



GULF OF MEXICO NEWS

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December 2010



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Floating Real-Time Global Navigation Satellite Systems to Validate Mobile Bay Circulation Model

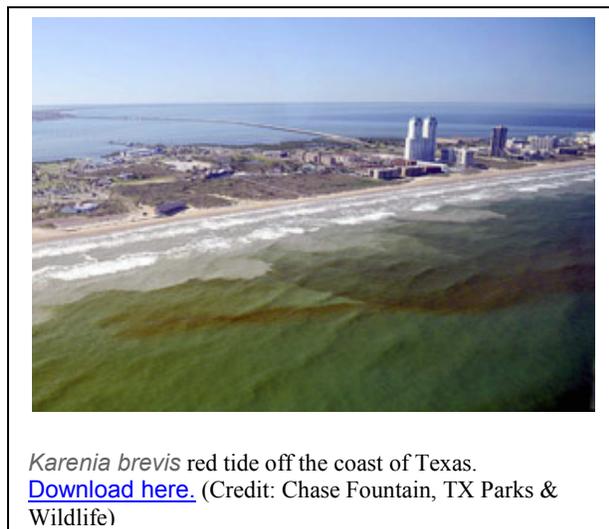
The week of December 2nd, the National Geodetic Survey (NGS), the Office of Coast Survey (OCS), and the Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services (CO-OPS) began a 90-day deployment of seven Real-Time Global Navigation Satellite System (RT GNSS) “floats” at strategic locations around Mobile Bay, Alabama. The floats, in support of the *NOAA in Mobile Bay* project, will provide a continuous record of sea-surface heights to validate a high-resolution coastal circulation model being designed by OCS. This project also relies on a network of GNSS base stations maintained throughout the deployment schedule, as well as local Continuously Operating Reference Stations (CORS)—all serving as local geodetic reference points for the floats. NGS state geodetic advisors to Alabama and Florida will be providing assistance with the deployment. For more information, contact [Gerald Mader](#).

New Vessel Sewage Discharge Rule to Take Effect in December

The final [NOAA rule](#) prohibiting discharge or deposit of sewage from Marine Sanitation Devices (MSD) within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary was printed in the Federal Register on November 26, and will take effect on December 27, 2010. It incorporates public and agency feedback on the draft rule, including an exemption for federal, state and local law enforcement officers, who often must remain at the scene of an incident for an extended period of time. Vessel sewage discharge has been prohibited in state waters of the sanctuary since their designation as a No Discharge Zone by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 2002. The new rule eliminates an exception allowing discharge or deposit from MSDs within the sanctuary, protecting both state and federal sanctuary waters from potentially harmful vessel sewage discharge. For more information, contact [Lilli Ferguson](#).

Forecast System to Warn of Toxic Algal Outbreaks Along Texas’ Shoreline

December 9, 2010



Texas officials and coastal managers will now receive early notice of outbreaks of toxic algae that threaten public health and affect beach and fishing activities along the coast. Weekly bulletins generated by the [NOAA Harmful Algal Bloom Operational Forecast System](#) are based on observations from state partners, coupled with models, imagery and data from NOAA’s powerful tide and current and weather systems.

“Early notification of blooms is essential, and knowing that a bloom is occurring offshore provides our resource managers with sufficient time to coordinate with other responding agencies and formulate a plan before blooms hit the beaches,” said Meredith Byrd, harmful algal bloom response

coordinator for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

The most common harmful algal bloom that occurs in the Gulf of Mexico is known as “red tide” and is caused by the algal species *Karenia brevis*. Occurrences of red tide have historically resulted in fish and marine mammal deaths, shellfish contamination and even human health risk in the form of respiratory distress. Economic impacts of harmful algal blooms in the United States average \$75 million annually including impacts on public health costs, commercial fishing closures, recreation and tourism losses and management and monitoring costs.

Recognizing the need to provide harmful algal bloom information on a more consistent basis, NOAA worked to transform this former demonstration project into a fully operational system. Earlier this year, test bulletins of this system successfully tracked and informed Texas officials about the location of a harmful *Dinophysis* algal bloom that closed Texas’ shellfisheries. NOAA has had an operational forecast in the eastern Gulf of Mexico for harmful algal blooms off the Florida coast since 2004 and with the expansion of the operational system, analysts will be available to review conditions daily with coastal managers from all of the Gulf of Mexico states.

“Ecological forecasting is crucial to protecting human health, the nation’s economy and our enjoyment of our special coastal places,” said Richard Edwing, director of the Center for Operational and Oceanographic Products and Services. “This new system is another way NOAA helps equip our coastal managers with information and tools to plan for and recover from the costly affects harmful algal blooms cause to their communities.”

The NOAA Harmful Algal Bloom Operational Forecast System is operated by NOAA’s CO-OPS, the nation’s authoritative source for accurate, reliable and timely water-level and ocean current measurements, in close partnership with NOAA’s National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science. Operational forecasts are also available for most of Florida and are in various stages of testing in other parts of the nation. To access the system, visit: <http://www.co-ops.nos.noaa.gov/hab>.

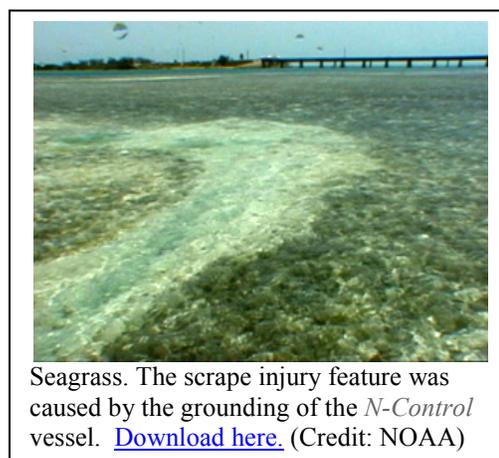
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New Report Outlines Restoration Activities to Speed Seagrass Recovery in Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

December 15, 2010

Results of a five-year monitoring effort to repair seagrass damaged in a boat grounding incident suggest that restoration techniques such as replanting seagrass can speed recovery time. The finding is included in a new report released today by [NOAA’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries](#).

The National Marine Sanctuaries Conservation Series report, “N-Control Seagrass Restoration Monitoring Report Monitoring Events 2003-2008,” presents results of efforts to repair a nearly 1,000-square-foot (92.8-square-meter) swath of seagrass that was damaged on May 29, 2001, when a 45-foot power boat, the *N-Control*, grounded in [Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary](#).



Seagrass beds are an important habitat in the sanctuary. They provide nurseries and homes for numerous species of fish and invertebrates and serve as storm surge buffers for the low-lying Florida Keys. However, shallow seagrass beds in the Florida Keys are being damaged by vessel groundings.



Bird stakes are a cost-effective means of providing fertilizer to newly planted seagrass shoots and injured areas devoid of seagrasses. [Download here.](#) (Credit: NOAA)

In 2007, an estimated 217 reported boat groundings occurred in the sanctuary, with approximately 80 percent occurring on seagrass beds. Vessel groundings damage seagrass, leaving barren areas where marine life once flourished.

Restoration techniques at the *N-Control* grounding site included replanting seagrass and installing stakes for birds to roost on. The use of stakes to attract birds provides a natural way to fertilize seagrass beds as bird feces are high in nutrients needed by the growing seagrass.

Among the key findings in the report:

- After five years, the damaged area is gaining seagrass and coral coverage, though it hasn't reached pre-grounding baseline levels.
- Rather than leaving the site to recover on its own, restoration activities have significantly reduced the amount of time required for damaged seagrass beds in the monitoring area to recover.

“This report highlights the critical science needed to understand and restore our sensitive marine habitats,” said Sean Morton, superintendent, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. “It’s also an important reminder that boaters need to know where they are going before heading out on the water to prevent groundings in the first place. Make sure you have up-to-date NOAA nautical charts, and always pay attention to the signs, channel markers and informational buoys.”



A quadrant from the restoration area three and a half years after the grounding event. [Download here.](#) (Credit: NOAA)

Currently, more than 30 seagrass restoration projects are underway at the sanctuary. Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary protects 2,900 square nautical miles of critical marine habitat, including coral reef, hard bottom, seagrass meadow, mangrove communities and sand flats. NOAA and the state of Florida manage the sanctuary.

The full report can be found online:

<http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/conservation/ncontrol.html>

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Federal Oil Spill Response Transitions to Regional Structure, Releases Scientific Report

Responders review scientific report to guide ongoing cleanup and mitigation actions

December 17, 2010

NEW ORLEANS - As planned and in coordination and consultation with state and local partners, the federal government's response framework for the Deepwater Horizon BP oil spill will transition on Friday, allowing for long-term response operations to be overseen by regional U.S. Coast Guard units rather than surge forces.

Capt. Lincoln Stroh will assume duties as the Federal On-scene Coordinator from Rear Adm. Paul Zukunft and the Unified Area Command, which Zukunft led, will transfer oversight of cleanup operations to the existing Gulf Coast Incident Management Team as part of the Coast Guard's 8th District.

Stroh has been working alongside Zukunft and the UAC for several weeks in preparation for a smooth transition. He will report to the Coast Guard's 8th District Commander, Rear Adm. Mary Landry, who leads all Coast Guard operations in the Gulf Coast from her headquarters in New Orleans. This transition to the permanent regional command structure will ensure that response activities continue to effectively target the areas requiring cleanup.

Zukunft has served on the response since June 4, and relieved Rear Adm. James Watson as the FOSC on July 12. He will return to his permanent assignment at U.S. Coast Guard headquarters in Washington, D.C., as assistant commandant for marine safety, security and stewardship.

"It has been my honor to serve with more than the 47,000 responders from the federal, state, tribal, local, private and volunteer sectors who aggressively and diligently fought the worst oil spill in US history," said Zukunft. "The passion and commitment of these responders to mitigate the environmental and economic impacts of this spill has been awe inspiring and something I have observed during each of the hundreds of oil spill site visits that I made during these past six months. The unity of effort among our local stakeholders has evolved to provide seamless and extremely well coordinated operations."

Stroh has been acting as an assistant to Zukunft since Nov. 13. As the FOSC, Stroh will serve as the representative of the federal government in charge of overseeing the cleanup of recoverable oil from the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill. More than 6,400 total personnel and 360 vessels continue to actively work on the oil spill response.

Additionally, in conjunction with the transition, a scientific report identifying the location and distribution of subsurface oil was provided to the Federal On-Scene Coordinator on Thursday. The report, produced by the interagency Operational Science Advisory Team, provides findings based on more than six months of subsurface monitoring in the Gulf, and gives the response organization detailed information about where recoverable oil remains to guide efforts moving forward.

The report includes chemical analysis of nearly 17,000 water and sediment samples collected between May and October. In the very near shore, scientists observed oil mats or indications of oil mats in shallow, sub-tidal areas. Traces of oil were also found in deepwater sediments near the wellhead. Based on this information, the FOSC has directed response teams to focus assessment and recovery efforts on the potentially recoverable near-shore oil.

This report is not intended to quantify the remaining oil nor determine the fate of unrecoverable oil. It is also not intended to evaluate long term damage caused by the spill. Rather, it will guide responders and allow clean-up workers to respond most effectively as they continue to clean up any remaining recoverable oil.

In all sampling there were no exceedances of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) human health benchmark and no exceedances of the EPA's dispersant benchmarks. Approximately one percent of samples taken since Aug. 3 exceeded aquatic life benchmarks. Of these, only sediment samples taken within two miles of the wellhead were consistent with the Deepwater Horizon source. Sediment samples with above-normal levels of oil compounds were found as far as six miles away from the wellhead, but could not be conclusively fingerprinted as oil from the Deepwater Horizon source.

The report, "Summary Report for Sub-sea and Sub-surface Oil and Dispersant Detection: Sampling and Monitoring," includes analytical chemistry data from 17,000 samples, making it the most comprehensive data set and analysis yet completed since the Deepwater Horizon BP oil spill in April. Although no recoverable offshore oil was identified through this sampling effort, continued sampling and monitoring activities will be conducted as part of the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) process. In keeping with the Federal Government's commitment to transparency and collaboration, all the data that were analyzed in this report are available online at restorethegulf.gov.

To view the report and associated data, please visit:

<http://www.restorethegulf.gov/release/2010/12/16/data-analysis-and-findings>.

For more information about the OSAT report, contact Jennifer Austin, NOAA, at (202) 302-9047.

For questions about the UAC to IMT Transition, contact the Joint Information Center at (713) 323-1670.

Other NOAA News

MPA Center Publishes Best Practices Manual on Mapping Human Uses of the Ocean

The MPA Center has published a best practices manual on mapping human uses of the ocean using participatory GIS techniques. The [report](#), "Mapping Human Uses of the Ocean: Informing Marine Spatial Planning Through Participatory GIS," summarizes the Center's mapping approach, provides detailed lessons learned from various participatory mapping projects throughout California, the Northeast, and Hawaii, and provides insight to the successful planning and implementation of mapping efforts to capture spatial data on human uses of the ocean in different regions and at varying scales. For more information, contact [Mimi Diorio](#).

NOAA Next Generation Strategic Plan Available

The [final Next Generation Strategic Plan](#) (NGSP) is now available. The NGSP charts NOAA's future by strategically addressing the challenges and opportunities facing society, the economy and the environment for generations to come.

The NGSP is our way forward to a promising future. It articulates the agency's four inter-related, long-term goals:

- Climate Adaptation and Mitigation: Envisions an informed society anticipating and responding to climate and its impacts;
- Weather-ready Nation: Society is prepared for and responds to weather-related events;
- Healthy Oceans: Marine fisheries, habitats and biodiversity are sustained within healthy, productive and resilient ecosystems; and

- Resilient Coastal Communities and Economies: Coastal and Great Lakes communities are environmentally and economically sustainable.

This comprehensive plan conveys NOAA's mission and vision of the future, the national and global issues NOAA must address, the specific outcomes NOAA aims to help society realize, and perhaps most important, the actions that the agency must undertake.

The strategy depends directly on the enterprise-wide capabilities of NOAA science and technology, the meaningful engagement of partners and customers, and outstanding administration and management functions that enable all of NOAA's work.

The final plan emerged from extensive input from NOAA employees, our stakeholders and the extended community of partners and collaborators in the public, private and academic sectors who contribute to NOAA's mission. Many of you gave significant and essential input to this plan, and NOAA's leadership team and I are grateful for your valuable contributions.

To download both the full NGSP and the [Executive Summary](http://www.ppi.noaa.gov/ngsp.html), please visit <http://www.ppi.noaa.gov/ngsp.html>.

NOAA, Partners: Growing Hypoxic Zones Reduce Habitat for Billfish and Tuna

Less habitat could increase vulnerability to fishing, affect population assessments

December 22, 2010



Samples of surface skin slim are taken from this Atlantic sailfish to determine gender. [Download here](#). (Credit: NOAA)

Billfish and tuna, important commercial and recreational fish species, may be more vulnerable to fishing pressure because of shrinking habitat according to a new study published by scientists from NOAA, The Billfish Foundation, and University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science.

An expanding zone of low oxygen, known as a hypoxic zone, in the Atlantic Ocean is encroaching upon these species' preferred oxygen-abundant habitat, forcing them into shallower waters where they are more likely to be caught.

During the study, [published](#) recently in the journal *Fisheries Oceanography*, scientists tagged 79 sailfish and blue marlin with satellite tracking devices in the western North Atlantic, off south Florida and the Caribbean; and eastern tropical Atlantic, off the coast of West Africa. The pop off archival satellite tags monitored horizontal and vertical movement patterns. Researchers confirmed that billfish prefer oxygen rich waters closer to the surface and will actively avoid waters low in oxygen.

While these hypoxic zones occur naturally in many areas of the world's tropical and equatorial oceans, scientists are concerned because these zones are expanding and occurring closer to the sea surface, and are expected to continue to grow as sea temperatures rise.

“The hypoxic zone off West Africa, which covers virtually all the equatorial waters in the Atlantic Ocean, is roughly the size of the continental United States, and it’s growing,” said Dr. Eric D. Prince, NOAA’s Fisheries Service research fishery biologist. “With the current cycle of climate change and accelerated global warming, we expect the size of this zone to increase, further reducing the available habitat for these fish.”

Less available habitat can lead to more fish being caught since the fish are concentrated near the surface. Higher catch rates from these areas may give the false appearance of more abundant fish stocks. The shrinking availability of habitat and resulting increases to catch rates are important factors for scientists to consider when doing population assessments.

Researchers forecast that climate change and its associated rise in ocean temperatures will further increase the expansion of hypoxic zones in the world’s oceans. As water temperature increases, the amount of oxygen dissolved in water decreases, further squeezing billfish into dwindling available habitat and exposing them to even higher levels of exploitation.



This Atlantic sailfish was just tagged by NOAA scientists off Senegal as part of a study to evaluate how oxygen depleted zones in the eastern Atlantic affect habitat. [Download here.](#) (Credit: NOAA)

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Illinois Governor signs Executive Order on Proposed Coastal Management Program

On December 10, Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed an Executive Order recommended by the Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM) as a necessary element of meeting NOAA requirements for the proposed Illinois Coastal Management Program (ICMP). Under the Order, and according to Coastal Zone Management Act regulations, Illinois State agencies are required to administer their programs in accordance with ICMP policies. The Order also establishes mechanisms to ensure cross-agency collaboration to implement the ICMP in coordination with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the lead agency for developing and implementing the Program. Federal approval of the ICMP will make it the 35th approved program, completing the National Coastal Management Program. For more information, contact [Diana Olinger](#).

Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee Seeks Nominations

The Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee is seeking new members to fill six vacancies for October 2011. The Committee advises the Departments of Commerce and the Interior on the development and implementation of a national system of marine protected areas. [Nominations](#) for natural and social scientists; state, territorial, and tribal resource managers; cultural resource experts; and representatives of ocean industry (e.g., energy, tourism), commercial and recreational fishing; and conservation interests are sought by February 15, 2011. Each nomination submission should include the proposed member's name and organizational affiliation, a cover letter describing the nominee's qualifications and interest in serving on the Advisory Committee, and a curriculum vitae or resume of the nominee. For more information, contact [Kara Yeager](#).

In the Gulf States

Ready to Begin Work – Alabama's Rapid Response Program for BP-Gulf Research Initiative Approved

As a result of the April 20, 2010, BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico, on May 24, BP announced a commitment of up to \$500 million to the Gulf Research Initiative (GRI) Open Research Program to study the impact of the Deepwater Horizon incident, and its associated response, on the environment and public health in the Gulf of Mexico.

From that initiative, \$5 million was designated Rapid Response Funds for Alabama's Marine Environmental Science Consortium (MESC) to allocate for immediate state research programs. Those research programs have now been approved, and funds are being released to begin the work needed to study the impacts of this historical environmental event.

The MESC is a consortium of 22 Alabama four-year colleges and universities, based at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab (DISL) on Dauphin Island, Alabama. Dr. John Valentine, Chair of University Programs at DISL, took charge of the immense process by bringing over 100 MESC-associated scientists to participate in four thematic workshops held in Mobile, Alabama, on September 2nd and 3rd, and on September 9th and 10th.

"This was a rare opportunity, driven by crisis, that brought together the best scientific talent from across the state of Alabama," stated Dr. Valentine. "We were, and continue to be, driven by our mutual concerns for the environment and citizens of our state and all states affected by the oil spill.

"We are pleased that this was an open and transparent process, vetted by a recognized panel of oil experts at the Harte Institute.

"This was a collaborative process by all 22 members of the MESC, and we are determined that this unprecedented effort will bring unprecedented results in studying the effects of this oil spill, and will aid in the recovery process. By careful scientific analysis and peer review, we are committed to robust results that will help in any future events of this nature, although we hope those events never again come to light," he concluded.

Added Dr. George Crozier, Executive Director of the DISL, "This project has provided a unique opportunity for cooperative efforts within the state's institutions of higher education. In a relatively short

amount of time, the funds will be disbursed to 105 scientists in 14 different MESC institutions – an impressive diversity of projects, people and places.”

Four themes were selected, as well as a co-chair from the participating institutions. A category for smaller grants, known as Small Grants for Exploratory Research (SGER), was also established to encourage those projects that needed more data to merit full funding (The full list of themes, workplans, principal investigators and budgets are listed below). The deadline for the work plans to be submitted to the Principal Investigator (PI) was October 8. Once received, the PI forwarded the proposed work plans to the advisory panel.

The Harte Institute, located in Corpus Christi, Texas, and part of Texas A&M, was asked to conduct the external review of work plans. The members of the advisory panel were selected and the panel conducted its evaluation of the work plan on October 19 at the DISL.

The Executive Committee of the MESC, its governing board, gave a final review and approval of the work plans. The Executive Committee is composed of President Gordon Moulton, University of South Alabama and Chair of the Executive Committee; President Jay Gogue, Auburn University; Chancellor Jay Hawkins, Jr., Troy University; President Robert E. Witt, University of Alabama; and President William G. Cale, Jr., University of North Alabama.

Moulton stated, “The RAPID response funds provided by BP to the State of Alabama have allowed our institutions of higher education to collaboratively develop research projects that will address the immediate needs of our public and BP to understand the impacts of the spill, and further, to eliminate the gaps in our scientific understanding of the Gulf and its multitude of physical, chemical and biological properties.”

The 22 MESC colleges and universities are:

- Alabama A&M University
- Alabama State University
- Athens State University
- Auburn University
- Auburn University at Montgomery
- Birmingham Southern College
- Huntingdon College
- Jacksonville State University
- Judson College
- Samford University
- Spring Hill College
- Talladega College
- Troy University
- Tuskegee University
- University of Alabama
- University of Alabama at Birmingham
- University of Alabama at Huntsville
- University of Mobile
- University of Montevallo
- University of North Alabama
- University of South Alabama
- University of West Alabama

“COASTWATCH” Allows Citizens to Report Marine Poachers via Text Message

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) Marine Resources Division has recently launched “COASTWATCH,” an Internet based Tip411 tool that enables the public to anonymously report saltwater fishing violations in Alabama’s coastal waters via text message.

To report a saltwater fishing violation, anyone with a cell phone can now text the keyword “COASTWATCH” to the number 847411. The public is encouraged to include as much detail as possible when reporting a violation such as: the name and description of the suspects, vehicle or boat description, license plate number, boat registration number, clothing description, time of your observation, and the area where the violation occurred.

Examples of [saltwater fishing violations](#) include: illegal netting, violations of fish size and limits, shrimping and oystering in closed waters, closed season fishing, and any other suspicious activity. For more information visit www.outdooralabama.com.

According to Major Chris Blankenship, Acting Director of the Marine Resources Division, citizen involvement is the key to protecting Alabama's coastal heritage. "This is just another tool to allow the public to provide valuable information as the eyes and ears of fishery enforcement in coastal Alabama," Blankenship said. "This is an extension of our already successful Coastwatch Trained Observer Network and is another way the Marine Resources Division continues to use technology to protect our natural resources. We appreciate the support of the [Coastal Conservation Association](#) (CCA) and [Alabama Wildlife Federation](#) (AWF) as we work together to provide outdoor recreation for generations to come." Tip411 removes all identifying information before ADCNR receives the tip making the sender totally anonymous. The anonymity of the process has produced results in the states using Tip411. Successful tips in Washington state and Wisconsin have resulted in hunting violation convictions. The total anonymity of the program allows concerned citizens to pass on information without fear of retribution.

Tip411 is used by other law enforcement agencies across the country including the Birmingham Police Department and the NYPD. The Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) began using the system in September 2010. To report a wildlife or freshwater fishing violation text the keyword "[GAMEWATCH](#)" to the number 847411 with as much detail as possible.

The Marine Resources 24 hour telephone tip line is 251-476-1256 and is another way for the public to anonymously report fishing violations in coastal Alabama. Funding for Alabama's Tip411 program is provided by the AWF and CCA.

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources promotes wise stewardship, management and enjoyment of Alabama's natural resources through five divisions: Marine Police, Marine Resources, State Lands, State Parks, and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. To learn more about ADCNR, visit www.outdooralabama.com.

Gulf of Mexico Minutes Provide Tidbits of 'Betcha Didn't Knows'

If the Gulf of Mexico region were its own country, it would support the seventh largest economy in the world. Tourism, commercial and recreational fishing, and much, much more provide a bounty of economic abundance to the communities of the Gulf region and the nation.

A series of 40 Gulf of Mexico Minute radio podcasts are now available on a variety of topics that directly, or indirectly, involve the vast water body. The short, 90-second messages enable listeners to explore the Gulf's diverse array of habitats, learn about unusual creatures ranging from tube worms to polka-dot batfish, and even explain how buying local produce actually helps to protect Gulf waters.

Did you know that the National Cancer Institute has been researching for marine organisms that could potentially provide treatments for chronic pain, asthma and breast cancer? Or that in some Gulf areas up to 80 percent of sea grasses have been lost? Or that in 2009 a giant squid nearly 20 feet in length and weighing over 100 pounds was discovered? These are just a few of the fascinating facts that can be downloaded or played. The messages were produced by staff at the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas and developed as part of a Gulf of

Mexico Alliance education and outreach project to promote awareness about the environmental and economic importance of the Gulf of Mexico.

Listeners are encouraged to share these messages with friends, family and co-workers, or to use for public broadcasts or publications. They are simple to download, just go to <http://www.supportthegulf.org/media-section/podcasts>.

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance was formed in 2004 by the Gulf States of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas as part of their shared vision for a healthy and resilient Gulf of Mexico region. The Alliance recognizes the economy and quality of life for Gulf citizens are linked to its ecological health. Through the collaborative leadership of governmental partners like the Florida DEP and the active participation of businesses and non-governmental organizations, the Alliance is addressing priority issues facing the Gulf region. The Governor's Action Plan for Healthy & Resilient Coasts, endorsed by the five Gulf Governors, outlines the specific actions necessary to achieve the Alliance's mission. To view the Action Plan, visit www.gulfofmexicoalliance.org.

State Park Opens Spring for Wild Manatee Population

~Partners gather for manatee milestone at Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park~



HOMOSSA SPRINGS - This morning the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Florida Park Service opened the gate to allow wild manatees to enter the spring bowl at Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park for the first time in 30 years. Event guests included representatives from DEP's Florida State Parks, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Save the Manatee Club and other partners and supporters.

"We are thrilled to hold this landmark event at Homosassa Springs in coordination with our partners," said DEP's Florida Park Service Director Donald Forgione. "This is an important component of the park's participation in manatee conservation

and brings these majestic animals back into their natural winter sanctuary."

This momentous event commemorated the opening of the bridge gate that separates rehabilitating manatees in the spring bowl and wild manatees in the spring run. This is the first time the gate has been opened since it was constructed nearly 30 years ago, before the park was acquired by the state in 1989. Members of the manatee conservation community have for many years hoped that the bridge gate could be opened for the wild manatees that winter in the Blue Waters area outside the park from November to March.

"Today marked an important and significant step forward for manatee conservation as recent history reminded us that open access to Florida's network of warm water springs is crucial to manatee winter survival," said supervisor for the FWS North Florida Ecological Services Office Dave Hankla. "Homosassa Springs' accommodation of the wild population during the winter underscores the Florida Park Service's commitment to long-term manatee conservation and recovery. This day also reflects the substantial research effort our manatee rehab partners made in furthering our understanding of the

manatee papilloma virus; without which our collective decision to take this step would not have been possible.”

A separation fence installed within the spring in February to provide for improved manatee rehabilitation made the gate opening possible. Homosassa Springs’ eight captive manatees have been placed behind the separation fence in the spring bowl, allowing the remainder of the spring bowl to be available for wild manatees. The gate underneath the bridge will be closed when the wild manatees have left the spring at the end of the season, usually March, and the rehabilitating manatees will again have the entire spring bowl for their use.

Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park has been a participant in the FWS Manatee Rescue, Rehabilitation and Release Program for 30 years, and has helped rehabilitate more than 40 injured manatees during that time. FWS is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Just this year, 10 new manatees have come into Homosassa Springs for rehabilitation, some of whom have already been released to the wild. Homosassa Springs will continue to rehabilitate manatees, and in addition, will continue to provide excellent manatee education and interpretation programs to Florida’s citizens and visitors.

Funding for the new gates within the spring was provided by the Save the Manatee Club as a continued supporter of manatee conservation and the park. Other important park supporters at the event included the Felburn Foundation, the Friends of Homosassa Springs Wildlife Park, the Citrus County Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Citrus County Chamber of Commerce.

About Florida State Parks

Created in 1935 by the Florida Legislature, Florida State Parks has grown from eight to 160 parks over the last 75 years. Today, the Florida Park Service manages more than 700,000 acres of Florida’s natural environment, including 100 miles of beaches, eight National Historic Landmarks and 39 sites on the National Register of Historic Places. Florida State Parks has been recognized by the National Recreation and Park Association as the nation’s first and only two-time Gold Medal winner for the nation’s best park service.

For more information

Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park - www.floridastateparks.org/homosassasprings
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - www.fws.gov/northflorida.

Governor Jindal, CCA & Shell Announce New Partnership to Benefit Louisiana’s Coast

Governor Bobby Jindal joined the Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) and Shell Oil Company to announce a new public-private partnership between the recreational angling community, private businesses and the state to assist in CCA’s ongoing Building Conservation Habitat Program. Shell has committed 1.5 million dollars to CCA’s Building Conservation Habitat Program.

Governor Jindal announced that Independence Island, formerly an emergent island in Barataria Bay near Grand Isle, will be one of the first beneficiaries of the Building Conservation Program. Independence Island was formerly one of



Louisiana's popular fishing destinations, but due to coastal erosion and subsidence, the Island has sunk to the point that it is no longer a viable fisheries habitat. Governor Jindal said the state's new partnership with CCA and Shell will help resurrect the treasured marina life habitat associated with Independence Island.

Governor Jindal said, Louisiana's coastal environment has faced many challenges, some man-made and some natural. This makes it increasingly important for us to find innovative ways to restore and enhance the coastal areas that support state's economy. Our marsh is the heart and soul of Louisiana. We have a sporting heritage second to none and a long, proud connection to our land, water and resources. Louisiana sportsmen know better than anyone the need to give something back to the environment so that we can continue to enjoy it while preserving this heritage for our children and grandchildren. That's what makes this announcement today so inspiring "CCA's Building Conservation Habitat Program is a long-term commitment from the angling community to the incredible natural resources of Louisiana. Partnerships like the one announced today are a critical component for helping our citizens get back on their feet after the oil spill and preserving the beauty of coastal Louisiana for generations to come."

David Cresson, Executive Director and CEO of CCA Louisiana said, "Today's announcement is a great example of how when private enterprise, members of the community and the state work together, they can accomplish great work. This reef will create new habitat for a large variety of marine species and will provide recreational fishing opportunities in an area that had been heavily affected by coastal erosion and other factors. I applaud Shell and Governor Jindal for working with CCA to spearhead this project, and I look forward to our continued work in conserving and enhancing our coastal fisheries."

John Hollowell, Executive Vice President, Deep Water, Upstream Americas, Shell Energy Resources Company said, "Shell has a long history of support for environment and habitat projects, and our thousands of employees in Louisiana are excited about the possibilities of this partnership. CCA members have an amazing track record of conservation work that sets them apart. We believe in the organization and are committed to doing our part to ensure that the Building Conservation Habitat Program has the tools to bring significant marine habitat restoration projects from concept to reality."

Patrick Murray, president of CCA National said, "This partnership combines the grassroots strength of CCA with the resources of Shell to allow our members to take the Building Conservation Habitat Program to new levels. It is an exciting time in marine conservation, and the restoration projects that will come from this initiative will play a key role in the enhancement of Gulf resources for both today's anglers and for generations of anglers to come."

The project calls for installing two reefs covering four acres at Independence Island this spring, each reef consisting of 3,500 tons of limestone to provide hard-structure habitat for marine fisheries. Almost immediately after installation, these reefs will start attracting marine organisms and forage fish, which will draw recreational species and provide new opportunities for anglers in Grand Isle.

CCA worked with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) to permit a 55-acre site for future reef development that includes the original footprint of Independence Island. The Independence Island Reef is being made possible by a \$250,000 donation from the CCA Building Conservation Habitat Program and matching funds from the state.

CCA has a highly successful artificial reef program with reefs completed in Lake Pelto, Vermilion Bay, Calcasieu Lake, and Lake Ponchartrain. In in-shore coastal areas, this program has used crushed limestone to construct low-relief shell-pad type structures to enhance habitats and fisheries resources.

Louisiana Sea Grant and LSU AgCenter Turn Problem Fish into Nutritious Dish for Haitians in Need

December 17, 2010

Asian carp have gained notoriety for overtaking the Illinois River, which connects the Mississippi River to Lake Michigan. Natural resources managers in the northern United States are working feverishly and at great expense to keep them out of the Great Lakes. Closer to home, the invasive fish have made inroads into the lower Mississippi, Red and Ouachita rivers and the Atchafalaya Basin. The filter feeders are now a common incidental catch in the hoop nets of Louisiana's commercial freshwater fishermen. Two species – the silver and bighead carp – also happen to be delicious, but there are numerous challenges in establishing a market for their flaky, white flesh.

Asian carp were deliberately introduced to this country in the 1970s to help manage aquaculture ponds and wastewater lagoons, but they escaped and quickly established themselves in the wild. Silver carp commonly exceed 20 pounds; bighead carp often exceed 40 pounds. They grow rapidly and can out-compete native fish for food and habitat. Additionally, silver carp pose a threat to humans when they are disturbed by boat motors. Videos of clouds of startled carp leaping into the air and striking unwary boaters and television journalists are popular Internet fodder.

Now, it appears the problem fish have the potential to become a solution for earthquake weary Haitians. Researchers at Louisiana Sea Grant and the LSU AgCenter are canning Asian carp and tweaking their recipe in search of a preparation that staff and residents in a home for disabled orphans will find palatable. Ultimately, the project could deliver a high-quality protein to people in need, be a boon to fishermen, provide a new opportunity for canneries, and reduce the population of an unwanted invasive species.

The project began when Fisheries Specialist Julie Anderson with Louisiana Sea Grant and the LSU AgCenter met Bill Horan, Operation Blessing International's president and chief operating officer. Operation Blessing is a non-denominational Christian humanitarian organization providing disaster aid in the United States and 23 other countries. It focuses on hunger relief, clean water and medical care. The group did extensive work in Louisiana following Hurricane Katrina, and Horan and Anderson met at an event celebrating Operation Blessings' efforts to help local soft-shell crab producers rebuild their crab shedding facilities.

"It was great to connect with Bill and Operation Blessing. This is an exciting opportunity to use an underutilized and sometimes misunderstood fish to feed people in need," Anderson said. "We quickly marshaled resources at LSU to create this pilot project. If the Haitians like the canned carp, we will look for ways to expand production."

"There are so many people in Haiti who are protein starved and would love to have fish," Horan said. "The favorite fish meal is a canned sardine in tomato sauce. We have a children's home with 47 disabled orphans. We thought that would be a good place with the kids and the staff to try the carp. If it works – if they like the taste – I don't know where we go from there."

The Highway 1 Fish Market in Simmesport donated about 100 pounds of silver carp, bighead carp and native buffalo fish to the cause. Anderson contacted her colleague Lucina Lampila, an associate professor with Louisiana Sea Grant and LSU's Department of Food Science, to coordinate the canning. Outgoing Marine Extension Leader Glenn Thomas cleaned the carp, and Lampila engaged fellow professor Paul Wilson in Food Science to access his pilot food processing facility at LSU. Food Science graduate student Matt Cael devised a tomato sauce recipe to replicate the one used in the Haitian sardine dish.

While bighead and silver carp meat is firm, mild and nutritious, the fish have an unusual bone structure that makes them difficult and labor-intensive to fillet. So, the team decided to process the fish with the bones in, employing carp canning protocols established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. The bones soften during the canning process and are eaten with the flesh, much like canned salmon.

Horan, who is an avid recreational fisherman, is enthusiastic about the test project. “The idea of using this scourge of American waters is wonderful,” he said. “If we could show these fish are good to eat, we and could create jobs and feed people. It’s a double-whammy. We want to get behind it, and Operation Blessing is very well positioned to responsibly distribute this product.”

The test run produced about 75 cans of fish using two different preparations. They passed initial Sea Grant and AgCenter staff taste tests, and Lampila plans to conduct a nutritional analysis on the finished product. “It smells like a very good quality light-meat tuna,” Lampila said. “It has a distinctive aroma of canned fish and an acceptable texture, flavor and mouth-feel. It’s also shelf-stable, which is important.”

The next step is to deliver it to Haiti and have orphanage residents and staff try it and offer their feedback. Anderson sent the samples to Operation Blessing workers who were about to depart for Haiti. Unfortunately, political unrest following the country’s recent disputed elections delayed the team’s departure and the shipment of carp.

In 2009, Louisiana Sea Grant and the LSU AgCenter produced a how-to video for recreational anglers demonstrating ways to clean and cook bighead and silver carp. It is available online on YouTube. Since its establishment in 1968, Louisiana Sea Grant has worked to promote stewardship of the state’s coastal resources through a combination of research, education and outreach programs critical to the cultural, economic and environmental health of Louisiana’s coastal zone. Louisiana Sea Grant, based at LSU, is part of the National Sea Grant College Program, a network of 32 university-based programs in each of the U.S. coastal and Great Lakes states and Puerto Rico.

Mississippi Coast Children Decide the Gulf Safe Egret will be Named Elvis

BILOXI, Miss. – The shrimp-eating snowy egret featured on 13 Mississippi Gulf Safe seafood billboards across the Coast will be affectionately known as Elvis.

The Mississippi Seafood Marketing Program, under the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR), held a Name the Gulf Safe Egret contest for Coast children ages 12 and under. The contest ended this week and after careful consideration of all the creative and funny entries, the contest judges couldn’t resist the name Elvis.

The Seafood Marketing Program would like to thank all the children who participated in the contest and congratulate the winners. The winning entry was submitted by both Conner Smothers, 12, of Diamondhead and by Tyler Fulmer, 11, of Biloxi. Both winners will receive a fishing rod and reel, a T-shirt from the Biloxi Seafood Museum and four tickets for a 2.5-hour walk-on sail aboard a 65-foot two-masted gaff-rigged Biloxi schooner, the Glenn L. Swetman or the Mike Sekul.

The Name the Gulf Safe Egret contest was a promotion of the Gulf Safe seafood campaign, an ongoing awareness drive organized by the DMR’s Mississippi Seafood Marketing Program. The message of the campaign is that Gulf seafood is safe, only harvested from open, regulated waters, tested extensively and is of the highest quality.

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.

Secretary of State Returns More Than \$9 Million to Gulf Coast from Tidelands Leases and New Assessment Collections

BILOXI, Miss. – Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann presented a check for \$7,607,668.28 to the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR) at a ceremony held Dec. 6, 2010, at the Secretary of State's Office in Gulfport. The total amount returned to the Gulf Coast from 2010 tidelands leases and assessments is \$9,302,968.228. Shortly after the Gulf oil spill this spring, the Secretary of State was able to make an advance payment of \$1,695,294 to the DMR to use for emergency disaster response. The check delivered by Hosemann Dec. 6 represented the balance of more than \$7.6 million.

The tidelands lease revenue was collected on leases on the Mississippi Gulf Coast in the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2010. 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 \$9,302,962 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 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 DMR. Since 1990, the Secretary of State's Office has collected more than \$85 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, non-governmental organizations and state agencies. I thank the Mississippi Legislature for providing these funds to implement these worthy projects."

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 dmr.ms.gov.

GMF Partners with HRI in Measuring Ecosystem's Value to Humans

December 2010 - Ecosystem services, the benefits ecosystems provide to humans, are the focus of collaboration among the GMF, [Harte Research Institute](#) (HRI) for Gulf of Mexico Studies, and the Habitat Conservation and Restoration Team (HCRT) of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance. The project area encompasses Galveston Bay, Texas, where HRI Endowed Chair for Socio-economics [Dr. David Yoskowitz](#) will lead the study. Researchers will first identify the primary services tied to the area's ecosystems and will then assess their value using either currency or non-monetary metrics.

The results of a nearby GMF/HCRT [sea level rise modeling project](#) will dovetail with this effort. Scientists will estimate changes in ecosystems due to sea level rise and evaluate the impacts on human wellbeing - information which can guide those in decision-making and planning roles. The GMF and the HCRT have conducted sea level rise modeling projects around the Gulf of Mexico but are primarily focused on advancing the science to support better conservation and restoration decisions. This interdisciplinary approach should prove meaningful both to resource managers as they prioritize habitats and to coastal communities which benefit from these natural systems.



GMF is partnering in an effort to measure the benefits that ecosystems provide to humans.
PHOTO: GMF

Exploring the Depths: Three from HRI join expedition

by Dr. Sandra Arismendez
Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies
Fall 2010 newsletter, HRI NEWS

Three researchers from HRI's Ecosystem Studies and Modeling Lab were part of a team of scientists conducting a six-week-long study in the Gulf of Mexico aboard the Research Vessel Gyre this fall. From September 11 through October 21, HRI research associates Dr. Sandra Arismendez, Rick Kalke and Dr. Benoit Lebreton were at sea, working as part of the expedition team. Their goal was to determine the effects of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill on toxicity levels and on benthic communities.

During the expedition, the researchers collected water and sediment samples at 66 locations ranging in depth from 80 meters to 2,800 meters. A total of 32 passengers from many different parts of the world participated in the cruise; about half were crew members and half were part of the science team.

Researchers retrieved water and sediment samples from the ocean floor with a Mega corer comprised of a frame with 12 detachable cores (photo right). The retrieved cores were detached from the frame and placed on a work bench along the starboard side of the vessel for processing.

Kalke describes the cores as "the most beautiful, intact cores" he's ever seen during his 30-plus years of working in this environment. Kalke has participated in a number of similar cruises in the Gulf of Mexico and in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of California.

HRI scientists were randomly assigned four cores for meiofaunal and macrofaunal analysis and for water and sediment toxicity. They suctioned super natant water from the top of each core (photo top right) and conducted water toxicity analysis. Then they sectioned sediment samples, which they either preserved or froze. Similar sampling techniques were used by two additional research vessels, the Ocean Veritas and the Ryan Chouest, and samples were shipped to HRI for laboratory analysis. HRI received a total of about 1,500 samples for analysis, about 250 samples each of water and sediment for toxicity analysis and about 1,000 macrofaunal samples for taxonomic enumeration and identification.

"What people often asked of us about the cruise," Arismendez said, "is if we saw any oil and if we were sea sick. Yes, we did see oil, both on the surface of the water and in the sediment cores, and no, fortunately, we did not get sea sick. In fact the weather was so cooperative we experienced some of the most stunning, multicolored sunrises and sunsets over the calm waters of the Gulf of Mexico I have ever seen."

The question often asked of Dr. Paul Montagna, HRI Endowed Chair for Ecosystem Studies and Modeling and lead investigator on the project, is "How bad is it and when will we have some results?" "This is one of the largest, and most complex projects I've ever been a part of in my 30 plus year career," Montagna said. "It will probably be a couple of months before we finish analyzing and interpreting the water and sediment toxicity results, but that's only part of the picture. We still have the macrofaunal and meiofaunal samples which will require more time to process." Montagna estimates it will take approximately 18 months before they have a good understanding of what the data are telling them about the condition of the Gulf. They will continue to provide updates as they become available. One thing that can be said at this point is that the sediment appears to be more toxic near the well site.

Other News

Accepting Nominations for the 2011 Gulf Guardian Awards

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

The first Gulf Guardian Award winners were recognized in 2000. For the year 2011, the Gulf of Mexico Program partnership will be awarding 1st, 2nd and 3rd place awards for seven (7) categories: **Business & Industry, Environmental Justice/Cultural Diversity, Civic/Non-Profit Organizations, Partnerships, Youth Environmental Education, Individual, and Bi-National partnership efforts**. All 21 winners in these seven different categories will be rewarded and recognized with an impressive marble and glass memento, press coverage on their project, and recognition by their peers at a special Gulf Guardian Awards ceremony.

The Gulf of Mexico Program is underwritten by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is a non-regulatory, inclusive consortium of state and federal government agencies and representatives of the business and agricultural community, fishing industry, scientists, and community leaders from all across

the five Gulf States and Mexico. To complete a nomination application for 2011, go to the Gulf of Mexico Program's web site at <http://www.epa.gov/gmpo>, and then click on the Gulf Guardian Application button. Applications are available in both English and Spanish. **Nominations are due by March 15, 2011.** If you have any questions, or require further information or assistance, please contact [Diane Altsman](mailto:altsman.diane@epa.gov) at (228) 688-7015 or email at altsman.diane@epa.gov.

Federal Oil Spill Response Transitions to Regional Structure, Releases Scientific Report

December 17, 2010 | 10:35:28 AM EST

NEW ORLEANS - As planned and in coordination and consultation with state and local partners, the federal government's response framework for the Deepwater Horizon BP oil spill will transition on Friday, allowing for long-term response operations to be overseen by regional U.S. Coast Guard units rather than surge forces. Capt. Lincoln Stroh will assume duties as the Federal On-scene Coordinator from Rear Adm. Paul Zukunft and the Unified Area Command, which Zukunft led, will transfer oversight of cleanup operations to the existing Gulf Coast Incident Management Team as part of the Coast Guard's 8th District.

Stroh has been working alongside Zukunft and the UAC for several weeks in preparation for a smooth transition. He will report to the Coast Guard's 8th District Commander, Rear Adm. Mary Landry, who leads all Coast Guard operations in the Gulf Coast from her headquarters in New Orleans. This transition to the permanent regional command structure will ensure that response activities continue to effectively target the areas requiring cleanup.

Zukunft has served on the response since June 4, and relieved Rear Adm. James Watson as the FOSC on July 12. He will return to his permanent assignment at U.S. Coast Guard headquarters in Washington, D.C., as assistant commandant for marine safety, security and stewardship.

"It has been my honor to serve with more than the 47,000 responders from the federal, state, tribal, local, private and volunteer sectors who aggressively and diligently fought the worst oil spill in US history," said Zukunft. "The passion and commitment of these responders to mitigate the environmental and economic impacts of this spill has been awe inspiring and something I have observed during each of the hundreds of oil spill site visits that I made during these past six months. The unity of effort among our local stakeholders has evolved to provide seamless and extremely well coordinated operations."

Stroh has been acting as an assistant to Zukunft since Nov. 13. As the FOSC, Stroh will serve as the representative of the federal government in charge of overseeing the cleanup of recoverable oil from the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill. More than 6,400 total personnel and 360 vessels continue to actively work on the oil spill response.

Additionally, in conjunction with the transition, a scientific report identifying the location and distribution of subsurface oil was provided to the Federal On-Scene Coordinator on Thursday. The report, produced by the interagency Operational Science Advisory Team, provides findings based on more than six months of subsurface monitoring in the Gulf, and gives the response organization detailed information about where recoverable oil remains to guide efforts moving forward.

The report includes chemical analysis of nearly 17,000 water and sediment samples collected between May and October. In the very near shore, scientists observed oil mats or indications of oil mats in shallow, sub-tidal areas. Traces of oil were also found in deepwater sediments near the wellhead. Based on this information, the FOSC has directed response teams to focus assessment and recovery efforts on the

potentially recoverable near-shore oil. This report is not intended to quantify the remaining oil nor determine the fate of unrecoverable oil. It is also not intended to evaluate long term damage caused by the spill. Rather, it will guide responders and allow clean-up workers to respond most effectively as they continue to clean up any remaining recoverable oil.

In all sampling there were no exceedances of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) human health benchmark and no exceedances of the EPA's dispersant benchmarks. Approximately one percent of samples taken since Aug. 3 exceeded aquatic life benchmarks. Of these, only sediment samples taken within two miles of the wellhead were consistent with the Deepwater Horizon source. Sediment samples with above-normal levels of oil compounds were found as far as six miles away from the wellhead, but could not be conclusively fingerprinted as oil from the Deepwater Horizon source.

The report, "Summary Report for Sub-sea and Sub-surface Oil and Dispersant Detection: Sampling and Monitoring," includes analytical chemistry data from 17,000 samples, making it the most comprehensive data set and analysis yet completed since the Deepwater Horizon BP oil spill in April. Although no recoverable offshore oil was identified through this sampling effort, continued sampling and monitoring activities will be conducted as part of the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) process. In keeping with the Federal Government's commitment to transparency and collaboration, all the data that were analyzed in this report are available online at restorethegulf.gov.

To view the report and associated data, please visit <http://www.restorethegulf.gov/release/2010/12/16/data-analysis-and-findings>.

For more information about the OSAT report, contact Jennifer Austin, NOAA, at (202) 302-9047. For questions about the UAC to IMT Transition, contact the Joint Information Center at (713) 323-1670.

Attorney General Eric Holder Announces Civil Lawsuit Against Nine Defendants for Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs
December 15, 2010

WASHINGTON – Attorney General Eric Holder announced today that the Justice Department has filed a civil lawsuit against nine defendants in the matter of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. The lawsuit asks the court for civil penalties under the Clean Water Act and to declare eight of the defendants liable without limitation under the Oil Pollution Act for all removal costs and damages caused by the oil spill, including damages to natural resources.

In the complaint filed today in the U.S. District Court in New Orleans, the United States alleges violations of federal safety and operational regulations which caused or contributed to the oil spill that began on April 20, 2010 when an explosion and fire destroyed the Deepwater Horizon offshore drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico, approximately 50 miles from the Mississippi River delta. This action will become part of the multi-district litigation pending before Judge Barbier in federal court in New Orleans.

“We intend to prove that these defendants are responsible for government removal costs, economic losses, and environmental damages without limitation,” said Attorney General Holder. “Even though the spill has been contained, the Department’s focus on investigating this disaster and preventing future devastation has not wavered. Both our civil and criminal investigations continue, and our work to ensure that the American taxpayers are not forced to bear the costs of restoring the gulf area and its economy is moving forward.”

The defendants named in the lawsuit are BP Exploration and Production Inc.; Anadarko Exploration & Production LP and Anadarko Petroleum Corporation (known collectively as “Anadarko Defendants”); MOEX Offshore 2007 LLC; Triton Asset Leasing GMBH, Transocean Holdings LLC, Transocean Offshore Deepwater Drilling Inc., and Transocean Deepwater Inc. (known collectively as “Transocean Defendants”); and Transocean’s insurer, QBE Underwriting Ltd./Lloyd’s Syndicate 1036. QBE/Lloyd’s can be held liable only up to the amount of insurance policy coverage under the Oil Pollution Act and is not being sued under the Clean Water Act.

According to the complaint, important safety and operating regulations were violated in the period leading up to the April 20, 2010 Oil Spill, including:

- Failing to take necessary precautions to keep the Macondo Well under control in the period leading up to the April 20th explosion;
- Failing to use the best available and safest drilling technology to monitor the well’s conditions;
- Failing to maintain continuous surveillance; and
- Failing to use and maintain equipment and material that were available and necessary to ensure the safety and protection of personnel, equipment, natural resources, and the environment.

The complaint alleges that these violations caused or contributed to the massive oil spill, and that the defendants are therefore responsible for removal costs and damages without limitation under the Oil Pollution Act.

The complaint also includes claims for civil penalties under the Clean Water Act, which prohibits the unauthorized discharge of oil into the nation’s waters. It alleges that the defendants named in the lawsuit were in violation of the Act throughout the months that oil was gushing into the Gulf of Mexico.

The ongoing civil investigation into the Gulf Spill is being handled by the Assistant Attorneys General Ignacia Moreno and Tony West of the Environment and Natural Resources Division and the Civil Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Coast Guard, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Southeast Watershed Forum Assists Taylor County, FL with Coastal-Friendly Development



The Forum's Christine Olsenius working with Taylor County Engineer, Kenneth Dudley.

Working under a grant from the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP) and FWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, the Southeast Watershed Forum has been assisting Taylor County, Florida with wetlands and habitat enhancement and coastal-friendly development. The county received funding to purchase property across the road from the only county-owned boat access on the Florida Gulf Coast. The park includes 23 acres of wetlands which need restoration, enhancement and removal of exotics.

The park will offer wildlife viewing, but also provides passive recreation and overflow parking for a boat ramp. To better acquaint the county with coastal-friendly (low impact) development practices,

the Forum worked with Dr. Martin Wanielista, Director of the Stormwater Academy at the University of Central Florida, the Gulf Coast Alliance, Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection and Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve to put together a workshop on October 28 on Coastal-friendly Park Development. The county will use pervious paving, rain gardens and bioretention areas at Keaton Beach Coastal Park. The Forum helped the County staff to secure a \$30,000 grant from the Fish and Wildlife Service Coastal Program for the wetlands restoration and enhancement work.

Grant Opportunities

Requests for Gulf of Mexico Regional Pre-Proposals

Broad Area Funding Opportunity
Gulf of Mexico Region
Funding for 2012 and 2013

NOAA, the Gulf of Mexico Sea Grant programs, and EPA Gulf of Mexico Program are pleased to announce a request for pre-proposals for 2012-2013 funding. Funding sources include: Ocean Research Priorities Plan, NOAA Coastal Storms Program, NOAA Coastal Services Center, Florida Sea Grant, Louisiana Sea Grant, Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, Texas Sea Grant and the EPA Gulf of Mexico Program. Other funding sources may be added prior to final selection of proposals.

The deadline for pre-proposals is 4 p.m. Central on Friday, Feb. 25, 2011. [Full Announcement](#)

The purpose of this notice is to advise the public of multiple funding opportunities for pre-proposals as the first step in the review process to identify one- or two-year projects to address priority coastal issues in the Gulf of Mexico region.

Funding Initiative and Eligibility

Coastal Storms Program: Local governments, non-profits, homeowner associations, business organizations, and community/university partnerships are eligible. Principal investigator(s) must work in and focus on the coastal counties within the Gulf of Mexico region.

Ecosystem Services Valuation: University-based programs throughout the United States. Pre-proposals submitted require investigators from at least two Gulf of Mexico states.

Sea-Level-Rise Data, Products and Tools: University-based programs within the Gulf of Mexico Region.

Contacts

Coastal Storms Program	Tracie Sempier CSP Outreach Coordinator	tracie.sempier@usm.edu 228-818-8829
Sea-Level Rise	Karl Havens Florida Sea Grant Director	khavens@ufl.edu 352-392-5870
Ecosystem Services Valuation	Robert Stickney Texas Sea Grant Director	stickney@neo.tamu.edu

979-845-3902

Submission Questions	Loretta Leist Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium Research Coordinator	loretta.leist@usm.edu 228-818-8835
Fiscal Questions	Devaney Cheramie Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium Fiscal Officer	devaney.cheramie@usm.edu 228-818-8839

Full proposal guidance will be available for all investigators upon notification of pre-proposal results. For more information on these funding opportunities, go to <http://masgc.org/regionalresearch>.

State Sea Grant Funding Opportunities

Funding for 2012 and 2013

There are also four RFPs that are released by the individual state Sea Grant programs. They include:

[Florida Sea Grant state research RFP](#)

[Louisiana Sea Grant state research RFP](#)

[Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant state research RFP](#)

[Texas Sea Grant state research RFP](#)

CELCP Competitive Funding Opportunity for FY 2012

NOAA is requesting for proposals for funding in fiscal year (FY) 2012. The FY 2012 Federal Funding Opportunity notice is provided below, along with recommended application templates and supplementary information on project eligibility requirements, and NERR targeted watersheds. Proposals must be received by Grants.gov no later than 6:00 p.m. EDT on April 15, 2011. Note that proposals may be submitted in electronic format only – CELCP is no longer accepting paper applications. Interested parties should also contact the appropriate [state CELCP lead](#) for information on state project solicitation processes.

[Federal Funding Opportunity Notice](#)

[Project and Budget Templates and Project Application Checklist](#)

[Summary “Key” of Eligibility Criteria and Requirements for CELCP and Matching Funds Under the New Program Authorization](#)

[National Estuarine Research Reserve \(NERR\) Targeted Watersheds](#)

FY 2011 Projects

For FY 2011 NOAA developed a [prioritized list](#) of projects that are ready and eligible for funding. This list, developed from a competitive merit review process, guides NOAA’s selection of projects within the funding amounts available through both CELCP and the [Great Lakes Restoration Initiative](#). Funding decisions are not finalized until after FY 2011 Congressional appropriations.

Conferences and Workshops

Nutrient TMDL Workshop

EPA Regions 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8 together with EPA HQ, are sponsoring a TMDL workshop focused on addressing nutrient impairments through the TMDL process.

When: February 15-17, 2011

Where: New Orleans, LA

Who: The workshop is open to all State and Federal TMDL practitioners. However, priority for space will be given to the five regions sponsoring the workshop.

What: The workshop will focus on the current practices being utilized to address nutrient impairments through TMDL development and the 303(d) program.

The final workshop agenda will be developed over the next few months with state participation. Session topics will include:

- How nutrient related impairments are being identified and listed on state 303(d) lists,
- The current practices being used to develop nutrient TMDLs,
- Identification of new or innovative practices for developing nutrient TMDLs,
- Sessions specific to common challenges faced when developing nutrient related TMDLs, and
- Issues surrounding the challenges associated with implementation of nutrient TMDLs.

To be notified of updated information, receive registration information, or submit a topic presentation proposal: Add your name and email address to the workshop email list on the workshop website for periodic updates. http://www.tetrattech-ffx.com/NOLAnutrient_workshop/.

Coastal Community Resilience Index Facilitators Training

The Gulf Sea Grant programs, Gulf of Mexico Alliance Resilience Team, and the EPA Gulf of Mexico Program invite you to attend a training of facilitators for the Coastal Community Resilience Index. The Index is a simple self-assessment tool communities can use to examine their preparedness for storm events. Trained facilitators will lead community leaders through the Index and guide valuable discussions about preparedness and resilience.

When: February 22-23, 2011

Where: Coastal Research and Extension Center, Biloxi, Mississippi

Who: Sea Grant agents, Extension agents, National Estuarine Research Reserve Coastal Training Program Coordinators, National Estuary Program Community Outreach Coordinators, and other organizations who work directly with the local government within their communities.

Why: In addition to providing key resources to the communities you serve, participation in the implementation of the Index may satisfy strategic planning tasks related to community resiliency in your organization

Registration: FREE, meals during workshop time will be provided as well as copies of the Index and training materials. Some travel funds are available for participants in the five Gulf states. Please contact us if you require travel funding to participate.

To register for this workshop, contact Jody Thompson (jody.thompson@auburn.edu) by Friday, February 4, 2010. For more information about the Index, visit www.masgc.org/ri

This workshop is made possible by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Gulf of Mexico Program, Gulf of Mexico Alliance, Gulf Sea Grant programs, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Coastal Storms Program, and Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center.

Many thanks to Louisiana Sea Grant, Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, Texas Sea Grant, Gulf Coast Services Center, National Estuarine Research Reserves Coastal Training Program, University of Florida College of Law, Florida Sea Grant, Louisiana Office of Coastal Protection and Restoration, Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Water Words That Work and Social Skills of Social Media

Host Partner(s): Weeks Bay Reserve
Location:  Weeks Bay Resource Center, Fairhope, AL
Date/Time: 2/17/2011 - 2/18/2011
Max Applicants: 60

"Water Words That Work and Social Skills of Social Media" will be held from 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM on February 17 and 9:00 AM - Noon on February 18 with registration beginning at 8:30 AM each day.

REGISTRATION

Registration is due by February 11, 2011. Workshop organizers reserve the right to cancel the workshop at their discretion. **ABSOLUTELY NO REFUNDS AFTER FEBRUARY 11, 2011.**

Water Words That Work, February 17 (\$35 fee)
Social Skills of Social Media, February 18 (\$30 fee)
Both February 17 and February 18 (\$55 fee)

ABOUT THE EVENT

Learn how to better convey your message. Water Words That Work helps environmental educators and organizations professionalize and modernize their communications. Two training events are offered that can help you succeed with your next project or campaign.

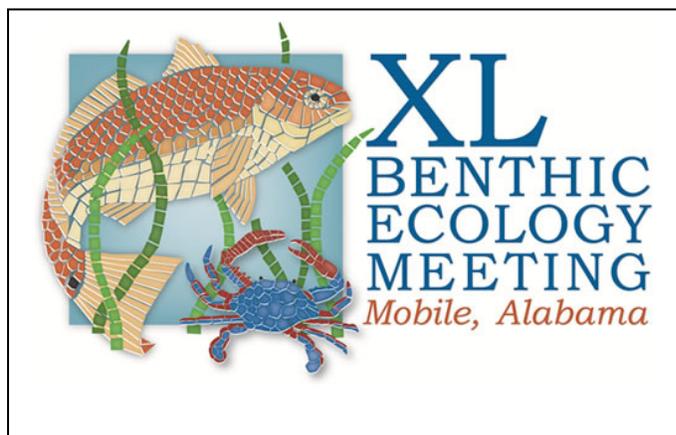
ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

Eric Eckl founded Water Words That Work and has more than 15 years experience planning and carrying out issue advocacy, fundraising, and behavior change campaigns. He is a sought-after speaker for environmental, marketing, and technology conferences. Eric has appeared on CNN, been quoted in the New York Times and sits on the editorial committee for the Center for Watershed Protection. Currently, he serves on the board of directors for the Green Media Toolshed.

QUESTIONS

For additional information about these events, please contact Michael Shelton at (251)928-9792 or Michael.Shelton@dcnr.alabama.gov.

40th Annual Benthic Ecology Meeting



March 16-20, 2011

Renaissance Riverview Plaza and Battle House Hotel

Key dates: Early Registration Deadline, February 1, 2011

Hotel Reservation by February 12, 2011.
Abstract Submission Deadline, January 21, 2011.

The 2nd "Beneath the Waves Film Festival" will be held at the Benthic Ecology Meeting,

For more information please visit www.beneathwavesff.wordpress.com

[Download Flyer](#)

Organizers: Sean Powers, John Valentine and Kenneth Heck Dauphin Island Sea Lab and the University of South Alabama.

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



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