other land trusts that have been awarded accreditation nationally since the fall of 2008 and is one of only two land trusts accredited in Alabama. Accredited land trusts are able to display a seal indicating to the public that they meet national standards for excellence, uphold the public trust, and ensure that conservation efforts are permanent. The seal is a mark of distinction in land conservation.

“We are proud to display the accreditation seal. The seal demonstrates the Weeks Bay Foundation’s commitment to perpetually protect ecologically-sensitive lands in coastal Alabama,” said the Foundation’s executive director. The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, based in Saratoga Springs, New York, awards the accreditation seal to community institutions that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever.

The Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance established in 2006, is governed by a volunteer board of diverse land conservation and nonprofit management experts from around the country. The Alliance, of which the Foundation is a member, is a national conservation group based in Washington, D.C., that works to save the places people love by strengthening conservation throughout America.

New Gulf of Mexico Alliance Training Website

A new [Gulf of Mexico Alliance training website](#) was recently launched that highlights the Gulf of Mexico Coastal Training project. With funding provided by the NOAA Coastal Services Center in support of GOMA, Gulf of Mexico Coastal Training is a unique regional collaboration between the five Gulf Coast National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) Coastal Training Programs (CTPs) and a full-time Gulf Regional Training Coordinator. The goal of this project is to provide targeted professional workshops that highlight GOMA priority issues and educate coastal decision-makers across each of the five Gulf States.

Contact Amy Gohres, Gulf Regional Training Coordinator, at amy@weeksbay.org if you have any questions or would like to make a topic recommendation for future Gulf of Mexico Coastal Training events.

Gardeners Grow 45,000 Oysters for Restoration

New Adopt-A-Garden program to support science in schools



Alma Bryant High School students helped plant the oysters in Mobile Bay.

When people ask Martha Crosby of Point Clear, Ala., what she's been up to, her answer isn't going to the gym or volunteering at the hospital. She tells them she's raising oysters on the end of her pier.

Crosby is a volunteer with the Mobile Bay Oyster Gardening Program. This year, she and other volunteers helped grow more than 45,000 oysters that were planted on reefs in Mobile Bay in November, according to Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant and Auburn University Maine Extension and Research Center Extension Specialist Phillip "P.J." Waters, who

helps lead the Mobile Bay Oyster Gardening Program.

Volunteers grew the oysters at 44 gardening sites. They maintain juvenile oysters (spat) in submerged cages by cleaning the cages about once a week during the summer months and removing any predators, such as blue crabs and oyster drills, from the cage.

"We saw excellent growth," Waters said. "Even though Tropical Storm Ida took 17 cages as she went by, we had a successful season."

This year's average was 1,027 oysters per gardener, which is in line with the 1,000-oysters-per-gardener average, he said.

David and Lois George of Mobile County and Steve Crockett, also of Mobile County, tied for most oysters produced this year with 2,000 oysters. Sue and John Caudil of Baldwin County boasted the biggest oyster at 3.26 inches, and Ann Browdy's oysters had the highest average size at 2.4 inches.

It only takes about an hour a week to clean the cages, Crosby said, and it gives her a chance to see firsthand that reefs are breeding grounds for many species. In the program, she also had the opportunity to

tour the Auburn University Shellfish Lab and learn about the science of oysters. And, friends and family keep up with her oyster garden by asking her for reports, she said.

Crosby has spent a lot of her time on the waterfront, and her property is located on conditionally open waters, which allows her to participate in the program.

A new Adopt-A-Garden Program allows people who do not own waterfront property to participate in oyster gardening. For \$25 a year, participants will receive a monthly newsletter and be able to follow their oysters as they grow.

“This is an excellent way for folks who do not live on the water, but recognize the ecological and economical importance of the oyster to our area to get involved with the program,” Waters said.

Adopt a Garden

What: Adopt-a-Garden Program.

Who: Mobile Bay Oyster Gardening Program.

Where: Mobile and Baldwin counties.

When: Start anytime.

Why: Support science activities in schools and receive monthly updates on the oyster gardening program.

Price: \$25 per year.

How: Contact P.J. Waters, 251-438-5690 or waterph@auburn.edu.

All proceeds will support science research programs in area schools. The oyster gardening program is sponsored by Mobile Bay National Estuary Program in cooperation with Auburn University and the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium. It teaches students and adults about the ecological and economical roles oysters play in Mobile Bay.

SW Florida District Completes Springs Coast Seagrass Mapping Project

More than 272,000 acres of dense seagrass digitally mapped
November 12, 2009

The Southwest Florida Water Management District recently completed a seagrass mapping project to monitor the long-term health of seagrass beds along Springs Coast. The project involved digitally mapping more than 525,000 acres of submerged land from the mouth of the Anclote River near Tarpon Springs to the mouth of the Withlacoochee River.

Seagrass generally grows in waters less than 14 feet deep and is an important barometer of the health of estuarine and marine waters because it requires relatively clean water to flourish. Seagrass beds shelter and support a variety of juvenile fish and other marine wildlife such as snook and red drum.

The Springs Coast was mapped in 1985, 1992 and 1999 by other agencies. This is the first time digital photography has been used, which produces more accurate and cost-effective images. Digital aerial photographs were obtained in spring 2007 by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The District then interpreted the imagery, conducted field surveys and developed the maps.

The results of the project revealed there are 272,772 acres of dense seagrass beds along the coast, which is similar to mapping results in 1985. Medium to sparse seagrass covered 87,393 acres and patchy seagrass covered 18,851 acres.

The project will serve as a baseline to monitor future changes in seagrass communities along the Springs Coast. Future mapping projects will be conducted every five years with the next project beginning in 2011. The total cost of this cooperatively funded project was \$295,680. The District's Coastal Rivers Basin Board provided \$165,680 and the remaining amount was funded by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute. For more information, contact [Keith Kolasa](#).

LA Officials Take Step to Require the Corps of Engineers to Beneficially Use Lower Mississippi River Dredged Material

The State of Louisiana took a bold step today to require the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to use sediment dredged from the Mississippi River to restore eroded wetlands in Louisiana – rather than wasting the material.

A letter sent by the State to U.S Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke will trigger a provision in federal law providing for Locke to assist in the development of a solution to ensure unimpeded maritime commerce on the Mississippi River while ending the Corps' practice of discarding dredged sediment that could be used to restore Louisiana's disappearing coast.

Last week, a federal judge determined that similar management practices on the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet exacerbated hurricane damages in the Greater New Orleans area.

At issue is the Corps of Engineers' Fiscal Year 2010 plan for maintenance dredging in the area of the Mississippi River's Southwest Pass. Specifically, the State of Louisiana wants the Corps of Engineers' plan to provide for the beneficial use of dredged material from the dredging activities.

Under the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, states may determine that federal agency actions are inconsistent with state coastal resource plans. The State of Louisiana determined that the Corps of Engineers' practice of dumping dredged sediment into the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico or other areas that fail to reestablish coastal lands is inconsistent with the Louisiana Coastal Resources Program. The Corps of Engineers has historically dumped the dredged material from that annual dredging offshore or in open water at the head of Pass a Loutre. Dumping the material at the head of Pass a Loutre has resulted in blocking fresh water and sediment flow to the eastern Mississippi Delta, accelerating the loss of coastal wetland, while dumping the material offshore effectively wastes needed sediment.

Research conducted by the Louisiana Departments of Natural Resources and Governor's Office of Coastal Activities shows that materials removed during maintenance dredging in other states is being used to build land and enhance coastal wetlands.

Dredging of the Southwest Pass area to maintain proper channel depths for navigation and commerce involves the removal of 5 million to 20 million cubic yards of sediment each year. While the State of Louisiana strongly supports the maintaining of shipping channels, it has asked that beneficial use of the dredged material also be made a key component of the management of the river.

"We are losing more than 25 square miles of coastal wetland each year. We cannot spare or waste any resources in the fight to preserve our coast," DNR Secretary Scott Angelle said. "It is critical that we find a way to put this material to work in projects that help us preserve and restore coastal land."

CPRA Chairman Garret Graves said using dredged materials beneficially to rebuild wetlands is the fastest way to begin slowing and possibly halting coastal erosion in Louisiana.

"The Corps removes about 60 million cubic yards of sediment from navigation channels in the State of Louisiana every year but only about 12 percent of that material is used to rebuild our vanishing wetlands," Graves said. "Reasonably, 45 million cubic yards could be used every year. As much as 10 square miles a year could be built with the material that is being wasted."

Graves equated the wasting of the dredged materials along the lower Mississippi to similar activities that removed sediment from the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) in St. Bernard Parish over the last 50

years. The environmental devastation and loss of wetlands from the construction and maintenance of the MRGO has caused the destruction of nearly 20,000 acres of wetlands east of New Orleans.

“Just last week, a federal judge determined that the Corps’ operation and maintenance of the MRGO contributed to Katrina damages in parts of New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish. Prior to the Corps’ construction of levees on the Mississippi River, Louisiana was actually growing in size each year. Since the levees were built, we have lost 2300 square miles of land. The era of wasting dredged sediment is over. We must reestablish the use of this material to help restore our coast as Mother Nature did for millions of years” he said. “Providing adequate depths on the Mississippi River is critical to ships carrying trade from the United States and around the world. This must remain a top priority. I am confident that Secretary Locke and the NOAA Administrator, Dr. Jane Lubchenco, can help the Corps to strike the right balance among navigation, restoration and hurricane protection.”

Graves also referenced a recent study released by LSU geology professors Mike Blum and Harry Roberts that shows the Mississippi River, because of levees and dams built throughout the river’s basin, carries half its historic sediment load.

“We simply can’t afford to waste any of the sediment carried by the river if we hope to have a fighting chance to restore this coast,” he said. “There is no doubt that we can build the kind projects needed to restore and protect this coast but only if we dedicate the necessary resources. Sediment and water from the Mississippi River is, perhaps, the most important of those resources.”

Graves said he applauds the efforts and the urgency demonstrated by the Corps in building hurricane protection in the New Orleans area since 2005. But, he said that same sense of urgency and commitment is needed to restore Louisiana’s imperiled coastal wetlands.

Louis Buatt, DNR assistant secretary with the Office of Coastal Management, said that the request for assistance from the Department of Commerce does not represent the first attempt by DNR and the state of Louisiana to make beneficial use a part of the Corps of Engineers’ annual maintenance dredging. DNR has substantially increased efforts to bring the Corps’ maintenance dredging program into compliance and consistent with the state’s federally-approved coastal management program, but has not been successful, Buatt said.

While beneficial use of dredged material would increase the cost of the maintenance dredging, cost alone is not reason enough for the Corps of Engineers to leave beneficial use out of its project plan, he said. “The Corps’ role should be to request the funding needed to make sure projects meet the standards and are consistent with our coastal management program,” Buatt said. “It is the role of the U.S. Congress to decide whether to provide the necessary funding. By not requesting the funding the Corps is effectively making the decision that is reserved for Congress.”

[State's letter to US Department of Commerce](#)  (13kb)

[State's letter objects to consistency](#)  (1.8mb)

More Louisiana Marinas Join an Elite Group

Five marinas in the state have recently been certified and have joined the state’s Clean Marina Program, according to coastal managers at the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR). In October and November of this year, three marinas located in St. Tammany Parish and two in Plaquemines Parish have adopted guidelines and measures to become a part of the department’s program. Additional marinas in Plaquemines are scheduled for certification visits by DNR Office of Coastal Management officials in December.

The five certified facilities joining the Louisiana Clean Marina Program are The Dock in Slidell, Marina Beau Chéne in Mandeville, Marina Del Ray in Madisonville, Delta Marina in Empire, and Myrtle Grove Marina in Myrtle Grove, LA. The designation means being part of a national program in which marina owners and operators employ best management practices that help protect the environment. Marinas are gateways to sensitive marine habitats that should be free of pollution and should be safe for boaters and citizens.

“This program, and the businesses who participate in it, are excellent examples of how we can reach the balance of enjoying our natural resources and protecting them,” said DNR Secretary Scott Angelle. The program promotes and celebrates voluntary adoption of measures that marinas can take and recreational boaters can participate in to protect waterways in our state. Office of Coastal Management Assistant Secretary Lou Buatt noted that marina businesses can show pride in their practice of maintaining a clean and safe environment and reap some economic benefits at the same time. The program began in 2004, under Secretary Angelle’s leadership. The goal has been to reach every marina in the Louisiana coastal zone, some 50 or so, with the clean marina guidebook for state certification.

Louisiana’s Clean Marinas receive a certificate acknowledging their environmentally responsible actions, a special flag to fly on their property, authorization to use the Clean Marina logo at their place of business, on their letterhead and in advertising, along with public recognition.

A recognition event to honor these marina owners and operators is expected and will be announced in January. More information on how to become a Clean Marina can be found online at www.dnr.louisiana.gov/cleanmarina

Louisiana Scientists Continue Study of Gulf of Mexico "Dead Zone"

November 2, 2009

A team of Louisiana scientists will continue their multi-decade studies of the Gulf of Mexico ‘Dead Zone’ with continued funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The focus in the coming years is modeling the causes of Gulf of Mexico hypoxia (low oxygen, often called a ‘Dead Zone’). Members of the group have been studying the low oxygen area for 25 years, making definitive connections between changes in Mississippi River basin landscape use, increases in Mississippi River nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus reaching the Gulf, and the continually increasing size and severity of the low oxygen (hypoxic) area.

The ‘dead zone’ forms each spring and summer along the Louisiana and upper Texas coasts, also in Mississippi coastal waters, as a result of the high freshwater discharge of the Mississippi River along with the highly enriched nutrient waters. The result in a physically layered coastal ecosystem is a burst of algal growth and subsequent decay that sucks most oxygen out of the lower water column and at the seabed. Fishery resources are redistributed, full economic potential is diminished, and basic ecosystem functions such as biodiversity and food web structure are disrupted.

The research team, headed by Dr. Nancy Rabalais of the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium, Dr. Eugene Turner of Louisiana State University and Dr. Don Scavia of University of Michigan, has been awarded \$766,600 for the first of a five-year, \$4 million project, subject to Congressional funding. The project is part of The Northern Gulf of Mexico Ecosystems and Hypoxia Assessment Program of NOAA entitled “Ecosystem Modeling of the Causes of Hypoxia.” The Louisiana group will be collaborating with a group centered at Texas A&M University that has been researching Gulf of Mexico hypoxia since 2003.

The LUMCON/LSU team has documented the size of the ‘dead zone’ since 1985, finding minimal areas when the Mississippi River delivers little fresh water and nutrients to sizes reaching 22,000 square

kilometers (8,500 square miles), or the size of the Massachusetts. The bottom area of the hypoxic zone is related most closely to the nitrate-nitrogen load of the Mississippi River in the preceding spring. The 2009 dead zone was predicted to be among the largest ever recorded, but measurements showed it instead to be small in bottom area but much larger in the total volume and more severe than normal.

Members of the LUMCON/LSU team along with researchers from the University of Michigan have developed several predictive models that closely forecast the size of the summer hypoxic area. The next steps for the research team are to refine the forecasting models for multiple scenarios of river discharge, nutrient loading, and physical conditions on different scales and for different times of the year. They will also further develop and refine the biological forcing mechanisms in a water quality based model inserted into a detailed dynamic model of the physics of the area where hypoxia occurs. The results of their studies will feed into nutrient management policy decisions for the watershed.

For more information, contact Nancy Rabalais at nrabalais@lumcon.edu or Eugene Turner at eurne@lsu.edu.

Grand Isle Diaries – An Oral History Available

December 18, 2009

The history of Grand Isle – told by its residents – is now available on CD, and online at www.laseagrant.org/comm/diaries.htm.

Louisiana Sea Grant has partnered with Earl Robicheaux and the Louisiana State Museum to produce Grand Isle Diaries – a 50-minute soundscape that chronicles the founding of the community to its encounters with recent hurricanes. The recordings – which can be listened to online or downloaded – explore five different segments of the town’s cultural and ecological history. To order a copy of Grand Isle Diaries on CD, e-mail jsche15@lsu.edu. The CD is free, but there is a \$6 shipping and handling fee.

“Capturing the experiences of residents, as well as the stories told to them by parents and grandparents, will keep a vital part of Louisiana’s history alive,” said Robicheaux. “One day, the people who experienced the Grand Isle lifestyle as we know it will be gone. One day, Grand Isle will be gone. It is imperative that the knowledge of this barrier island’s inhabitants be captured. Future generations will know these people were here, this community was here, what type of lifestyle was here, and that there was solid ground here.”

Grand Isle Diaries was created from 24 hours of interviews Robicheaux conducted with residents over the past year. Those interviews are being transcribed and the audio and text files eventually will be made available on the Louisiana Sea Grant Web site. Currently, the original tapes and digital copies of the interviews are available at the Hill Memorial Library on Louisiana State University’s Baton Rouge campus. Transcripts also will be available at Hill Memorial when they are completed.

Robicheaux has produced a number of similar recordings during his career, including *Losing Louisiana: Oral Histories of Coastal Land Loss*, *Voices of the Atchafalaya*, and *Atchafalaya Soundscapes*. Grand Isle Diaries is a continuation of Louisiana Sea Grant’s oral history project which began with the Web film series *Shrimp Tales* (www.seagrantfish.lsu.edu/people/shrimptailes.htm), featuring photographs and interviews with fishermen discussing changes, challenges and wives’ tales in their profession; and *Reflections on Chandeleur* (www.laseagrant.org/lighthouse/index.html) which documents the Chandeleur Islands’ lighthouse and landscape through a trove of donated photographs and audio interviews with anglers, scientists and naturalists.

“It doesn’t matter if the listener is from Louisiana or not, they’ll understand the importance of Grand Isle after listening to the soundscape,” added Robicheaux.

Bay St. Louis Historic Walking Tour Brochure Kick-Off

Bay St. Louis's newest visitor attraction features the city's oldest assets – its historic buildings. Two dozen architectural gems are featured in a lively new Historic Walking and Biking Tour brochure officially released on Saturday, November 14th.

Walkers and bicyclists may register for the premier tour at the 100 block of Main Street in Bay St. Louis between 9 and 11am on Saturday morning. The five-dollar donation to participate is earmarked to benefit the Hancock Main Street program and Live Oak Alliance.

The self-guided tour meanders just over a mile and a half down Main Street and through the Depot District, circling back to end at the Kate Lobrano house, home of the Hancock County Historical Society. Shops, galleries and restaurants along the route provide ample resting, dining or shopping opportunities.

The twelve page full-color tour brochure includes an easy-to-read map of the route and photos of the buildings, as well as colorful facts and local legends. The brochure also lists several “off the beaten trail” sites for the more adventuresome sight-seer. The Bay-Waveland beach trail and the Bay Bridge Artwalk are suggested as additional activities for both walkers and bicyclists.

Marcie Baria, founder of Live Oak Alliance Mississippi, spearheaded the effort to produce the booklet. LOAM partnered with several other groups, including the Hancock Main Street program and the Hancock Chamber. The team worked for over a year to take the project from conception to printing.

“The tour is a perfect low-cost family activity,” Baria said. “So it should attract visitors from around the region. We’re even having a web-friendly version made, so people all over the country can see how much we have to offer in Hancock County.”

Funding for the booklet's initial production was provided by the Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area and the Hancock Chamber of Commerce. Signs to mark each building on the route are being designed and will feature the names of tour sponsors. The annual sign sponsorships should cover the costs for future reprintings of the brochure, making the project self-supporting.

Baria pointed out that even locals will learn more about their heritage, since Charles Gray from the Hancock Historical Society provided some obscure tall tales for the brochure.

“The brochures are free of charge to the public and we’re distributing them as widely as possible,” Baria said. “We believe that it’s a perfect souvenir of our area – something people will take home and show their friends, generating more tourism in the area. Next year, we’re planning to produce a similar brochure for Waveland and include a section for nature buffs and bird-watchers.” “In so many ways, Hancock County is one of the richest places in the country,” Baria said and then she smiled. “And we’re just trying to spread the wealth.” For more information on the Premier Tour, contact Sherri Bevis, director of the Hancock Main Street program at (228) 216-9045.



DMR, Partners Sink Omega Protein Vessel for Artificial Reef Habitat



BILOXI, Miss. – On Tuesday, Nov. 24, 2009, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR), in partnership with Mississippi Gulf Fishing Banks (MGFB), deployed a retired fishing vessel donated by Omega Protein Inc. to be used as an artificial reef habitat.

The Great Wicomico, a 176-foot fishing vessel formerly used by Omega Protein for its fishing operations in Reedville, Va., was submerged earlier today in Fish Haven 13, about 13 miles south of Horn Island in Mississippi waters. Omega Protein hosted a dedication ceremony for the submersion of the vessel.

“This is the second largest vessel we’ve sunk so far,” said DMR Artificial Reef Bureau Director Kerwin Cuevas. “This is a great addition to Mississippi’s artificial reefs and we’d like to thank Omega Protein and Mississippi Gulf Fishing Banks for working in partnership to increase our reef fish habitat off the state of Mississippi.”

Before a vessel can be deployed, all fuel, oil, engines and any wood must be removed and the fuel tanks pressure-washed. It is then inspected to be sure there are no remaining hazardous materials. To deploy the vessel, holes are cut along the water line and wood patches placed over the holes. Once at the deployment site, the patches are removed to allow water to overtake and sink the boat.

Omega Protein donated the vessel and shared the cost of cleaning and sinking the vessel with MGFB utilizing NOAA Emergency Disaster Relief Program funds. “In 2000, Omega Protein donated our vessel the von Rosenberg, which is now part of Mississippi’s artificial reef habitat. We’re pleased to contribute further with the Great Wicomico,” said Ben Landry, director of public affairs for Omega Protein. “We are delighted to have a continued involvement with DMR’s Artificial Reef Program and happy to make this contribution for the sustainability of the fishing industry and overall health of the Gulf.”

About 90 percent of Mississippi’s artificial reefs were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. A little more than 60 percent of those reefs have been rebuilt. Omega Protein Inc. makes its products from menhaden, an omega-3 rich fish that is abundantly available along the U.S. Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic coasts. The company has been part of the Jackson County Community for roughly 50 years and currently employs 260 Mississippi residents.

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.

Honored Guests to Attend, Speak at NERR's New Coastal Resources Center Dedication

BILOXI, Miss. – The Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) and Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) will hold a dedication ceremony for honored guests for the new Grand Bay Coastal Resources Center on Monday, Dec. 7, 2009, at 10:30 a.m. Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR) Executive Director William Walker will be the master of ceremonies, and invited guest speakers include representatives from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and state and local government. Please see attached agenda for complete list of speakers.

A public grand opening will follow with a brief ceremony at 1:30 p.m. to mark the opening of the facility and the NERR's 10th anniversary, and tours of the facility and interpretative area at 2 p.m., 2:30 p.m. and 3 p.m. Beginning Dec. 8, the Center's Interpretative Area will be open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily. The Center is located at 6005 Bayou Heron Road in Moss Point.

The dedication coincides with the NERR's 10th anniversary of its designation as a National Estuarine Research Reserve, protecting more than 18,000 acres of estuarine and upland habitat for purposes of scientific research and observation, education and stewardship. Grand Bay was the 24th reserve to enter the National Estuarine Research Reserve System in 1999.

The 20,000-square-foot facility, which serves as headquarters for the NERR and NWR in Moss Point, features a public interpretive area, office space, laboratories, classrooms and a dormitory. It is one of the "greenest" buildings in Mississippi and demonstrates low-impact development design and construction technologies, which create a healthy environment for staff and visitors, reduces operational costs and ultimately demonstrates a commitment to the environment.

The Grand Bay Reserve is located near the community of Pecan in southeast Jackson County and includes wild lands and waterways from Bang's Lake to the Alabama state line. The Reserve is managed through state-federal partnership between the Department of Marine Resources and its partners—Mississippi Secretary of State's Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mississippi State University, the University of Southern Mississippi, the Nature Conservancy and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

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.state.ms.us.

MS Secretary of State Returns More Than \$7 Million to Gulf Coast from Tidelands Leases and New Assessment Collections

BILOXI, Miss. – Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann presented a check for \$7,046,853 to the Commission on Marine Resources (CMR) at a ceremony held Dec. 16, 2009, at the Secretary of State's Office in Gulfport. The dollars are generated from tidelands leases and assessments.

The tidelands lease revenue was collected on leases on the Mississippi Gulf Coast in the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2009. The Tidelands Assessment revenue is a result of House Bill 44, passed in the 2005 Fifth Extraordinary Session. That bill allowed land-based casinos on the Coast and required them to pay a tidelands assessment, which is based on a casino's capital investment.

“The tidelands check is a crucial component of preserving the culture of the Mississippi Gulf Coast,” said Hosemann. “The Mississippi State Legislature and the Secretary of State’s Office are committed to maximizing the benefit of our state-owned lands and the preservation of our coastal areas. This \$7,046,853 in returned funds to the Gulf Coast through the Department of Marine Resources is an integral part of ensuring that goal.”

The people of Mississippi own the public trust tidelands, the land covered by water at high tide. Rent is collected by the Secretary of State’s Office from tidelands leaseholders, including casinos. As Secretary of State, Hosemann negotiates tidelands leases on behalf of the state. Traditionally, the Mississippi Legislature appropriates the lease revenue for specific projects. Rent is collected from tidelands leaseholders by the Secretary of State and then returned to the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) at the end of the fiscal year. The Tidelands Trust Fund Program consists of funds derived from the lease rentals of tidelands and submerged lands. Revenues collected by the Secretary of State’s Office are appropriated by the state legislature and administered by the CMR. Since 1990, the Secretary of State’s Office has collected more than \$74 million in tidelands leases.

“Tidelands Trust funds provide for public access projects that allow citizens and visitors to coastal Mississippi to better access and utilize Mississippi’s marine resources, provide educational programs and enhance management capabilities within the coastal region of Mississippi,” said DMR Executive Director Dr. William Walker. “The funds are awarded annually to a variety of recipients, including cities, counties, academic institutions, nongovernmental organizations and state agencies. I thank the Mississippi Legislature for providing these funds to implement these worthy projects.”

North Deer Island Partners Honored by Presidential Award

Team recognized for protecting critical bird habitat

On Dec. 2 the North Deer Island Protection Team received the Coastal America Partnership Award—the only environmental award of its kind given by the President of the United States—for their efforts to protect the most important colonial water bird rookery on the upper Texas coast: North Deer Island.

“North Deer Island is emblematic of natural habitats that are not only critical for fish and wildlife, but ultimately benefit the many people who live on and visit the Texas coast,” said Carter Smith, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department executive director. “This is only one of two natural islands left in West Galveston Bay. Without help, projections showed one third of it would have eroded away in 30 years.” Texas Parks and Wildlife Department accepted the award on behalf of a large coalition of diverse partners, which include Audubon Texas, NRG Energy, EPA Gulf of Mexico Program, EPA Region-6, Houston Audubon Society, Texas Commission of Environmental Quality - Galveston Bay Estuary Program, Texas General Land Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Galveston Bay Foundation.

“Fish and wildlife resources in Texas contribute more than \$8 billion to the state’s economy every year,” says Bryan W. Shaw, Ph.D., chairman of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. “This award recognizes the efforts of the many agencies, stakeholders and individuals in the on-going efforts to restore and protect our nation’s sensitive coastal environment. The TCEQ, through the Galveston Bay Estuary Program, is proud to be a part of this important work.”

The partners worked for nine years to armor approximately 1.7 miles of North Deer Island’s rapidly eroding shoreline. Erosion was destroying highly-productive habitat for up to 30,000 nesting pairs of birds using this island, including the Brown Pelican, and two priority-bird species—the threatened Reddish Egret and White-faced Ibis— plus 16 other bird species on the Audubon Society’s bird island sanctuary. The island’s wetland marshes provide valuable nursery habitat for shrimp, redfish and other important fish species.

“This island has been extremely important to the recovery of the Brown Pelican in Galveston Bay. Based on a strong and healthy population, our agency has removed the Brown Pelican from the endangered species list. The North Deer Island Protection Team played an important role in our efforts to bring the Brown Pelican back from the brink,” said Benjamin Tuggle, Ph.D., U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southwest Regional Director.

The project, led by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, helps implement regional habitat conservation goals established by the Galveston Bay Estuary Program partnership, whose mission is to preserve the bay’s economic and ecologic health. Partners barged in 24,100 tons from a rock quarry in Missouri—using the Mississippi River and the Intracoastal Waterway as a route—to create 7,100 feet of stone breakwater and armored shoreline. The planning, engineering, and construction costs for the eight-year endeavor were over \$3.2 million.

The Coastal America Awards Program recognizes outstanding efforts and excellence in leadership for protecting, preserving and restoring the nation's coastal resources and ecosystems. Coastal America Awards have been presented annually since 1997.

Media Contacts: Tom Harvey, TPWD, (512) 389-4453, tom.harvey@tpwd.state.tx.us

TCEQ Establishes Office of Water

Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2009--New Office to be Headed by L'Oreal Stepney

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) has announced formation of a new Office of Water, effective Dec. 1. The new office will encompass the three existing major water divisions in the agency: Water Planning, Water Supply, and Water Quality.

“The new office is in recognition of the fact that the state’s population is expected to double in the next 30 years,” said Chairman Bryan W. Shaw, Ph.D. “So the agency must put even more focus on water issues to ensure that there will be adequate water quality and quantity for future demand.”

L’Oreal Stepney will serve as deputy director of the new Office of Water. She has served with the TCEQ and predecessor agencies since 1992. She holds a master’s degree in Environmental Engineering from the University of Texas.

“There are 6,800 public water systems in our state,” said Executive Director Mark Vickery. “Making sure that the water that comes through these systems is clean and healthy is a priority of the TCEQ and is critically important to many, many Texans.”

Stepney has served in air permitting and wastewater permitting, as section manager of the Wastewater Permitting Section, as Water Quality Division director, and her most recent assignment was assistant deputy director for the Office of Permitting and Registration.

“Over the past several years, much of the state experienced a fierce drought,” said Commissioner and former Rio Grande Watermaster Carlos Rubinstein. “Our agency’s response to the people and communities that suffered from this event was extraordinary, and this new Office of Water will ensure that we provide an even higher and more focused level of response.”

“Water planning, water supply, and water quality are all issues that are important to the future of our state,” said Commissioner Buddy Garcia. “This is an important step in our reorganization.”

Oyster Recycling

by Debbie Lindsey-Opel & [Dr. Jennifer Pollack](#)
[HRI News](#)

The Harte Research Institute and Water Street Restaurants have kicked off their partnership with the Port of Corpus Christi to do what nature intended – use oyster shells to provide quality habitat for young oysters. The Oyster Shell Recycling program was formally launched at a media event on November 17 at Water Street Oyster Bar in downtown Corpus Christi, Texas. Afterwards, Water Street Restaurants owner Brad Lomax and HRI Assistant Research Scientist [Dr. Jennifer Pollack](#) were interviewed on NewsRadio 1360 KKTU by Jim Lago, host of the radio show called Lago in the Morning.



This innovative program recycles large quantities of shells that are typically carted off to the landfill and puts them back where they are needed the most – on oyster reefs, where they provide hard structures for young oysters to attach and grow.

“I am so excited about this project,” said Lomax, adding, “We will easily recycle 60-70 tons annually or about the equivalent of 20 Shamu-sized Killer Whales, give or take a couple of tons. Not only do the young oysters win, but the landfills do as well.”

An economic analysis will quantify the benefit. As part of her masters thesis, Assistant Director of HRI Gail Sutton will identify all of the economic activities and determine a net benefit. “We’ll take what we learn from this project and share it with key stakeholders to encourage them to take advantage of oyster shell recycling,” she said.

Once collected, the shells are transported to a storage location at the Port of Corpus Christi, where they will stay until a significant volume accumulates. The goal is to replace at least an acre of habitat. While the shells are in storage, the scientists will conduct studies to determine the best place to put them back. Areas in Copano and Aransas Bays will be reviewed. Stakeholders, including recreational users, industry, state agencies and the scientific community, will be asked for input on the ultimate location for the restoration project.

The Oyster Recycling Program is funded by a Texas General Land Office Coastal Management Plan Grant. HRI's Endowed Chair for Ecosystem Studies and Modeling Dr. Paul Montagna and Pollack worked together to secure the funding and are directing the program. For more information on the Oyster Shell Recycling Project, visit oysterrecycling.org, which is currently being developed to include information on oyster shell recycling and project updates.

Harte Research Institute-NOAA Expedition

[HRI News](#)

The Harte Research Institute and the National Marine Sanctuaries (NMS) Program co-sponsored a research cruise aboard the NOAA Vessel R/V MANTA October 11-14 to the Flower Garden Banks NMS.

Focusing on the biological characterization and ecology of the South Texas Banks, the cruise investigated study sites at Southern Bank, North Hospital Bank and Baker Bank. The Phantom S2 Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) and operators from NOAA's National Undersea Research Center at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington were provided through a grant from the Texas Research Development Fund, awarded to HRI's Dr. Tom Shirley and Dr. Wes Tunnell. The research team from HRI and Texas A&M

University-Corpus Christi consisted of Dr. Larry McKinney, Dr. Wes Tunnell, Dr. Greg Stunz, Dr. Matthew Johnson, and doctoral students Doug Weaver, Morgan Kilgour and Michael Reuscher.

The South Texas Banks are a series of mid-shelf features located on the South Texas Continental Shelf that are important grounds for commercial and recreational fisheries. The banks, ranging in depth from 50-85 meters, support a deep reef biological assemblage and provide important hard bottom habitat between the shallow coral reef communities in the southern Gulf of Mexico and the Flower Garden Banks and other deep reef communities of the northwestern Gulf.

The banks were originally mapped using single beam echosounders and surveyed with a submersible in 1974 and 1975. The area had not been revisited since. In 2006, HRI sponsored a mapping cruise using high-resolution multibeam sonar to develop detailed maps of five of the main banks. Multibeam bathymetry was used to navigate the ROV during the research cruise and to select study sites at the crest, lower terrace and flanks of the three target banks.

The scientists used the ROV to conduct quantitative video transects and to capture high-resolution digital still images to document fishes, invertebrates, benthic communities and geological structures occurring on the three features. They used a multi-purpose manipulator on the ROV to collect a limited number of invertebrate and sediment samples.

Data acquired during the cruise included ROV tracks, depth contours, boat position and digital still photographs (354 total) taken during each ROV transect. They recorded more than 14 hours of video completed 58 quantitative transects. Most of this material will be used as part of Doug Weaver's PhD dissertation research at HRI. Fishes documented for the first time at the South Texas Banks included black grouper, yellowmouth grouper, rock hind, French angelfish, neon goby, twospot cardinalfish, sandbar shark, scalloped hammerhead shark and whale shark. Five sandbar sharks and a single scalloped hammerhead shark were tagged and released as part of the Shark Tagging Initiative in the laboratory of Dr. Greg Stunz.

Other News

Landrieu: FDA Agrees to Commonsense Solution on Gulf Coast Oysters

Senator Landrieu gets commitment from FDA Commissioner Dr. Hamburg in phone call today.

WASHINGTON – United States Senator Mary L. Landrieu, D-La., today announced that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has agreed to halt a proposed plan to ban Gulf Coast oysters that are not subject to post-harvest processing. Sen. Landrieu received the news in a phone call with FDA Commissioner Dr. Peggy Hamburg earlier today.

Sen. Landrieu has been a staunch opponent of the FDA regulation, and has organized several calls and meetings urging top FDA officials to reconsider their proposed action.

“The FDA’s decision today is a major win for our oyster industry and all of Louisiana,” Sen. Landrieu said. “By reversing course, the FDA has acknowledged that its original plan was unreasonable and that we need a commonsense approach to protecting the small number of at-risk consumers.

“I commend Commissioner Hamburg for listening to Louisianians’ unified voice, and for being willing to partner with the industry to find a path forward that does not put oystermen out of business. I believe that

the FDA should continue to work with the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Commission (ISSC) to implement the plan adopted in 2001 to combat *Vibrio Vulnificus* (V.v.), and work with the ISSC in the future to develop sound policies to address this illness. This is the best solution to protecting both consumers and thousands of oyster industry jobs.”

The Louisiana oyster industry employs 3,500 Louisianians and has an estimated \$318 million impact on the state. Currently, Gulf States produce 67 percent of all oysters harvested in U.S.

Last year, there were more than 87 million cases of food-related illnesses, 371,000 hospitalizations and 5,700 deaths. However, only 15 individuals with pre-existing conditions died from eating raw oysters last year. This means that less than one-quarter of one percent of all food-related deaths in the U.S. were the result of consuming raw Gulf oysters. Five times as many Americans die each year from being struck by lightning than by consuming raw oysters.

Only 10 percent of the harvested oysters in the Gulf Coast are processed using these post-harvest technologies. Currently, the Gulf oyster industry is post-harvesting 30 million pounds of oysters, leaving 270 million untreated. Those 270 million have an economic impact of \$324 million.

Assessing Interest in a Southeast Smart Growth Network

In the summer of 2009 the [Southeast Watershed Forum](#), with support from the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), conducted a study to determine if there is a need for, and interest in, forming a regional Southeast Smart Growth Network similar to EPA’s national Smart Growth Network. Interest in this initiative developed as the partners worked to assist communities wrestling with the rapid pace of growth in the Southeast and its impact on the region’s quality of life.

The Forum surveyed almost 90 organizations and individuals that provide quality growth-related programs in the Southeast. Of those that responded, 88.5% expressed interest in the possibility of forming a Southeast Smart Growth Network.

A core planning team has been assembled representing 10 of the respondents and a meeting is being held at EPA Region 4 Headquarters in Atlanta in early December to determine the potential structure, content and activities of such a regional Network.

Survey respondents listed the following services they would like to have from such a Network:

- 80% or more – opportunities for partnerships, networking, and training
- 60-79% - conferences, webinars, web-based data, technical assistance, and case studies
- 50-59% - financial assistance, toolboxes, assistance with program implementation, research and planning

Additional suggestions included: a clearing house of Southeast-specific examples of smart growth and green building practices; a network of regional providers; cost analysis of different forms of development; and financial impacts of smart growth practices on local government cost-of service. Stay tuned for more developments on the Southeast Smart Growth Network!

Secretary Vilsack Announces 41 Watersheds to Take Part in Mississippi River Basin Initiative

WASHINGTON, November 23, 2009 - Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that 41 watersheds in 12 states, known as Focus Areas, have been selected to participate in a new initiative to improve water quality and the overall health of the Mississippi River Basin. The selected watersheds cover over 42 million acres, or more than 5 percent of the Basin's land area.

"The USDA is committed to working cooperatively with agricultural producers, partner organizations and State and local agencies to improve water quality and the quality of life for the tens of millions of people who live in the Mississippi River Basin, the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative will help" Vilsack said. "Today's announcement is another step toward achieving this goal, and I encourage as many eligible participants as possible to join us in this major conservation effort."

The Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI), which was announced on September 24, 2009, will provide approximately \$320 million in USDA financial assistance over the next four years for voluntary projects in priority watersheds in Arkansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee and Wisconsin. MRBI will help producers implement conservation and management practices that prevent, control and trap nutrient runoff from agricultural land.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) manages the initiative. NRCS State Conservationists from the 12 watershed states selected the watersheds with guidance from State Technical Committees and state water quality agencies. Selections were based on the potential for managing nitrogen and phosphorus -- nutrients associated with water quality problems in the Basin -- while maintaining agricultural productivity and benefiting wildlife.

Next, smaller watershed projects will be selected through a competitive process under NRCS' Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI). NRCS assistance will be leveraged with contributions from partners, expanding the capacity available to improve water quality throughout the Basin.

Three requests for project proposals will be announced in the next several weeks, including one for CCPI. Funding for CCPI projects will come from NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program.

Two other requests for proposals will fund projects through the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program and Conservation Innovation Grants. For information about these programs, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs.

For information about the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative, including eligibility requirements, please visit the MRBI web page at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/mrbi/mrbi_overview.html or your USDA Service Center. A map of the project area is available the [MRBI Programs webpage](#).

Entergy, RAE Join Forces to Rebuild Louisiana Wetlands

New Orleans, LA--Forty-three percent of threatened and endangered species in the United States depend on wetlands during some stage of their life cycle. Despite their recognized value to the environment, more than 80,000 acres of wetlands continue to be lost in the United States each year. In an effort to protect Louisiana's coast from future natural disasters and habitat loss, Entergy Corporation has partnered with Restore America's Estuaries and Jefferson Parish on a new wetlands preservation project.

The Coastal Bayou Segnette Cypress Planting Project, funded through Entergy's Environmental Initiatives Fund, will re-establish cypress trees that provide critical habitat for migratory birds and provide storm protection for Jefferson Parish residents. The project will also promote coastal protection concepts outlined in Louisiana's Comprehensive Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast.

Some of the key benefits of the Coastal Bayou Segnette Cypress Planting Project include enhanced habitat quality, decreased erosion along Louisiana's coast, and positively impacting climate change by sequestering carbon dioxide.

"Since 1932, we've lost over 1,900 square miles of Louisiana wetlands, and we continue to lose 25 square miles of wetlands annually--an area roughly the size of Washington, DC," said Brent Dorsey, Entergy's director of corporate environmental programs. "Protecting our coast is very personal to us because both our employees and many of our customers are first-hand witnesses to the ramifications of sea-level rise and erosion."

Bayou Segnette is located in the Barataria Preserve south of New Orleans in the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park. The preserve's 20,000 acres include bayous, swamps, marshes and forests that are home to alligators and other reptiles, amphibians, and a wide variety of other coastal species, including more than 300 species of migratory birds, shore birds, and ducks that will benefit from the Coastal Bayou Segnette Cypress Planting Project.

"Estuaries are our coastal natural treasures and provide a critical habitat for essential marine and aquatic species," said Jeff Benoit, president of Restore America's Estuaries. "In many ways, the Louisiana coast and its estuaries are the first line of defense and a measuring stick for the predicted impacts of climate change."

"Not only will the tree growth from this project sequester carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, the trees will also protect adjacent marshes from being lost and releasing carbon into the environment," said Dorsey. "Entergy has been a great corporate partner on our community-based restoration programs," added Steven Peyronnin, executive director of the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana. "This project is a perfect example of what we can accomplish in Louisiana when good corporate citizens work with conservation organizations and local partners to restore our coast and protect our communities."

Entergy has contributed \$280,000 from its Environmental Initiatives Fund to Restore America's Estuaries since 2007, including \$60,000 for the Coastal Bayou Segnette Cypress Planting Project.

Established in 2001, Entergy's Environmental Initiatives Fund is dedicated to strengthening the company's clean energy portfolio, driving greater energy efficiency, and actively participating in greenhouse gas offset markets.

Entergy Corporation is an integrated energy company engaged primarily in electric power production and retail distribution operations. Entergy owns and operates power plants with approximately 30,000 megawatts of electric generating capacity, and it is the second-largest nuclear generator in the United States. Entergy delivers electricity to 2.7 million utility customers in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. Entergy has annual revenues of more than \$13 billion and approximately 14,700 employees

New Aquatic Habitat Restoration Projects Funded

November 13th, 2009

In 2010, the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP) and the NOAA Restoration Center are investing over \$400,000 in 11 aquatic habitat restoration projects in five southeastern states. Through these projects, about 5.5 acres of coastal marsh, 3 acres of oyster reef, 6 acres of brackish marsh, and 5.5 acres of wetlands may be created or restored. In addition, these projects will encourage local communities and state agencies to work together in restoring these habitats, not only benefitting living marine resources, but also developing a stewardship ethic to maintain them for future generations. The data from each project will help the partnership achieve its long term goal to promote, facilitate, and implement cooperative habitat conservation and restoration in the southeast. The projects are:

1. St. Andrew Bay Environmental Study Team, Inc.-"From Bulkheads to Grassbeds," **St. Andrew Bay, FL**
2. The City of Gulf Breeze - "Deadman's Island Restoration Project," southwest side of Pensacola Bay Bridge, **Gulf Breeze, FL**
3. Environmental Protection Commission of Hillsborough County "Improving Management of Seagrass Resources through Restoration and Assessment," Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve, **Tampa Bay, FL**
4. Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage (F.I.S.H.) - "F.I.S.H. Preserve Habitat Restoration Project," **Cortez, FL**
5. GA Department of Natural Resources, Coastal Resources Division - "Oyster Reef Restoration / Enhancement through the use of Shell and Non-Shell Cultch Materials," Altamaha Estuary, GA
6. Jefferson Parish Department of Environmental Affairs - "Jefferson Parish Lafitte Terrace Planting," **Barataria Bay Waterway, LA**
7. The Nature Conservancy (TNC), NC Chapter - "Hydrologic Restoration of Coastal Wetlands on North Carolina's Albemarle-Pamlico Peninsula," Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, NC
8. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill - "Using Positive Interactions Between Bivalves and Seagrass to Reduce Habitat Fragmentation and Restore Essential Fish Habitat," Rachel Carson National Estuarine Research Reserve, NC
9. North Carolina Coastal Federation (NCCF), "Jockey's Ridge State Park Community-based Living Shoreline Restoration Project, Phase II," Roanoke Sound, Nags Head, NC
10. Marine Resources Research Institute, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources - "CONSTRUCT – Creating oyster niche structures through restoration using crab traps," Charleston Harbor, Stono River, Ashley River, Leadenwah Creek, Dawho River Flats, Tom's Point Creek, SC
11. Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept., Coastal Fisheries Division - "North Shore Eagle Point Oyster Restoration – Phase II," North Shore of Eagle Point, **Galveston Bay, TX**

Individuals from local communities participating in each of these projects, reflect a growing commitment by Americans to conserve and restore the ecosystems around them. These projects will also achieve the goals of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHAP), which nationally coordinates and supports regionally-based fisheries protection, restoration and enhancement. SARP is one of the first recognized NFHAP partnerships.

For information about specific projects, contact the partnership's Program Administrator, [Marilyn Barrett-O'Leary](#).

Conferences and Workshops

Habitat Priority Planner: GIS Training for Coastal Resource Professionals

January 5, 2010 8:30am – 4:30pm

Mobile, Alabama

The Habitat Priority Planner is a geographic information system (GIS)-based tool used to make decisions about land use, conservation, and restoration. Different scenarios can be quickly explored—How would this restoration project impact the landscape? Where are wetlands that may contain species of concern? How many acres of forest are currently conserved? Thanks to the ease and speed with which this tool makes maps, visuals, and reports, the Habitat Priority Planner is very helpful when making decisions in a group setting. This course is a computer-based GIS training on how to apply the Habitat Priority Planner tool to land-use management, conservation, and restoration projects. After completing this course, participants will be able to:

- Develop their own spatial analysis process, including defining goals, collecting data, performing analyses, and selecting criteria
- Use common land cover data sets to classify habitats with the Habitat Priority Planner
- Understand and be able to apply landscape and custom analyses available in the Habitat Priority Planner
- Prioritize habitats for land use management action

Prerequisites: Intermediate experience with ESRI ArcView 9.2 or 9.3

Location: US Army Corp of Engineers GIS Training Lab, 201 St. Michaels Street, Mobile, Alabama

Space is limited. Registration deadline is January 1, 2010 and no refunds following registration deadline date. The right to cancel the program due to lack of attendance is reserved. For information on training content and registration, contact Michael Shelton, Weeks Bay Reserve, at 251-928-9792 or michael.shelton@dcnr.alabama.gov or Marian Hanisko, Grand Bay Reserve, at 228-475-7047 or marian.hanisko@dmr.ms.gov.

The Weeks Bay NERR is a component of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System and funded by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, State Lands Division, Coastal Section, in part, by a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management.

21st Annual Alabama Nonpoint Source Conference

January 20, 2010

Renaissance Hotel and Conference Center - Montgomery, Alabama

[Conference Agenda](#)

[Renaissance Convention Center Information](#)

[Directions and Parking Information](#)

[Additional Hotels](#)

[Online Registration](#)

Deadlines and important dates: January 9, 2010 - last day to register for the conference

EPA Adaptation Workshop Announcement

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Water, Office of Air and Radiation, and Region 4 office in Atlanta are co-hosting the Southeast Adaptation Workshop on **February 2 and 3, 2010**, in Atlanta, Georgia. The goal of the workshop is to explore how stakeholders from across the Southeast can work together to adapt to climate change now and into the future. Seats are limited and early registration is encouraged. There is no registration fee for this workshop. The registration website is located at: http://epa.gov/region4/clean_energy/conferences.html.

Freshwater Inflows: 2010 and Beyond

Corpus Christi, Texas
8-10 February 2010

The purpose of this conference is to highlight the importance of freshwater inflows and to identify water management questions and approaches that protect estuaries. Join us to discuss value of inflows, indicators of estuarine health, threats to inflows, state and regional issues, and methodologies to identify and protect freshwater inflows to estuaries.

Registration Deadline: 9 December 2009
Accommodations at Omni Hotel- Bayfront Hotel
~\$89.00 per night (extended dates available at no extra cost)

Contact: Harte Research Institute
6300 Ocean Drive
Corpus Christi, Texas 78412-5869
www.freshwaterinflows2010.org

Texas Coastal Bend Living Shorelines

February 11, 2010

Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve, Port Aransas, TX
Contacts: Chad: cleister@mail.utexas.edu or Amy: amy@weeksbay.org

The Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve Coastal Training Program and the Gulf of Mexico Alliance would like to invite you to attend an Introduction to Living Shorelines workshop from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm on February 11, 2010 at the Community Center in Port Aransas, Texas. This event is free to attend, and lunch will be provided for a nominal charge. Space is limited, so **register now** at www.GulfAllianceTraining.org. Living shorelines use plants and other natural materials to stabilize the shoreline, minimize coastal erosion and maintain coastal processes while enhancing the natural shoreline habitat for the benefit of property owners and wildlife.

Course Objectives

- Understand the ecological purpose, benefit and function of shoreline alternatives
- Learn the role of state and federal agencies in the permit review process
- Evaluate examples of living shoreline projects in Texas
- Explore funding opportunities and the cost of living shorelines as compared to hardened shorelines

International Conference on Sea Level Rise in the Gulf of Mexico: Impacts, Adaptations, and Management

Omni Bayfront Hotel
Corpus Christi, Texas
1 - 3 March 2010

<http://www.sealevelrise2010.org/>

Sea level is rising along the Gulf of Mexico coasts of the United States, Mexico, and Cuba. Historical tide gauge measurements prove this and model projections by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change project that global sea-level rise will continue at an increasing rate during the next 100 years. Even if we simply project the current rates of sea-level rise 50-100 years into the future, we see that the impact to humans and the environment will be significant because coastal populations and infrastructure have moved closer to the coast during the last 50 years. The amount of sea-level rise and the impact it has had and will continue to have will vary around the Gulf according to geologic setting and human activities. This international conference will examine the phenomenon of sea-level rise in the Gulf and consider how people and the natural environment can or will respond.

Early Registration: August 15, 2009 - January 15, 2009

[Click here to register!](#)

Sea Level Rise 2010 Conference: Special Gulf of Mexico Alliance Session on Sea Level Rise

When: Wed., March 3, 2010—12:30 to 4:30 pm, Omni Bayfront Hotel, Corpus Christi, TX

What: A summary of current and planned sea level rise research and projects in the Gulf followed by an extended participant discussion of application and management needs.

Why: Sea Level Rise research and activities in the Gulf are burgeoning. SLR 2010 provides a great opportunity to assess “who is doing what” in the Gulf and how to align this SLR work with management needs.

Who: Researchers, coastal managers, local governments, and others in the Gulf that are engaged in or concerned with Sea Level Rise issues.

Sea Level Rise Speed Dating: This special session will begin at 12:30 with a “gourmet” box lunch and a series of compressed presentations on SLR work in the Gulf. If you are doing SLR work in the Gulf we invite you to make a brief presentation. The intent is to present a comprehensive inventory of ‘who is doing what’ in the Gulf relative to SLR.

Let’s Talk About it: After this ‘speed dating’ sea level rise session there will be a facilitated discussion exploring how the Gulf of Mexico Alliance Issue Teams’ work plans match up with the ongoing SLR research, data collection and decision support tools. This session will explore how existing efforts can inform decision-making, and identify additional information needs.

Summary: We feed you lunch and all you have to do is listen and talk about Sea Level Rise in the Gulf.

Presentations: Those conducting or planning to conduct SLR research and projects in the GoM are strongly encouraged to submit a 1-page abstract/summary of your work to the website by Feb. 1st. (www.SeaLevelRise2010.org) Please include your contact information in the summary. The session organizers will contact you.

RSVP: If you plan to attend this session, you must RVSP by Feb. 1st via the conference website: www.SeaLevelRise2010.org.

Mark Your Calendars for the Louisiana State of the Coast Conference

June 8-10, 2010

Baton Rouge River Center, Baton Rouge, LA

www.stateofthecoast.org

Louisiana's coast is a complex and dynamic environment that has been intensively studied for decades. After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, Louisiana developed a Comprehensive Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast (Integrated Ecosystem Restoration and Hurricane Protection: Louisiana's Comprehensive Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast, 2007) which is the first plan to completely integrate hurricane protection with the effort to maintain and rebuild Louisiana's rapidly eroding coast. It is the guide for all coastal restoration and hurricane protection efforts in Louisiana over the next several decades. Plans for the future of the coast continue to evolve under this vision from project-specific to coastwide scales. These efforts are being undertaken by a wide-array of entities, including federal, state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, academia, private industry and others. The future of the coast - ecosystem, economy and culture - depends on effective coordination and implementation of these plans.

The key to our success will be the utilization of the best available science and engineering during the implementation of restoration and protection plans. In order to achieve this task, planning efforts now have to incorporate research from all areas of expertise along the coast to fully understand cause-effect relationships and evaluate trade-offs of any proposed action, all the while being able to move forward with the urgency needed and to adaptively manage for uncertainties.

The State of the Coast (SOC) conference's mission is to provide a forum to learn from recent advances in science and engineering as they relate to hurricane protection and ecosystem restoration in coastal Louisiana, to ensure that relevant and current knowledge is applied to existing and future coastal restoration and protection efforts, and to effectively inform policy and decision making.

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



Laurie Rounds

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