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## **NOAA Gulf of Mexico News**

### ***NOAA Web Portal Makes the Search for Past Weather Data User-friendly***

Finding climate information, such as past weather conditions and temperature and precipitation averages and extremes, can be easily achieved through NOWData (NOAA Online Weather Data)—a tab click away on the newly-standardized climate pages of the 122 local NOAA National Weather Service forecast offices. By visiting the NOAA National Weather Service's national climate Web portal, users can click a desired location on a national map and be taken directly to the local climate page of the appropriate NOAA National Weather Service forecast office. Then, by clicking on the NOWData tab, users can access a wide range of climate products for nearly 3,900 locations. Read the [Full Story](#).

### ***Floods Cost Lives and Billions of Dollars in Property Damage Each Year Around the United States***

*2005 Hurricanes Particularly Devastating to Life and Property*

NOAA Reminds Everyone about Flood Safety Awareness — Across the United States each year many lives are taken or put at risk by flooding. In every state or territory floods destroy property costing billions of dollars annually. NOAA National Weather Service storm data show that on average floods kill more people every year than lightning, tornadoes and hurricanes. Read the [Full Story](#).

### ***Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee Meeting Announced***

The Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Federal Advisory Committee will hold their next meeting from April 24-26, 2006, in Corpus Christi, Texas. The three-day meeting will focus on electing a new chair and vice-chair, discussing the new charge to the committee, and forming new subcommittees. A series of panel sessions are planned, with topics including MPA management in the Gulf of Mexico, cultural resource management, and ecosystem approaches to management. Two public comment periods are also scheduled. The committee submitted their first set of recommendations about creating a national system of MPAs to the Departments of Commerce and the Interior in June 2005. For more information, visit [http://mpa.gov/fac/fac\\_meetings.html](http://mpa.gov/fac/fac_meetings.html) or contact [Lauren.Wenzel](#).

### ***Interagency Environmental Assessment of Hurricane Katrina***

*Preliminary Results from the NOAA National Status and Trends (NS&T) Mussel Watch Survey: Post-storm Assessment and 20 Year Retrospective Analysis*

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), US Geological Survey (USGS), US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and coastal States of northern Gulf of Mexico are engaged in a [comprehensive interagency effort](#) to assess human-health and environmental impacts of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in affected coastal waters. This combined effort has been designed to characterize the magnitude and extent of coastal contamination and associated

human-health and ecological effects resulting from this unprecedented storm. The [March 2006 Post Storm Assessment and 20 Year Retrospective Analysis](#) provides a summary of preliminary results from samples collected as part of NOAA's National Status and Trends (NS&T) Mussel Watch field surveys conducted as a part of this coordinated effort.

The NS&T Mussel Watch Project has a 20-year time series for over 100 contaminants in mussels from 300 sites Nationwide. Twenty of these sites in the northern Gulf of Mexico were sampled by NOAA staff and partners between September 29 and October 10 as part of the integrated Katrina survey. The extensive Mussel Watch time series provides a critical long-term baseline for contaminant levels in the affected region, including sites sampled for this assessment. Coupled with the nationwide coverage of the NS&T monitoring program, this report provides quantitative information required to assess whether contaminant signatures resulting from the passage of Katrina are significantly different from historic levels, and from neighboring regions.

A more complete analysis of all NS&T analytes quantified will follow this preliminary report. In addition, a companion report describing results of the joint NOAA/EPA/USGS surveys in Lake Pontchartrain and in the open waters of Mississippi Sound will be forthcoming.

## **Gulf of Mexico Alliance**

### ***State, Federal Leaders Release Plan to Strengthen Protection for the Gulf of Mexico within Three Years***

*Governors' Action Plan Outlines Projects for a Healthy and Resilient Coast*

March 28, 2006 — Top environmental officials from the 13 federal agencies and five Gulf Coast states today unveiled a plan to strengthen environmental protection for the Gulf of Mexico and further the ongoing recovery and rebuilding effort after the devastating effects of the 2005 hurricane season. The Governors' Action Plan for Healthy and Resilient Coasts is a framework and guide for meaningful and sustained progress in the shared stewardship of the Gulf of Mexico by the American Gulf States.

The three-day State of the Gulf of Mexico Summit is hosted by the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi's Harte Research Institute. Senior federal officials from several cabinet agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency and NOAA, are joined by Texas Governor Rick Perry, governors from Mexico and agency leaders from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to discuss issues toward creating and maintaining a sustainable economy and environment.

The state-federal alliance outlined 11 actions to improve and protect water quality, restore coastal wetlands and estuarine ecosystems, reduce pollution and nutrient loading, identify Gulf habitats to support coastal management and expand environmental education. They include:

- Improving detection and forecasting of harmful algal blooms.
- Improving government efficiency in water quality monitoring.
- Increasing the safety of Gulf communities by better understanding the risks of localized sea level rise, storm surge and subsidence.
- Creating and providing access to interactive habitat maps for priority Gulf of Mexico habitats.

- Implementing nutrient reduction activities during Gulf recovery and rebuilding to restore key coastal watersheds impaired by excessive nutrient inputs.
- Galvanizing local communities to protect the Gulf of Mexico through targeted education.

The Governor's Action Plan is the result of 12 months of collaboration between the Gulf States, the Federal Workgroup, interested citizens and numerous other partners. The initiative includes projects designed to produce results in 36 months. The Gulf of Mexico Alliance is part of a coordinated response to the Ocean Action Plan, which called for the development of regional goals and priorities for safeguarding the nation's oceans through better coordination of federal, state and local management, planning and scientific resources.

NOAA and EPA led the workgroup of 13 federal agencies who together bring diverse expertise and established experience to support the Gulf of Mexico Alliance. The federal workgroup will coordinate and integrate the federal collaboration based on the coastal and ocean issue priorities of the Alliance.

"Our partnership with the [Gulf of Mexico Alliance](#) allows us to explore better mechanisms for applying a regional ecosystem approach to management and for using integrated coastal and ocean observations for management purposes," said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., Ph.D., undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "NOAA has committed experts and resources to help the Alliance in four ways. We will expand our real-time harmful algal bloom forecasts to Texas and Mexico, hold Gulf-wide habitat restoration workshops, create a Web-based priority habitat information system, and help the states demonstrate the importance of ensuring the environmental and economic resilience of the Gulf.

The three-day summit will continue Wednesday with presentations and discussions on increasing governmental effectiveness, better preparing for future natural emergencies and supporting an improved quality of life throughout the Gulf's coastal communities.

For more information, or to read the [Governors' Action Plan for Healthy and Resilient Coasts](#), visit [www.gulfofmexicoalliance.org](http://www.gulfofmexicoalliance.org).

## **In the Gulf States:**

### ***ADEM Hosts State Emergency Response Commission Meeting***

MONTGOMERY – The Alabama Department of Environmental Management is continuing to look at ways to improve emergency response to environmental incidents. On March 22, ADEM hosted a meeting of the State Emergency Response Commission to discuss how to get more counties involved with response efforts. Many small, rural counties do not have the infrastructure, funding, or staffing to have an emergency response plan developed and maintained. SERC officials discussed the possibility of having groups of counties allied together in regional response efforts that would combine resources to improve training and coordination.

ADEM has trained emergency responders available 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week to take action immediately in incidents involving transportation, industry, or severe storms. The department has field offices in Birmingham, Decatur, Mobile and Montgomery staffed with environmental engineers and scientists who perform more than 370 emergency responses a year and work very closely with state and county emergency management agencies. "It is important that the department be able to exchange ideas

with and lend support to our local, state and federal emergency response partners,” said ADEM Director Trey Glenn. “Working together is the key to improving response to environmental incidents.”

ADEM responders serve as on-scene coordinators for assessment and cleanup of hazardous materials. The department gives technical advice to cities and counties to identify and remediate the containment, treatment, removal and proper disposal of hazardous materials. SERC is comprised of representatives from the Alabama Emergency Management Agency, the state Department of Public Health, the Alabama Department of Transportation and ADEM. The next SERC meeting is scheduled for Oct. 25.

## ***ADEM Update: Seven Months After Katrina***

*Hurricane Katrina – a category-four storm – made landfall Monday, Aug. 29, at approximately 9 a.m. The hurricane’s storm surge and wind gusts of 150 mph caused severe damage to large portions of South Alabama.*

MONTGOMERY – Seven months after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina recovery of Alabama’s Gulf Coast environment, beaches, and infrastructure is progressing, according to Trey Glenn, Director of the Alabama Department of Environmental Management. “After the storm it looked pretty rough,” said Glenn, who toured the area just days after landfall and again a few weeks later with Administrator Stephen L. Johnson of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. “With local emergency responders working closely with EPA, the Coast Guard and ADEM, environment assessments were done quickly and recovery efforts started right away. The cooperative effort – from an environmental standpoint – worked pretty well.”

Hazardous materials assessment and recovery operations, drinking water and wastewater treatment systems evaluations and water quality monitoring began immediately after the storm passed. ADEM responders spent approximately 3,500 work hours and logged more than 30,000 miles over a 10-week period following the storm to assure that services were restored.

As the 2006 beach tourism season approaches, a sense of normalcy has returned to Alabama’s two largest coastal destinations; Gulf Shores and Orange Beach. ADEM’s work with other state, local and federal emergency responders on environmental response following the hurricane contributed to the recovery. “All water and wastewater treatment systems are operating normally and beach dunes are recovering,” said Glenn. “Most local restaurants, hotels, retail businesses and industries have returned to regular operations.”

## ***Florida Environmental Education Team Wins National Award***

--DEP and partners bring environmental film series to students--

PENSACOLA – The West Florida Regional Planning Council/Bay Area Resource Council of Pensacola was recognized last night by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Gulf of Mexico Program for the Environmental Education Coordination Team. A partnership of community members including the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties and other local organizations, the Environmental Education Coordination Team won the first place Gulf Guardian Award for 2005 in the Youth/Education Category for the Resource Rangers Environmental Club.

“By combining hands-on activities with environmental curriculum, students gain a greater understanding of their environment and the importance of protecting our valuable natural resources,” said DEP’s

Northwest District Director Dick Fancher. “We applaud the Environmental Education Coordination Team for their work to make environmental stewards of our students.”

In 2001, DEP worked with local environmental professionals and volunteers to develop an environmental awareness campaign providing programs and extracurricular activities for students in Northwest Florida. This curriculum-based program for elementary and middle school students addresses several environmental topics with the common thread of improving water quality.

Beginning with an initial program of classroom speakers, the partners developed the Resource Rangers Environmental Club that includes classroom visits, ecological field trips and a series of videos that include corresponding curriculum and hands-on activities. The group was funded initially through DEP’s Coastal Management Program, and has since secured funding through grants and local contributions to continue the program.

The Gulf Guardian Awards are presented by the Gulf of Mexico Program to recognize businesses, community groups, individuals and agencies that are taking positive steps to keep the Gulf healthy, beautiful and productive. Underwritten by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the non-regulatory Gulf program is a consortium of government agencies and industry representatives. Award entries were received from Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. For more information, visit [www.dep.state.fl.us](http://www.dep.state.fl.us).

## ***Students Learn Lessons of Environmental “Pier” Pressure***

--Event highlights the basics of clean boating and water resource protection for students--

MIAMI-DADE – The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), together with the Clean Boating Partnership, participated in Environmental Immersion Day, an annual event hosted by the U.S. Coast Guard. The event provides an opportunity for local high school students to experience the water quality and pollution prevention techniques employed by the statewide Clean Marina Program and the U.S. Coast Guard. “Education is the underlying foundation to understanding and safeguarding water resources,” said DEP Division of Law Enforcement Assistant Director Maury Kolchakian. “This opportunity will lead to educated consumers and environmentally-aware citizens.”

Environmental Immersion Day offers high school students a hands-on introduction to the environmental missions of those working to protect Florida’s marine resources. The event includes lessons on emergency response, water quality protection, pollution investigation, a mini U.S. Coast Guard boot camp and a mock Clean Marina designation review.

“It is important for our youth to experience the cooperation necessary among federal, state and industry partners for effective pollution prevention,” said U.S. Coast Guard Captain James Maes, Sector Miami Commanding Officer. “From a day in the life of a Coast Guard service member to the regulation of marine industry management practices, it takes passionate personnel and an educated community to protect our waters.”

The Clean Boating Partnership, which includes DEP, marina and boatyard owners and operators, Marine Industries Association of Florida, Florida Sea Grant Program, United States Coast Guard (USCG) and Coast Guard Auxiliary, developed the Clean Boater and Clean Marina Programs to help boaters, marinas and boatyards use environmental practices to preserve Florida’s natural resources.

"We are proud of our partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard," said Clean Boating Partnership co-chair Stephen Bogner. "Their outreach efforts on behalf of clean water are outstanding and we are encouraged to see such interest in environmental education in our young residents."

The Clean Marina Program encourages Florida's marinas, boatyards and marine retailers to use eco-friendly practices beyond regulation requirements by adopting best management practices. Marine patrons are encouraged to look for the Clean Marina Flag, which denotes an environmentally-conscious marine facility. For more information about the Clean Boating Partnership or to take the pledge online, visit [www.dep.state.fl.us/law/grants/cmp/default.htm](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/law/grants/cmp/default.htm).

## ***Rookery Bay Unveils New Exhibit at Archaeology Festival***

--Exhibit highlights 3,000 years of human activity at Rookery Bay--

NAPLES – Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) unveiled a new, permanent exhibit at the Environmental Learning Center today in conjunction with the second annual Southwest Florida History and Archaeology Festival. "Rookery Bay is pleased to host this exhibit showcasing how our ancestors connected with the local area," said Rookery Bay Reserve Director Gary Lytton. "Native Americans and pioneers played an important role in preserving this coastal treasure, setting the example for future generations."

Located on the second floor of the Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center, the exhibit was designed by New York firm C&G Partners and constructed by Jan Spoerri & Co., also of New York. The exhibit was funded by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The exhibit explores human interaction with the Rookery Bay Estuary over the past 3,000 years through photographs, artifacts, replicas, timelines and videos.

One of only 26 nationally designated Estuarine Research Reserves (NERR), the 110,000-acre Rookery Bay Reserve is located at the northern end of Ten Thousand Islands in Collier County, protecting one of the few remaining, relatively undisturbed mangrove estuaries in the nation. DEP manages Rookery Bay in cooperation with NOAA. For information about Rookery Bay or Florida's estuaries, visit [www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/) For more about the Friends of Rookery Bay, visit [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org).

## ***Apalachicola Research Reserve Hosts Alternative Spring Break***

The Apalachicola NERR and St. Joseph Bay Buffer Preserve hosted University of Georgia students for a week of alternative break this month. The students removed old barbed wire and field fence from preserve lands. The fence poses hazard to both wildlife and staff conducting prescribed burn activities. Students were provided meals. University of Georgia students, very happy with their accomplishment and the preserve environment, plan to return and expand the program with cooperation of the preserve staff. For more information contact [Seth.Blitch@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:Seth.Blitch@dep.state.fl.us).

## ***Apalachicola Research Reserve Partners with TNC to Manage Invasive Species***

The Apalachicola NERR established a partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to map and manage invasive species removal in the Apalachicola River Basin. A temporary staff position has been

established at TNC to assist the project. Products from the partnership will include invasives specific GIS datasets for the basin and Phragmites specific datasets for Apalachicola NERR managed lands. A more comprehensive management plan will also be developed. For more information contact [Seth.Blitch@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:Seth.Blitch@dep.state.fl.us).

## ***LA DNR Hosted Forum on Use of Hurricane-generated Waste for Wetland Restoration***

DNR hosted forum on use of hurricane-generated waste for wetland restoration projects on Thursday, March 30, 2006 in Baton Rouge. Discussion included how the state will use hurricane-generated wood waste debris for wetland restoration for three projects in coastal Louisiana that will be designed to help protect specific outlying marsh areas. For more information, contact Coastal Resources Project Manager Kenneth Bahlinger at 225/342-7362 or DNR Public Information Office at 225/342-8955.

## **Other News**

### ***National Research Council Endorses Administration's Proposal for Universal Saltwater Angler Registration***

The National Research Council, an arm of the National Academy of Sciences, has presented NOAA with preliminary findings of a study to improve the agency's scientific program for recreational marine fisheries. NRC's primary recommendation supports the administration's call for a universal angler registration program as part of a comprehensive data collection system, included in the reauthorization bill for the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act currently under consideration in Congress. NOAA commissioned the NRC study in 2004 to gain unbiased scientific insight into ways the agency can strengthen its recreational fishing data collection program to meet the modern needs of fisheries managers. NRC presented the results yesterday at a meeting in Arlington, Va., to [NOAA Fisheries Service](#) leadership, the directors of the state fisheries management agencies, and recreational fishing industry leaders.

"NRC has provided us with guidance on the way forward with our recreational data collection program." said [Bill Hogarth](#), director of NOAA's Fisheries Service. "The study underpins the Bush Administration's call for a comprehensive angler registration program, and I look forward to working in partnership with Congress, the states, and recreational fishermen to make sure it becomes a reality."

In response to angler concerns about how recreational data is used for fishery management decisions, Hogarth tasked NRC to review current scientific methodologies for data collection, recommend improvements, and identify potential new data collection methods. NRC calls a national registration of all saltwater anglers "the most effective way to achieve a comprehensive, universal sampling frame with national coverage" of recreational fishing data.

Representatives from NRC told NOAA that the current method of capturing recreational data – NOAA's Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistical Survey (MRFSS) – is handicapped by a number of issues, including a small staff, lack of a universal sampling for all saltwater anglers, lack of uniform participation in data collection efforts by all the states, and modest funding to run the data collection program.

The MRFSS program, launched in 1979, has been modified and updated over the years. However, NRC concluded that management goals and fishing practices have evolved over time, which calls for a revised fisheries data collection design and new analysis methods. NRC also called for better communication and outreach to the recreational fishing community about the need for accurate recreational fisheries data and standardization among state surveys, and between state surveys and the central MRFSS program. "We are going to need the cooperation and partnership of all the states to implement the changes recommended yesterday by NRC," Hogarth said. "You have my commitment to improve the system. It's time we all roll up our sleeves and fix the MRFSS program so we can all be confident in the data we use to manage recreational fisheries."

## ***EPA, Corps Move to Improve Wetlands Restoration and Conservation***

WASHINGTON, DC – Swamps, bogs, fens, and marshes – in short, wetlands – are as vital to our environment as coral reefs and rain forests. With that in focus, the U.S Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) are proposing a new rule to ensure more effective wetlands restoration and preservation nationwide. The agencies' rule, being published for public comment, proposes improved science and results-oriented standards to increase the quality and effectiveness of wetlands conservation practices under the Clean Water Act (CWA).

"Today's action will accelerate progress toward the President's commitment to increase the quality and quantity of the Nation's wetlands," said Benjamin H. Grumbles, U.S. EPA Assistant Administrator for Water. "This rule will help us meet the President's ambitious wetlands goals by emphasizing best available science and promoting market-based approaches that focus on achieving results." "We are focusing on a watershed approach for improving wetlands conservation in this proposed rule," John Paul Woodley Jr., Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works), said. "This approach helps us fulfill the promise President Bush has made to protect, improve and create new wetlands and other aquatic resources."

Because wetlands play such a critical role in the environment, a project proposed to be built in wetlands is first subject to review by the Corps and EPA under the CWA. Consistent with the goal of "no net loss of wetlands," this review often requires a developer to restore or create a wetland to replace the one that was impacted by the project. The proposed rule:

- Responds to recommendations of the National Research Council to improve the success of wetland restoration and replacement projects
- Sets clear science-based and results-oriented standards nationwide while allowing for regional variations
- Increases and expands public participation
- Encourages watershed-based decisions
- Affirms the "wetlands mitigation sequence" requiring that proposed projects fully avoid and minimize potential wetland impacts before proceeding to mitigation

The proposed rule combines accountability and flexibility. By focusing on results and accountability, the proposed standards will improve the quality and effectiveness of wetland replacement projects. Most importantly, the proposal establishes a "level playing field" ensuring that all forms of wetlands conservation satisfy the same high environmental standards.

Increased reliance on innovative, market-based approaches is expected to promote the expansion of wetland banking, which is one of the most reliable and environmentally effective methods of wetland

replacement. A wetland bank is a wetland, stream, or other aquatic resource area that has been restored and protected to offset permitted impacts to wetlands or other aquatic resources.

Wetlands provide important environmental functions including protecting and improving water quality and providing habitat to fish and wildlife. Wetlands are also critically important areas for storing floodwaters and can reduce damage from storm surges caused by hurricanes.

For more information regarding compensatory mitigation and how to provide comments on the proposed standards see: <http://www.epa.gov/wetlandsmitigation>. Information about the importance of wetlands is available at: <http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/>. Additional information about the Corps' regulatory program can be found at: <http://www.usace.army.mil/inet/functions/cw/cecwo/reg/>.

## ***Developers Encouraged to Turn to Experts to Restore Wetlands***

March 28, 2006 — By John Heilprin, Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration is encouraging developers who destroy wetlands or streams and are required to replace them to pay other businesses to do the work. The Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency issued proposed regulations Monday that are intended to promote companies that specialize in creating swamps, marshes and streams.

Benjamin Grumbles, the EPA's assistant administrator for water, said he hopes the number of businesses engaged in "mitigation banking" will double. About 300 such businesses now exist. Developers could buy credits from such companies to compensate for the bogs, swamps, marshes and other types of wetlands and streams they fill in. This is the first time the government has issued a rule spelling out what professional standards for wetlands compensation should be required under the Clean Water Act.

George Dunlop, the Army's deputy assistant secretary, said greater use of mitigation banking would make restoration work more predictable and consistent. The Government Accountability Office, Congress' investigative arm, found last year the Army Corps could not ensure that the 40,000 acres of wetlands restoration work required each year since 1983 is actually taking place. With the proposed regulations, the government is turning to private businesses to improve compliance.

"I believe I'm going to love it," said John Ryan, president of Land and Water Resources Inc., in Rosemont, Ill., a company that specializes in such work. "It's great for the environment and for us. Now everybody has to be held to the same high standards that we are."

Julie Sibbing, a wetlands expert with the National Wildlife Federation, said the rule is too eager to adopt mitigation banking as an ideal approach. "It sets it up almost on a pedestal. It says that if you're going to use a mitigation bank, it's almost an automatic OK," she said. "This is a real business-friendly rule, not only for mitigation bankers but also developers."

The lower 48 states in pre-colonial times had an estimated 220 million acres of wetlands and streams, but 115 million acres of them had been destroyed by 1997, according to government estimates. President Bush promised on Earth Day in 2004 to restore or protect as much as 3 million acres of wetlands over the next five years. The administration now claims to have reversed the government's estimated loss of 58,500 acres of wetlands annually. But the National Wildlife Federation says the nation is still losing 130,000 acres of wetlands a year. The group said the administration is including in its count of wetlands "open water systems" such as new lakes, reservoirs and golf and stormwater retention ponds.

## **Corps Updates Progress on the New Orleans-Area Hurricane Protection System**

WASHINGTON (March 30, 2006) – With two months remaining prior to the official start of the 2006 hurricane season, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is well on its way to accomplishing the initial goal of repairing and strengthening those segments of the hurricane protection system that were damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

"The effort to effectively restore the hurricane protection system that was so badly damaged by hurricanes Katrina and Rita last year is one of the largest and most ambitious civil works projects ever undertaken in the United States," said Maj. Gen. Don Riley, USACE director of Civil Works. "The Corps' ability to meet the 1 June goal – which many thought to be impossible – is not only a reflection of the abilities, commitment and dedication of the outstanding men and women of the Corps, but also of the support by our many contractor partners, external review teams, and elected leaders," said Riley.

The restoration of the 169 miles of damaged levees currently stands at:

- Orleans East Bank 27 percent
- Inner-harbor Navigation Channel 64 percent
- New Orleans East 72 percent
- St. Bernard 74 percent
- Plaquemines 74 percent

The effort to inspect the entire the levee and floodwall system has been ongoing since Sept. 2005. The Corps continues to conduct both surface and subsurface inspections of the remaining 181 miles of the New Orleans-area levee system that was not visibly damaged by last year's hurricanes.

Approximately 38 miles of the system are topped by I-walls similar to those that were breached along the three outfall canals during Hurricane Katrina and we are taking several approaches to quickly minimize any possible I-wall deficiencies:

- Thoroughly inspect those that were not damaged
- Replace damaged I-walls with T-walls (2.4miles)
- Isolate the I-walls along the interior drainage canals from any storm surge (8.6 miles)
- Replace I-wall with levee enlargement in Plaquemines Parish (6 miles)

Additionally, we have doubled the standard amount of quality control and quality assurance inspections to ensure the soil and other materials, as well as their placement, meet the highest standards.

All our inspections, particularly along the I-wall portions, are enhanced by the tremendously detailed information and analysis that has been provided to the Corps by the Interagency Performance Evaluation Task Force. The IPET, chartered by Lt. Gen. Carl Strock to take a thorough look at the performance of the hurricane protection system during Hurricane Katrina, is comprised of more than 150 engineers, scientists and other experts from government, academia and industry. The recently released IPET Report 2 detailed the failure mechanisms of the I-wall breach along the 17th Street Canal.

Another recent IPET contribution was to accelerated completion of work already underway to establish reliable vertical reference datum for the region. The vertical reference datum, previously being done by the USACE New Orleans District and the National Geodetic Survey, is critical to the Corps' ability to

accurately benchmark and measure the height of vertical protective structures, like levees, in the New Orleans area.

The newly established vertical reference datum will enable the Corps to accurately restore damaged and other sections of the levees to their authorized design heights, and to track subsidence and compaction in the future. The fabrication and installation of temporary closure gates at the mouths of the three outfall drainage canals continues to progress toward meeting the 1 June goal. These massive structures, once installed, will isolate the outfall canals and their levee walls from potential Lake Pontchartrain storm surge during the upcoming hurricane season. The gates will only be closed when the canals are potentially threatened by Lake Pontchartrain surge.

The first portions of the 17th Street Canal closure gate were placed on barges this week to begin their movement to the installation site. "There is a great deal of work yet to be completed and inspected to meet the 1 June goal," said Riley, "and much more to be done beyond that date to effectively meet long-term hurricane protection goals. "We will continue to work to ensure the citizens of the New Orleans area are kept fully informed of the progress of our work, and to assure them that the Corps is committed to the highest quality of design and construction."

For more information about the protection system call:  
New Orleans District (504) 862-2126 or  
Task Force Guardian (504) 862-2076

## ***FEMA Releases "Getting Ready For Disaster" Preparedness DVD***

WASHINGTON D.C. -- With The Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) facing the upcoming 2006 hurricane season – being touted as just as active as last years'- and watching killer tornados, floods and wildfires from Illinois to California wreak death and destruction, a new citizen preparedness DVD titled, "Getting Ready For Disaster- One Family's Experience" is ready for distribution to help people get ready for those natural and man-made disasters that may impact their families and their communities.

The DVD guides viewers through important steps of disaster preparedness and brings into focus issues such as drafting a family disaster plan, stockpiling food and water; helping children cope with disasters and preparedness for special populations such as the elderly and people with disabilities.

"Being prepared for disasters is everyone's responsibility," said FEMA's Acting Director, R. David Paulison. "We're excited that this professionally-produced and highly informative product is now available as we approach what's expected to be another active hurricane season. And it's not just for hurricane preparedness, but rather follows FEMA's all hazards approach to disaster preparedness. The content is based on the most reliable hazard awareness and emergency education information, such as the latest scientific knowledge and physical research on what happens in disasters.

The DVD's story surrounds a 12 year-old boy, whose school assignment challenges him to learn about disasters and emergencies. He is instructed to develop a disaster plan and a disaster supplies kit for his family with his family's help. As a result of following the easy steps to preparedness, the youngster and his family 1) get prepared together, 2) manage to help others as they get prepared, and 3) decide to volunteer so that they can help even more of their neighbors get prepared.

The DVD's seven segments include: 1) Getting Informed; 2) Making a Plan; 3) Assembling a Disaster Supplies Kit; 4) Food and Water in an Emergency; 5) Helping Children Cope with Disaster; 6) Disability and Special Needs Populations; and 7) Getting Involved - Citizen Corps – and walk the viewer, step by step, through lifesaving procedures for being ahead of the storm and knowing what to do when danger threatens.

The DVD is designated # “FEMA 500” for ordering purposes and is now available at the FEMA Distribution Center by calling 1-800-480-2520. Orders are being limited to one DVD per caller for the time being. In the coming months, the DVD will be translated to Spanish and will be available in both languages on a single DVD.

FEMA officials say the DVD, produced with funds from Homeland Security's United States Fire Administration, is designed to be used with FEMA's 200-page Are You Ready? An In Depth Guide to Citizen Preparedness and accompanying facilitator manual for teaching preparedness principles in small group or classroom settings.

More than 267,000 Are You Ready? guides have been ordered from FEMA in only 18 months, with more than 5,000 facilitator guides in the hands of trainers across the country. Thanks to the guides and the cadre of trainers, citizens are learning how to get informed about local emergency plans, how to identify hazards that affect their area, and how to develop and maintain an emergency communications plan and build their own disaster supplies kit.

Are You Ready? is just one of many resources Homeland Security provides American citizens to help them be prepared against all types of hazards. Homeland Security's Ready campaign seeks to help America be better prepared for even unlikely emergency scenarios. Information on how the public can be ready in case of a national emergency, including a possible terrorism attack involving biological, chemical or radiological weapons, can be found by logging on to [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) or by calling 800-BE-READY for printed information.

## **Grant Opportunities**

### ***New Grants Available for Hurricane-Impacted Communities***

Contact Information: Cynthia Fanning, 214-665-2142, [fanning.cynthia@epa.gov](mailto:fanning.cynthia@epa.gov)

(Dallas, Texas - March 30, 2006) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has a new grant opportunity for communities impacted by Hurricanes Katrina or Rita. Organizations with projects to address local environmental or public health issues stemming from the hurricanes may apply by April 30, 2006.

"We want to support the efforts of willing, knowledgeable and enthusiastic local partners in addressing public health concerns and restoring fragile ecosystems," EPA Regional Administrator Richard E. Greene said. "Working together, we will accelerate the pace of recovery in Louisiana and Texas."

Eligible applicants for this program are limited to local non-profit community-based organizations and local environmental justice networks, local universities or colleges, and local churches located within the states of Louisiana and Texas.

EPA will host conference calls Thursday, April 6 and Wednesday, April 12 at 1:30 p.m. CST. The conference call-in number is 1-866-299-3188. When prompted, callers should enter code 2146652713.

The new grant program is titled, "Environmental Justice Grants in Support of Communities Directly Affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita." Total funding for the project is \$150,000. EPA will make awards for the amounts of \$25,000 or \$50,000 only. For more information, please visit <http://epa.gov/region6/6dra/ejtribal/ej/index.htm>.

## Energy

### ***Mexican Tanker Sinks in the Gulf***

URL: [http://www.rigzone.com/news/article.asp?a\\_id=30760](http://www.rigzone.com/news/article.asp?a_id=30760)

A Mexican tanker carrying 950 tons of heavy fuel oil sank in the Gulf of Mexico, but there was no initial spill, officials said. Mexico's Federal Environmental Protection Bureau, known as Profepa, said in a statement that the Orion, which belongs to Empresa Naval Mexicana, went down Tuesday approximately 190 miles off Puerto Progreso on the Yucatan Peninsula. The ship reported having problems on Sunday. Five members of its crew were rescued, but three others are still missing.

Profepa chief Ignacio Loyola has ordered that measures be taken so that in addition to "the priority task of finding the three missing sailors, a close watch be kept on the area to detect any fuel leak that could harm the environment." "It's almost impossible to get the load out due to the depth at which the ship sank," Profepa said.

Empresa Naval Mexicana said the tanker was hermetically sealed and there was no possibility of a leak due to the cold temperatures at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico, which should solidify the fuel in the vessel's tanks. The company said authorities were investigating the cause of the shipwreck.

### ***Coast Guard and MARAD Publish Final EIS for LNG Terminal***

McMoRan Exploration Co. 3/13/2006 URL: [http://www.rigzone.com/news/article.asp?a\\_id=30213](http://www.rigzone.com/news/article.asp?a_id=30213)

McMoRan Exploration says that the US Coast Guard and the Maritime Administration (MARAD) have published the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the planned Main Pass Energy Hub (MPEH) license application. McMoRan is pursuing development of the MPEH, an offshore facility for receiving and processing liquefied natural gas (LNG) that would be located east of the Mississippi River Delta.

The Coast Guard has scheduled public hearings for the week of March 20, 2006. The governors of the adjacent coastal states (Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama) will have 45 days from the date of the last public hearing to respond to MARAD on the license application, with a record of decision on the application expected by the end of June 2006.

The Final EIS evaluated potential impacts associated with MPEH. According to McMoRan, it concludes that the environmental impacts associated with the construction and operation of MPEH would be expected to result in minor long-term adverse impacts. The EIS assessed the impact to fisheries of using the Open Rack Vaporizer alternative for the project and indicated that this system would have "direct, adverse, minor impacts on biological resources."

The methodology used in the EIS to assess the impact on biological resources did not consider potential benefits from varying the depth of seawater intakes or mitigation strategies that could reduce the potential impacts. Based on additional technical studies not included in the EIS that consider the location of MPEH in 210 feet of water and mitigation measures expected to be included in the project's deepwater port license, McMoRan expects the potential environmental impacts from MPEH, evaluated to be minor in the EIS, can be further reduced.

"The publication of the Final EIS is a significant milestone as we near completion of the permitting process for our proposed major new LNG port," said McMoRan Co-Chairmen James R. Moffett and Richard C. Adkerson. "The MPEH project would provide critical supplies of natural gas to our nation, generate substantial direct economic benefits through job creation, and investment in our Gulf Coast region and be operated in an environmentally responsible manner. We look forward to completing our work with applicable federal and state agencies in a timely fashion."

The MPEH terminal would be capable of regasifying LNG at a rate of 1 billion cubic feet of natural gas (Bcf) per day. The use of existing facilities provides significant cost advantages, and the proposed project benefits from its offshore location near established shipping lanes. Additional investments are being considered to develop significant on-site cavern storage for natural gas in the large salt dome structure at this site and for pipeline connections to enhance gas delivery from Main Pass to a broad range of markets in the US. The proposed design includes 28 Bcf of initial cavern storage availability, and aggregate peak deliverability from the proposed terminal, including deliveries from storage, of up to 2.5 Bcf per day.

## ***GAO Study Predicts Up to \$80B in Lost Royalties***

Greenwire 3/29/2006 URL: [http://www.rigzone.com/news/article.asp?a\\_id=30776](http://www.rigzone.com/news/article.asp?a_id=30776)

Companies that drill in the Gulf of Mexico will cost the federal government at least \$20 billion over the next 25 years, according to the draft of a Government Accountability Office report obtained yesterday. The draft GAO study found that \$80 billion in revenue could be lost over the same period if oil and gas companies win a new lawsuit that seeks a further reduction in their royalty payments. The draft report, delivered in a private briefing late Monday to House and Senate staff members, is the first attempt by a government agency to calculate the soaring costs of a 10-year-old program that was created to encourage deepwater drilling when energy prices were low.

The Kerr-McGee Corp., which produces oil and gas in the Gulf, has filed a federal lawsuit challenging the Interior Department's right to collect royalty payments on certain deepwater leases. The lawsuit attacks Interior's right to suspend a subsidy called "royalty relief" that was offered to producers under the 1995 Deep Water Royalty Relief Act. The act aims at spurring development of high-risk, high-cost deepwater gulf projects at a time when energy prices were much lower.

The company says Interior does not have the right to suspend the "royalty relief" when energy prices reach certain "price thresholds." The lawsuit alleges that Kerr-McGee has leases purchased in the 1990s and 2000 under the act that contain "price thresholds" that cannot be legally imposed under the 1995 law (Greenwire, March 21).

On the larger question of the overall cost of royalty relief, the GAO noted that the Interior Department, which runs the offshore leasing program, had never carried out a "robust" cost-benefit analysis of the original program or of incentives added in the last five years. In what the GAO said was a preliminary analysis, it estimated that the government would lose about \$20 billion as a result of leases already

signed. But that loss would quadruple to \$80 billion if the suit by energy companies succeeds (Edmund L. Andrews, New York Times, March 29).

## **Training and Conferences**

### ***Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf of Mexico – Assessing the State of the Science***

This symposium is designed to assess the current scientific understanding of the processes regulating the development, persistence and areal extent of hypoxic waters in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

The 2001 Action Plan for Reducing, Mitigating and Controlling Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf of Mexico describes a National strategy to reduce the size of the hypoxic zone in the northern Gulf of Mexico and improve water quality in the Mississippi River Basin. The Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force has initiated a Reassessment of the Action Plan for Reducing, Mitigating and Controlling Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf of Mexico based upon the latest scientific information. This reassessment will evaluate the effectiveness of the current strategy and the need for future revisions. This symposium is part of the scientific underpinning for the reassessment. Presentations of prior and ongoing monitoring, modeling and research efforts from academic and government organizations will help formulate a state-of-the-science assessment of hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico.

**Location:** New Orleans, Louisiana

**Dates:** April 25-27, 2006

Contact Information: Dr. Rick Greene U.S. EPA, Office of Research & Development, Gulf Ecology Division Gulf Breeze, FL 32561

Phone: 850-934-2497; E-mail: [Greene.Rick@epa.gov](mailto:Greene.Rick@epa.gov)

Home Page URL: [http://www.tetrattech-ffx.com/hypoxia\\_ngm/](http://www.tetrattech-ffx.com/hypoxia_ngm/)

### ***2006 Florida Governor's Hurricane Conference***

The 2005 Hurricane Season has been extremely active and has created even more unprecedented challenges and destruction. Records have already been set for the months of June, July and August, not only in terms of the number of named storms, but also major hurricanes. The Panhandle was hit by category three Hurricane Dennis in July, and fortunately damage was not as severe as that from Hurricane Ivan in 2004. In August, Southeast Florida was hit by Hurricane Katrina as a category one hurricane that later became a category five in the Gulf of Mexico, one of the strongest on record. Katrina then made landfall on the Gulf Coast as an intense category four, further affecting the Panhandle with tropical storm force winds and high water, while causing massive devastation and loss of life in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

The Program Committee has been directed to develop a program that will again address the training needs of those new to the emergency services community and also present the lessons learned from the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons from a variety of perspectives, to include the experiences of Hurricane Katrina from the Gulf Coast. The presenters will include representatives from first responders to federal

officials, local and national disaster agencies and private business. They will share with you the good, bad and ugly of preparing for, responding to and recovering from a hurricane.

**Location:** Greater Fort Lauderdale / Broward County Convention Center, Florida, USA

**Dates:** May 8-12, 2006

Contact Information: Governor's Hurricane Conference, PO Box 279 Tarpon Springs, FL, 34688-0279

Phone: 727-944-2724 or 800-544-5678; Fax: 727-944-2687

Home Page URL: <http://www.flghc.org/>

### ***Imagine: A Region with Thriving Mixed Use Cities***

As Coastal Alabama grows, we have a chance to move forward with a larger, long-term vision. What might we do to create new dreams for our region? Imagine is about the future, but it's grounded in workable solutions available today. Hear case studies from successful cities like Charleston and transformed towns like Eufaula, Alabama. Preview modeling tools that answer development questions without years of study. Partner with local leaders to position our cities for the future.

**Tuesday, April 18, 2006**

Arthur Outlaw Convention Center 8:30 AM - 4:00 PM

For more information contact: Smart Coast, 251-928-0366, [info@smartcoast.org](mailto:info@smartcoast.org)

[Information Flyer](#)

[Registration Brochure](#)

### ***Nutrient Loading and Removal in the Lower Mississippi River Basin***

This symposium is part of the reassessment of the Action Plan for Reducing, Controlling, and Mitigating Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf of Mexico, being undertaken by the Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force. The symposium will focus on activities and trends in the lower Mississippi River and its major tributaries and watersheds, including both point and non-point sources of nutrient loading, as well as human and natural processes of nutrient removal and uptake.

**Location:** New Orleans

**Dates:** June 1-2, 2006

Contact Information: Doug Daigle [dougdaigle@mrba.org](mailto:dougdaigle@mrba.org)

Home Page URL: [http://www.epa.gov/msbasin/news/SBC\\_callforpapers\\_GMPO31.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/msbasin/news/SBC_callforpapers_GMPO31.pdf)

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