

# An Education, Outreach and Community Involvement Program Assessment for the

# GULF OF MEXICO ALLIANCE

Produced by the  
Florida Department of Environmental Protection's  
Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas.  
Staff members represent the Rookery Bay and Apalachicola  
National Estuarine Research Reserves.



July 28, 2008

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## **I. Introduction**

The purpose of this project was to provide guidance for Florida's environmental education commitment to the Gulf of Mexico Alliance (Alliance) and to produce a useful document for the Alliance network. This report is the result of interviews with coastal and natural resource professionals that work as part of the Alliance and it is intended for internal use within the Alliance. The report provides a brief snapshot of Alliance Priority Issue Teams' activities, and it is not intended to be all-inclusive. Findings have not been prioritized or ranked in any way, and some interpretation of context was necessary for organizational purposes. Statements that apply to several topics appear in multiple sections.

Interview questions focused on identifying education-related issues and ideas and determining the current scope of local community involvement. In addition, the interviews revealed numerous education-related opportunities which could help guide future work plans. This project resulted in a better understanding of the Priority Issue Teams and the Alliance as a whole.

This project was funded by the United States Environmental Protection Agency, Gulf of Mexico Program, under Assistance Agreement Number MX-964795 awarded to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The contents of this report do not necessarily represent the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute an endorsement or recommendation.

This report is one result of a multi-year grant-funded effort to increase public awareness through pilot projects in Florida and to provide Florida with personnel to fully engage in the Alliance.

## **II. Background**

The Alliance partnership was initiated in 2004 with the leadership of the five Gulf State governors. The Alliance consists of the five Gulf States of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas and thirteen federal agencies. Also supporting establishment of the Alliance was the Bush Administration's 2004 U.S. Ocean Action Plan, which highlighted the need for increased integration of resources, knowledge and expertise to support the governors' initiative. In 2005, a series of devastating storms impacted many of the Gulf States and clearly revealed the vulnerability of coastal communities to storm events. Since that time, the Alliance has made strides to significantly increase regional collaboration in order to enhance the environmental and economic health of the Gulf Region.

The Alliance released the *Governors' Action Plan for Healthy and Resilient Coasts* on March 28, 2006. To date, 22 percent, or 16 Action Blueprint Steps, are complete. Seventy percent, or 51 Action Blueprint Steps, are in progress toward completion by spring of 2009.

The Alliance promotes resource sharing and collaboration for a healthy and resilient Gulf of Mexico by also coordinating closely with several Caribbean nations and the Gulf of Mexico States Accord in order to strengthen its relationship with the six Mexican Gulf States.

Alliance Priority Issue Teams were established to address the following six regionally significant issues and to merge local, state and federal efforts:

- Water quality for healthy beaches and shellfish beds(WQ);
- Habitat conservation and restoration (HCRT);
- Environmental education (EE);
- Habitat integration and assessment (EIA);
- Reducing nutrient inputs to coastal ecosystems(NR); and
- Coastal Community Resilience(CR)

In June 2007, staff from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection in the Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas received an Alliance grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program. Applicants were Gary Lytton, Director of the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Naples, Tabitha Whalen Stadler, Coastal Training Coordinator, Rookery Bay, and Seth Blich, Director of the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve in Apalachicola. The purpose of the grant was to support educational objectives of the Alliance by galvanizing local communities and raising public awareness. One element of the project is to support the Priority Issue Teams in meeting their educational objectives. In February 2008, two Florida Gulf Alliance Educators were hired under this grant. To better understand the Priority Issue Teams' educational needs and to clarify their goals and environmental education messages, the Florida Educators and the Grant Manager designed an assessment that resulted in telephone interviews of thirty six Priority Issue Team representatives. Information collected will guide the work of the Florida Alliance Educators and can help guide future efforts of the Alliance's Environmental Education Network.

### **III. Goals and Methodology**

The purpose of this project was to help guide the environmental education component of Florida's commitment to the Alliance and to identify outreach and media activities being carried out by Alliance representatives. Interview questions focused on identifying education-related issues and ideas, current levels of local community involvement, and potential opportunities for future work. In addition to these outcomes, interviews also resulted in a better understanding of the Priority Issue Teams and therefore a better understanding of the Alliance as a whole.

#### *Goals:*

- Identify ideas, issues and messages from the Priority Issue Teams that could be used to raise public awareness
- Increase understanding of past and upcoming educational workshops and events
- Identify education and outreach activities that could be supported by the Environmental Education Network, especially in Florida
- Assess levels of local community involvement in Priority Issue Team initiatives
- Identify media outreach successes and strategies for replication

#### *Methodology:*

Florida Gulf Alliance Educators, Bridget Washburn and Robyn Schoessel, emailed Alliance Priority Issue Team members to explain the assessment process and request a phone appointment. If no response was received, a follow-up phone call was made to request an interview. No more than two follow up phone calls were attempted. A total of thirty six telephone interviews were conducted by Ms. Washburn which included state and federal

representatives. Interviews varied in length from thirty to ninety minutes, with a forty five minute average. The following table more clearly illustrates the diversity of those interviewed.

*State and Federal Participation*

	TX	LA	FL	MS	AL	Federal	Total
Priority Issue Team Representatives Contacted	7	9	9	8	6	15	55
Number of Interviewees	4	8	8	3	1	12	36

*Priority Issue Team Participation*

PIT	WQ	HCRT	EE	EIA	NR	CR
Number of Interviewees	8	4	6	6	7	5

Because the limiting factor for conducting interviews was time, the number of people interviewed from each state or Priority Issue Team varied. Circumstances in which individuals were unavailable or unable to participate accounted for variability in participation among states.

While interview questions were carefully identified and reviewed by the grant manager and others, a casual interview style led to several discussions that strayed from the original set of questions and purpose. Ms. Washburn took notes during the telephone interviews and spent an average of 45 minutes after each interview organizing and refining these notes. This raw data was used to create this document, although names and affiliations are removed to protect the private opinions of individuals.

**IV. Interview Questions by Category:**

*Outreach and Messaging*

- If you could generate public (government officials, NGO's, universities, etc) awareness and response to one of your issues, what would it be? What behavior change or increase in knowledge would you like to see related to your Priority Issue Team?
- Are you satisfied with the public awareness/education/outreach component of your activities? What do you like or dislike about your current efforts?
- What level of interaction do you have with the media? How has the media assisted with or otherwise affected your team's outreach and messaging?

### Educational Activities

- What programs have you hosted? What educational projects are you currently involved with?
- Who are your audiences/participants? Is local participation encouraged?
- Are you getting help with your educational programs now? Can we (or the EEN) assist with your education initiatives (evaluation, facilitation, etc.)?
- What are the outputs?

### Local Community Involvement

- Are you interested in involving local communities (government, non-profit, academic, business)? Is it the right time to involve local community members?
- Please describe the local level involvement with your Priority Issue Team.
- Would you change anything to encourage more local participation? Could we (or who could?) be a resource to help increase local involvement, and if so, how?
- Please identify key partnerships that have been developed.

### Miscellaneous

- What is the biggest challenge in your work with the Alliance?
- Please describe any press related or educational material that the Priority Issue Team has released or published.

## **V. Outreach and Messaging Results**

The following section provides information about outreach and education efforts, ideas and messages from the Priority Issue Teams. These results could be used to raise public awareness about issues that affect the environmental or economic health of the Gulf of Mexico. They could also be useful in promoting awareness and support for the activities of the Alliance. In some instances, these results focus more on priorities for educational opportunities related to behavior change, rather than awareness. Some statements below came directly from Team members, while others are observations made by the interviewer.

### Water Quality

- Due to the highly technical and conceptual nature of projects currently underway, there was consensus among Priority Issue Team members that the majority of public awareness efforts are forthcoming.
- By working to standardize nutrient and water quality monitoring throughout the Gulf and creating study designs based on a single conceptual model, we will develop a shared

method by which to gather accurate, legally defensible data for establishing coastal nutrient criteria that will guide efforts to protect Gulf waters.

- It is critical for the public to understand the interconnection between water quality and the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico.
- Implementation of water quality standards will require careful communication with numerous stakeholders – it is a tremendous challenge.

### Habitat Conservation and Restoration

- The Habitat Conservation and Restoration Priority Issue Team (HCRT) has an overarching goal of preserving and restoring identified environmentally sensitive lands.
- HCRT often works with state and federal agencies to accomplish this work, and communicating accurate scientific information between project partners is critical.
- Increasing public awareness is a critical element for success. Specifically, the public needs to understand the benefits and values that are provided by healthy ecosystems in order to support and promote the preservation and restoration of important areas.
- The loss or conversion of natural lands to development has a critical impact on natural ecosystems and their capacity to function. The costs of restoring native ecosystems typically far exceed the costs of preserving existing natural areas.
- The Gulf's "in our lifetime" ephemeral coastline is constantly changing and evolving. It provides a terrific buffer against storms, and communities will benefit from becoming familiar with and recognizing the amazing diversity and protection that coastal resources provide.
- We must take a long term view at coastal restoration and consider potential effects of development and re-development before starting new projects. We must look at the past, learn from our mistakes and build a stewardship ethic that will guide a more sustainable future.
- Coastal areas feed economic efforts by providing natural storm protection.
- It is critical that we restore landscapes so they function naturally and evolve with a changing landscape as they have historically.

### Environmental Education

- Environmental Education Network (EEN) members represent a wide array of organizations such as aquaria, National Estuarine Research Reserves, Sea Grant and Coastal Ecosystem Learning Centers. EEN members therefore integrate Gulf of Mexico information into existing programs whenever possible and appropriate.
- Primary EEN projects include the Social Marketing Campaign, specifically designed to address reduction of nutrient runoff, and the development of a website.
- The EEN relies extensively on public outreach to raise awareness of GOMA issues and continues to increase diversity through outreach by the EEN Underserved and Underrepresented (UUP) working group.
- The EEN serves as a catalyst. By conducting a public awareness campaign, it is our goal to improve public coordination and collaboration of efforts to protect the Gulf.
- The EEN works to keep Alliance messaging fine tuned and focused and to communicate Alliance findings so that they become relevant in the lives of Gulf communities.

- Citizens and industry should be more aware of what they put down indoor drains and what materials get washed into storm-water drains and where that material ends up.
- It is essential to highlight environmental education projects around the Gulf and promote replication of successful programs.
- Commercials, public service announcements, identification of a GOMA spokesperson, public speakers, and websites should all be employed to sustain the public awareness campaign.
- We aim to ensure that the EEN website serves as a direct and updated reference source for teachers and students.

### Ecosystem Integration and Assessment

- Projects of EIA will result in standardized catalogues of data and will promote informed decision making by natural resource managers and other policy makers.
- Proper management of an ecosystem requires the capacity to visualize and relate to it. We aim to provide data at the large scale needed to understand the Gulf as a system and to manage it as a whole.
- The public needs to understand the value of the Alliance and the value of managing the Gulf in its entirety.
- Data on a vast scale is needed to manage such a huge resource.
- Mapping gulf systems is of great value to policymakers - it will support policy decisions by providing supportive data and other critical information.
- By standardizing definitions and formats for data, we aim to provide an accurate and shared system of information about Gulf ecosystems.

### Nutrient Reduction

- NR is currently developing a method to establish legal standards for coastal nutrient criteria and is collaborating with WQ to standardize data collection and monitoring techniques. The public awareness component of NR will be strongly influenced by findings of the EEN's social marketing campaign, which is specifically focused on reducing nutrient runoff.
- It is necessary to have a more systematic approach to assist and identify communities that are conducting infrastructure rebuilding activities that help reduce nutrient runoff.
- Community surveys and reviews will allow us to assess the practicality of these efforts.
- Communication and sharing of resources is critical if we are to attain the overarching goal of reducing nutrient inputs to the Gulf of Mexico.

### Coastal Community Resilience

- This is a newly established Priority Issue Team that has initially focused on the development of a Resiliency Index for coastal communities.
- Public outreach is a high priority, and in Florida alone, two community input workshops recently drew nearly one hundred participants.
- We have an opportunity to promote ecological resilience, as well as the social and cultural resilience that preserve the heritage of a community.

- The Gulf States would greatly benefit from adopting land development codes that preclude development in coastal high hazard zones and creating mandates that require construction of stronger home and building structures.
- Citizens should photograph their historic structures and create restoration plans for those structures to ensure their appropriate restoration after a storm event.
- The Resiliency Index is a preventative tool intended to help local governments assess their capacity to withstand severe events. It identifies strengths and weaknesses that affect resiliency and empowers communities to proactively work to improve their current situations.
- Resiliency incorporates a diverse array of topics – restoration, mapping, engineering and human resources - but the goal is to bring people together to identify problems and to create realistic solutions.
- Why all of this effort? The human dimension. We like the coast, we live here, and we want to continue to do so and to maintain this quality of life.
- Resiliency describes a community's ability to rapidly embrace change and move forward. It is critical that communities are proactive in developing rebuilding plans that promote prompt recovery from storm events.

## **VI. Educational Activities: Outputs, Goals and Future Actions Results**

These results are intended to document Priority Issue Team education and outreach activities and to suggest ways that teams could be supported by the EEN. The Florida Alliance Educators will use these results to determine strategies to support the PIT's work in Florida. The *Priorities* category contains direct statements of interviewees. While many of the *Education Opportunities* were also direct statements, some ideas were discerned by the interviewer as means to address the goals or challenges of the Priority Issue Teams.

### Water Quality

#### *Priorities*

- Host an Annual Water Quality Forum.
- Identify pilot sites for developing future water quality criteria.
- Convey the interconnectedness between water quality and ecological productivity.

#### *Education Opportunities*

- Facilitate forums and workshops.
- Act as a liaison between the Alliance Priority Issue Teams and Resource Managers (Aquatic Preserve and others) to identify pilot site locations with historic documentation of coastal resources on record.
- Continue to facilitate the Annual Monitoring Forum and help identify partners and sites to host similar meetings in the other Gulf States.

## Habitat Conservation and Restoration

### *Priorities*

- Improve communication and interaction between restoration scientists and agencies to increase incorporation of science-based knowledge to projects.
- Promote public education about land-use programs that encourage Best Management Practices for landowners like EQUIP and WHIP, which incentivize reduced use of fertilizer in addition to conservation and restoration of environmentally sensitive land.
- Increase involvement of local government and provide educational opportunities on the sustainable economic benefits resulting from coastal conservation and restoration.
- Communicate the importance of appropriate sediment management.
- Illustrate the interconnectedness between habitats in public forums (environmental impacts to uplands eventually affect downstream water quality).

### *Education Opportunities*

- Host workshops to standardize definitions and practices. The definition of “coastal wetlands” varies among states, and the term is often limited in scope, leaving many coastal watersheds unprotected.
- Provide educational forums to increase public understanding of the interconnectedness between a loss of natural lands (and their capacity to provide services such as natural water filtration) and water quality. Increase public awareness of cumulative effects of development and man made changes such as dam building, planting of row crops and associated fertilization. Provide information on more sustainable alternatives.
- Host workshops to facilitate an exchange of information between scientists and other agencies working on coastal restoration. Discuss the pros and cons of engineering for the purposes of controlling water flow versus restoring natural ecosystem functions and values and create holistic solutions.
- Host a Science and the Media Conference to improve an exchange of information between professionals. Replicate the workshop where it will be beneficial.
- Host workshops to promote the Regional Sediment Management Master Plan. There is a need to use dredged material to re-create coastal marsh ecosystems, but the operating agency generally directs it to other locations. This has occurred for 20 years, and improved communication will be necessary to change this practice.

## Environmental Education

### *Priorities*

- Reduce fertilizer use by coastal communities and promote other practices that result in decreased nutrient runoff.
- Make citizens and industry more aware of what they put down inside drains and what materials get washed into storm-water drains (no more bleach should be put down drains), etc. We must use pressure to induce behavior change in local polluters.
- Reduce or eliminate use and consumption of products containing plastic.

- Increase travel options and reduce miles travelled using fossil fuels. Promote development of bike and pedestrian friendly communities and increase shared transport.
- Increase messaging that highlights environmental education projects around the Gulf.
- Promote replication of successful environmental education programs.
- Sustain the public awareness campaign with commercials, Public Service Announcements, an Alliance spokesperson, public speakers, websites, and by ensuring that the EEN site is a direct and updated reference source for teachers and students.
- Increase curriculum development, outreach, and professional development opportunities for teachers, and experiential learning opportunities for students.
- Increase Alliance involvement with the National Estuary Programs like Charlotte Harbor.

### *Education Opportunities*

- Increase interaction with formal educators with presentations, hold show and tell workshops to encourage replication of successful programs.
- Meet with the Florida Department of Education and other state education entities to communicate the work of the Alliance.
- Focus on press releases, work with resource managers to identify newsworthy events.
- Increase diversity of participation through outreach to counties, municipalities, officials, planners and commissioners.
- Host public issues and conflict management workshops and introduction to smart growth workshops for planners and commissioners to provide models, sample ordinances and examples to guide future planning efforts.
- Pursue the idea of Alliance “model communities”.
- Document successful media strategies and make this information available to resource managers, scientists and researchers.
- Support the EEN University of South Florida Social Marketing Campaign.

### *Ecosystem Integration and Assessment*

#### *Priorities*

- Host workshops to pilot the Priority Habitat Information System (PHINS) Database in order to assess quality and utility of site and address whether the existing program meets users’ needs.
- Promote data standardization and collection of metadata by identifying venues in each Alliance state for the Geospatial Analysis of Marine Ecosystems (GAME) program to be presented and discussed. Connect GAME with Apalachicola and Crystal River Aquatic Preserves.
- Work to develop key messaging for use in public service announcements.
- Work with the Restoration Priority Issue Team to identify and prioritize GOMA restoration sites.
- Strengthen partnerships with the oil and gas industry to promote sharing of data.
- Increase diversity by involving coastal planners, NGO’s and local officials.
- Assist other Priority Issue Teams with the provision of Gulf data.

### *Education Opportunities*

- Coordinate the Gulf GAME workshops in the Gulf States.
- Coordinate PHINS input sessions as needed.
- Ensure that workshop invitations are extended to diverse audiences.
- Support meetings between Habitat ID and other Priority Issue Teams.

### *Nutrient Reduction*

#### *Priorities*

- Identify a more systematic approach to identify and assist communities participating in nutrient reduction technical projects and create surveys and review assessments for community members.
- Work with and assess communities participating in nutrient reduction techniques to identify tools that would support infrastructure re-development efforts.
- Promote the Wastewater to Wetlands program in Gulf States.

### *Education Opportunities*

- Coordinate workshops.
- Assist with community outreach and assessment materials.

### *Coastal Community Resilience*

#### *Priorities*

- Work with public officials to discourage development in coastal high hazard areas. This would require amendments to most current land use policies.
- Develop an educated and well informed city and county staff by sharing professional and updated information on resilience-related issues.
- Use a wide variety of techniques to preserve coastal lands including outright acquisition and transfer of development rights programs.
- Increase economic resilience. Oil, fertilizer, tourism and marine transportation industry representatives should become active participants in the Resiliency Priority Issue Team.
- Conduct regular, open discussions within each Team that are based on a general outline. This would allow members to discuss what they envision accomplishing, to openly discuss current progress, and to re-confirm that programs and projects being pursued are hard hitting and efficient.
- Promote policy changes such as ordinances and other binding requirements that address Alliance Resiliency issues.

### *Education Opportunities*

- Host technical “show and tell” workshops to highlight successful resilience techniques or programs.
- Encourage partnership with Department of Health.
- Provide resiliency related policy information (historic preservation planning, post-hurricane recovery plans, etc) to local governments as part of a model GOMA

communities program. Include information on Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) programs and other resiliency related concepts.

- Compile sample recovery plans and encourage communities to discuss the aftermath of a devastating storm, such as requirements for new building elevations, storm-water, permitting and utilities such as power lines. (For example, in some states, when rebuilding power lines after a storm, companies put them above ground again, even though below ground lines are significantly more resilient.
- Organize an ongoing series of workshops for communities/counties to address resilience in terms of economy, zoning, growth, sea level rise and building codes.
- Provide officials with information to adopt ordinances or other policies that mandate implementation of resilience related actions.

## **VII. Community Involvement: Public Awareness and Local Participation Results**

The results in this section include an assessment of the level of local community involvement in Priority Issue Team initiatives. Community involvement is an important element of this grant, so an assessment of where and how people are already involved was important to help choose appropriate strategies for the Florida Alliance Educators. The Priority Issue Teams are at various stages of project implementation. Some have begun working with, or are prepared to involve, the public sector, while others remain in the process of data collection or technical analysis. The educational and outreach needs of each Priority Issue Team therefore vary. However, the need to increase public and local government awareness of Gulf issues and the Alliance was consistently cited by Priority Issue Team representatives interviewed.

### Water Quality

- WQ info is still too conceptual to be released to the general public. Not ready to make “this leads to that” statements to the public.
- Coastal Bend Bay Foundation hosts monthly forums at Texas A&M Corpus Christi Campus to discuss bay issues including development, beach erosion and bacterial contamination.
- Nonpoint source programs have labeled sewers to show where pollutants will eventually end up...See the “Rubber Ducky” campaign.
- Identify pilot sites for developing future water quality criteria.
- Collaborations between WQ and the academic sector, including researchers and scientists, have promoted community input and participation in GOMA events.

### Habitat Conservation and Restoration

- Coastal Planning and Restoration Act supports community restoration and gives the media an opportunity to cover community restoration projects.
- Identify and highlight “Coastal Characters” that are involved with local issues to speak at events.
- The “BioBlitz” program, 24 hours of biological surveys, guided walks, etc. drew enthusiastic community participation at Crystal River Aquatic Preserve in Florida.

### Environmental Education

- Develop an “Alliance Model Community” concept to introduce policies and practices to local governments.
- Conduct a Social Marketing Study to learn new approaches to increase community level interest in Alliance issues.
- Begin developing public outreach strategies and diversify stakeholder participation in Alliance events with key stakeholders such as the tourism industry.

### Ecosystem Integration and Assessment

- Attend local tradeshows or conferences to present Alliance issues.
- EIA projects will result in standardized catalogues of data and will promote informed decision making by natural resource managers and other policy makers.

### Nutrient Reduction

- Develop a more systematic approach to assist and identify communities that are conducting infrastructure rebuilding activities that will help to reduce nutrient runoff is necessary.
- Work with and assess communities participating in nutrient reduction techniques to identify tools that would support infrastructure re-development efforts.

### Coastal Community Resilience

- Work with communities to pilot test the Resiliency Index. This index, or metric, will serve as a tool for communities seeking to assess their capacity to withstand and respond to unplanned events by identifying strengths and weaknesses in categories including socio-economic, ecological, response, and built environments.
- Public outreach is a high priority for this team, and in Florida alone, two community input workshops recently drew nearly one hundred participants.

## **VIII. Media and Press Successes and Strategies Results**

The results in this section will be used to help identify media outreach successes and strategies for replication. During interviews, participants shared knowledge gained through many combined years of experience. This section captures thoughts and ideas as stated by interviewees, and it provides examples of successful “model” programs or media outreach strategies.

### Water Quality

- An example public website showcases the University of Southern Mississippi’s Bacterial Contamination Beach Monitoring Program.

- Produce information such as the “Hill Brief” to inform Congress and the legislature about Alliance events and successes.
- Use [www.supportthegulf.org](http://www.supportthegulf.org) as a “one stop media shop” and link to the Alliance Working Website.
- Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation has worked fairly extensively with the media to produce local television ads, press releases and a website.
- An extensive media campaign for the Red Fish Bay State Scientific Area documents efforts to reduce prop scarring with radio, magazine and internet outreach.
- A useful website could be interactive. Scientific information and viewpoints could be posted on a topic and provide the public with an opportunity to respond – how do they view the topic and what concerns them the most about it.
- There is a great need for workshops addressing science translation. Contrasting schools of thought make communication with the media difficult. One view is that scientists who advocate for a cause are “biased” and therefore cannot be trusted, and the other is that scientists should communicate what they are learning, even if it is controversial.
- The Department of Health maintains the “Healthy Beaches” website and public beach signage.

#### Habitat Conservation and Restoration

- Read *Rising Tide* by John Barry.
- Talk with Mark Grunwald, author of *The Swamp* about future media coverage.
- Replicate and get press coverage of Living Shorelines workshops.
- Coastal Planning and Restoration Act supports community restoration and gives the media an opportunity to cover local communities’ restoration projects.
- Start with the local press and expand from there. Learn who will print timely and accurate stories and focus on developing those relationships.
- Include contact information in any press release.
- Alert press about interesting events, such as the “BioBlitz” program, which included 24 hours of biological surveys, guided walks, etc. and was well received by the press and community at Crystal River Aquatic Preserve.

#### Environmental Education

- “It Takes Two” Jacksonville water campaign.
- “The first 72 are on you!” AL Hurricane Preparedness.
- NOAA and Earth Gauge messages will be used in the Smithsonian’s Ocean Hall scheduled to open November 2008.
- GOMA should pursue television coverage. Earth Gauge has identified 2 stations in FL that will air their messaging at prime time (6 am/pm and 10 pm).

### Ecosystem Integration and Assessment

- “Seagrass Status and Trends Report” received widespread media coverage.
- Speak at Saturday markets or fishing tournaments (successful in Tampa).
- Relate health of the Gulf to economics, human health, water supply and quality, saving time, money and the social norm.
- “Scuba-naughts” program received a grant to expand nationwide.

### Nutrient Reduction

- “No Wetland, No Seafood”: Sea Grant beverage holders.

### Coastal Community Resilience

- Pilot tests on the Resilience Index may be an opportunity for press coverage.
- Create a blog or chat room with the Coastal Resource Center.

## **IX. Insights About the Gulf of Mexico Alliance**

This portion of the report contains direct comments of interviewees that provide interesting insights into the Alliance as a whole. It contains comments that are inspirational as well as precautionary. Few others documents contain such specific reflections about the Alliance, which is a first-ever effort to provide ecosystem-wide management to the Gulf of Mexico. Perhaps these types of statements can guide Alliance work by serving as mission and vision statements.

- The Alliance is a united effort to sustain the ecological integrity of the Gulf, which will also ultimately promote economic security.
- The Alliance must function as a selfless entity, independent of influence. It should not be used as a tool to promote any one ideology.
- The Alliance should avoid becoming too broad in its coverage of topics.
- It is critical that Alliance members support efforts that will not necessarily benefit their state. Efforts to restore critical areas in any of the Gulf States will strengthen the Alliance as a whole (using the LA subsidence issue as an example).
- We should steer away from divisive topics. These are politically charged issues.
- Several state leads participate in both the WQ and the NR Priority Issue Teams, and the teams share resources when possible. They work closely in the spirit of collaboration.
- EIA works closely with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to accomplish their key goal of mapping and characterizing Gulf Ecosystems.
- EIA supports the HCRT by providing information necessary to identify and prioritize critical sites for ecological restoration.
- The Alliance offers a huge opportunity to share resources and knowledge among states and agencies.
- Science based information is tightly controlled – but it is critical that the Alliance relies upon scientific findings.

- It is critical that the Alliance remains a flexible entity by which to increase collaboration between states and scientists.

## **X. Conclusions**

This project provided a snapshot of Priority Issue Team activities. It helped to increase our understanding of key tasks and objectives of the Priority Issue Teams and to identify successful educational activities and media strategies.

Outreach efforts vary among the Priority Issue Teams, but all have made progress in defining key messages. While all of the Priority Issue Teams have held input sessions at meetings and other public venues, the majority of individuals interviewed voiced the importance of increasing future outreach activities. Many cited a need to involve local government officials, NGO's and the private sector and to promote public awareness of the Alliance as a resource for scientists, educators and policymakers.

Findings in this document will help to guide future education and outreach activities by the Florida EEN and have assisted with efforts to support the Alliance Priority Issue Teams.

## **XI. Acknowledgements**

Sincere gratitude goes to the individuals who shared their experience, knowledge, and ideas and also to those who helped to create the assessment and review this document. It was a privilege to discuss critical issues affecting the Gulf Region with each of you. The perspectives and insights shared during the interviews were invaluable. Despite the numerous challenges cited during these calls, the overwhelming attitude was one of optimism. Many voiced confidence in the Alliance's capacity to effectively and efficiently respond to future challenges. Thank you for contributing to this snapshot view of the Alliance – a summary of unified efforts aimed at promoting a sustainable, resilient and healthy Gulf Region for future generations.

Specific thanks go to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program and their wonderful support staff. Sharon Hayes and LaKeshia Robertson have been particularly helpful.

Thanks again to the following for your contribution to this project: Brent Ache, Becky Allee, Diane Altsman, Len Bahr, Kris Benson, Seth Blich, John Bowie, Lael Butler, Christina Carollo, Alice Dossett, Greg DuCote, Rod Emmer, Sharon Hayes, Alison Hammer, Gary Lytton, Jeff Marx, Larry McKinney, Cherie O'Brien, David Palandro, Kris Pintado, Heidi Recksiek, Dave Reed, Randy Runnels, Laurie Rounds, Dugan Sabins, Robyn Schoessel, Lynn Sisk, James Simons, Tabitha Stadler, Sidne Tiemann, Sharon Walker, Ann Weaver, Dave Whittall, Danny Wiegand, Steve Wolfe and Lee Yokel.

This document may be found online at <http://www2.nos.noaa.gov/gomex/welcome.html>. For more information about this assessment, email Bridget Washburn at [bridget.washburn@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:bridget.washburn@dep.state.fl.us) or phone 239-293-0394. For more information about this grant and its contributors, contact Tabitha Whalen Stadler at [tabitha.stadler@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:tabitha.stadler@dep.state.fl.us) or phone 239-417-5310 ext. 209.