

# Gulf of Mexico News



NOAA Ocean Service, Office of Ocean & Coastal Resource Management

November 17, 2006

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## NOAA Gulf of Mexico News

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### ***Handbook on Mitigating Coastal Hazards Released***

The Association of State Floodplain Managers, with funding and assistance from Coastal Services Center, has completed an on-line handbook, *No Adverse Impact in the Coastal Zone*. The handbook provides a vision, principles and tools that communities can use to help mitigate the effects of coastal hazards. The No Adverse Impact (NAI) principle holds that the actions of a community or property owner should not adversely impact other people or the coastal resource. In 2007, an updated version of the handbook will contain photographs and case studies from around the nation illustrating policies and actions that demonstrate the NAI concept. To view the handbook, visit [www.floods.org/noadverseimpact/cnai\\_handbook\\_10-06.pdf](http://www.floods.org/noadverseimpact/cnai_handbook_10-06.pdf). For more information, contact [Keelin Kuipers](#).

### ***NOAA Builds its Largest Barrier Island Project***

Nov. 9, 2006 — Despite delays caused by [Hurricane Katrina](#), NOAA is on schedule to complete the first phase of an 800-acre barrier island project in Louisiana's Plaquemines Parish. In one of the largest island restoration projects ever done by [NOAA](#), workers are dredging and performing major earth-moving activities on Chaland Island, to create beach and marsh habitat that will help protect Louisiana's coastal communities and infrastructure from the devastating effects of wind, waves and flooding.

Over the years, the shoreline along the project area has eroded severely due to human and natural factors. Also, recent storms breached the shoreline and segmented the 2.6-mile island into three smaller fragments. Left unaddressed, these breaches threaten the integrity of several major natural gas pipelines. "Wetlands and barrier islands are our first defense against storms," said [Bill Hogarth](#), [NOAA Fisheries Service](#) director. "This project will help absorb surging water and wind during storms, protecting our national energy assets and Louisiana's coastal communities."

At the project site, the construction contractor, Weeks Marine, Inc. is operating a 30-inch hydraulic dredge to pump offshore sediment onto the eroding barrier island, increasing its width and height. In addition, contractors are installing sand fencing to create dunes and planting native vegetation for intertidal marsh habitat.

"I'm excited to see this project come to fruition," said Rachel Sweeney, NOAA ecologist and project manager. "Hopefully this will be one of many restoration projects that NOAA and the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources construct over the next few years." During the 20th century, coastal Louisiana has lost more than 1.2 million acres of land, an area more than 25 times larger than Washington, D.C. If left unchecked, scientists estimate that the state will lose an additional 431,000 acres by 2050. This and other restoration projects help reverse land loss trends and provide vital habitat for the Gulf's fisheries.

At \$60 million, this NOAA Fisheries Service-led project is the largest funded Coastal Wetlands Protection, Planning and Restoration Act project to date. By building nearly a third of all completed [CWPPRA projects](#), NOAA takes a lead in implementing broad-scale habitat restoration projects that benefit marine fisheries and protect shorelines in Louisiana. NOAA has constructed 22 CWPPRA

projects, totaling \$150 million in construction costs. These restoration projects have benefited 130,000 acres of coastal wetlands. "Louisiana Department of Natural Resources and NOAA continue to work together to be the leading CWPPRA partners in completing coastal restoration projects that will protect the coast of Louisiana and enhance and increase the habitat of the many fish and aquatic species that flourish in the marsh," said Kenneth Bahlinger, Louisiana Department of Natural Resources Landscape Architect.

The CWPPRA, enacted in 1990 and also known as the Breaux Act, provides approximately \$50 million a year for coastal protection and restoration in Louisiana. The Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force oversees the implementation of CWPPRA in Louisiana. The Task Force is composed of the State of Louisiana and five federal agencies, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, NOAA Fisheries Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This unique partnership has led to the completion of 67 projects throughout Louisiana's coastal zone. The program also has 71 projects either in the engineering and design or construction phases.

#### **Relevant Web Sites**

[NOAA Fisheries Service](#)

[Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection & Restoration Act](#)

[NOAA Hurricane Katrina Portal](#)

#### **Media Contact:**

[Kim Amendola, NOAA Fisheries Service Southeast Region](#), (727) 551-5707, or [Connie Barclay, NOAA Fisheries Service](#), (301) 713-2370

## ***NOAA Announces New Cooperative Institute Serving the Northern Gulf of Mexico***

NOAA, along with a consortium of universities and institutions, today announced the creation of a new cooperative institute. The new Northern Gulf Institute will collaborate with NOAA scientists to study regional issues associated with coastal hazards, climate change, water quality, ecosystem management, coastal wetlands, and pollution.

"This institute begins a new paradigm of long-term collaboration to develop and sustain research, education, and outreach capabilities focusing on the needs in the Northern Gulf of Mexico region," said Vice Admiral [Conrad C. Lautenbacher](#), Jr., U.S. Navy (Ret.), under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "This will benefit the residents of the region and also support NOAA's participation in the President's U.S. Ocean Action Plan, the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, and the Gulf Coastal Ocean Observing System."

"This consortium of universities will work with NOAA to provide expertise in research and to take advantage of the world class scientific capabilities of the Stennis Space Center," said Sen. [Thad Cochran](#) (R-MS). "The Northern Gulf of Mexico has critical ecosystem needs that will be addressed by this Cooperative Institute." The consortium of universities and institutions includes Mississippi State University, the University of Southern Mississippi, Louisiana State University, Florida State University, and Alabama's Dauphin Island Sea Lab. The new institute will conduct research under four themes: climate change and climate variability effects on regional ecosystems; coastal hazards; ecosystem management; and geospatial data integration and visualization in environmental science. Research conducted by the new institute also is expected to support the national Integrated Ocean Observing

System through the Gulf of Mexico Coastal Ocean Observing System. Most scientists associated with the institute will be located at Stennis Space Center, Miss. Other Institute researchers will be located on the campus of the consortium member institutions and NOAA facilities throughout the region.

"The Cooperative Institute will be conducting research that addresses some of the more pressing issues facing our region including coastal ecosystem protection, hurricane forecasting, and management practices to protect water quality," said Dr. David Shaw, MSU professor, director of the university's GeoResources Institute and director of the new Northern Gulf Institute in Mississippi. The Northern Gulf Institute joins 20 other NOAA cooperative institutes across the country. These institutes are NOAA-supported, non-federal organizations that have established an outstanding research program in one or more areas that are relevant to NOAA's mission. The CI collaborates with NOAA scientists on long-term research topics and provides significant coordination of resources among all non-government partners and promotes the involvement of students and postdoctoral scientists in NOAA-funded research.

**On the Web:**

Northern Gulf Institute: <http://www.gri.msstate.edu/ngi>

NOAA Cooperative Institutes: <http://www.nrc.noaa.gov/ci>

## ***NOAA 10-Year Aquaculture Plan Available for Public Comment***

Nov. 14, 2006 — [NOAA](#) released a draft 10-Year plan for the [NOAA Aquaculture Program](#). Through adoption of this plan, NOAA seeks to establish an improved system for regulating and monitoring U.S. marine aquaculture, develop new seafood farming technology, improve public education about aquaculture, and influence development and adoption of global sustainable aquaculture practices and standards. The plan is available for public comment until November 30.

NOAA developed the plan at the request of the Department of Commerce's marine fisheries advisory committee, made up of a diverse cross-section of public representatives. The plan identifies the program's goals and strategies, budget and staffing requirements, and potential outcomes, benefits and challenges through 2017. The public is asked to provide overall comments on the adequacy and appropriateness of the plan as well as offering specific recommendations for improvement.

"A strong marine aquaculture industry will benefit America's coastal communities with new jobs and revenues, and secure the availability of our nation's future seafood supply," said [Bill Hogarth](#), director of [NOAA Fisheries Service](#). "This plan provides a promising roadmap for how we will achieve our ambitious goal of increasing sustainable U.S. production of farmed seafood and meet the stock enhancement needs of the nation's commercial and recreational fisheries over the next 10 years, while providing environmental and other safeguards to protect wild stocks and marine ecosystems."

The United States imports almost 70 percent of its seafood, 40 percent of which is farmed. Hogarth said the United States wants more control over the safety, security and environmental standards under which seafood is raised. The U.S. aquaculture industry, made up primarily of freshwater species such as catfish and tilapia, produces a fraction of global fish production. With a robust and sustainable seafood farming industry, the nation could reduce its \$8 billion seafood trade deficit by relying less on imports and increasing seafood exports. Aquaculture also has the potential to substantially increase employment and business opportunities in U.S. coastal communities.

The Ocean Action Plan called for advancing offshore aquaculture while ensuring they operate in an environmentally sustainable manner. The NOAA Aquaculture Program is focused on supporting farming of all types of marine species, for commercial food production, non-food uses, and hatcheries that will

stock fish farms and enhance wild fish populations. In June 2005, the Department of Commerce forwarded legislation to Congress that would grant the Secretary of Commerce new authority to issue permits for aquaculture in federal waters. As Congress considers passage of the bill, implementation of this plan will ensure that NOAA's Aquaculture Program is well-positioned to take on the additional responsibility.

The draft plan is available [online](#) for the public to review. Comments on the plan are due by November 30, 2006. To comment, send an e-mail to [noaa.aquaculture@noaa.gov](mailto:noaa.aquaculture@noaa.gov); send a fax to (301) 713-9108; or send a letter to: NOAA Aquaculture Program, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13117, Silver Spring, MD 20910. The plan will be finalized and implemented in January 2007.

#### **Relevant Web Sites**

[Draft 10-Year Plan for the NOAA Aquaculture Program](#)

[NOAA Aquaculture Program](#)

[NOAA Fisheries Service](#)

#### **Media Contact:**

[Susan Buchanan](#), [NOAA Fisheries Service](#), (301) 713-2370

(Photos courtesy of Kate Naughten, NOAA Aquaculture Program.)

## ***NOAA Says Invasive Species Prevention and Control Focus Needed on Non-Native Lionfish***

Nov. 6, 2006 — [NOAA](#) researchers reported today that non-native [lionfish](#) populations will continue to grow and cannot be eliminated practically using conventional methods. Lionfish have taken hold along the southeast United States coast, placing divers and fishermen at significant risks from their painful, venomous sting, as well as leaving native fish populations potentially susceptible to new and unstudied hazards from their interactions with this species.

The scientists explained that the cost and effort to dispatch trained divers—the only effective elimination method currently known—would be impractical, partly due to the expansive deepwater reef habitats of the Southeast coast of the United States and Bahamas, an area encompassing more than 62,000 square miles. How lionfish will affect native fish populations has yet to be determined or assessed, including the potential impacts to the commercial fishing industry. However, non-indigenous species can have serious negative economic effects and cause major disruption of native ecosystems.

The information was provided by scientists from the [NOAA National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science](#) to coastal resource managers as part of information on lionfish biology and control measures and also was presented at a meeting of the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council in July 2006.

Lionfish, a native of the Indian and Pacific oceans, are now considered established in the Atlantic Ocean. First discovered off the coast of North Carolina in 2000 by the NOAA National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science, they are believed to have been present off the east coast of Florida since the mid 1990s. Lionfish, popular in the aquarium trade, were likely introduced through releases by amateur aquarists no longer wishing to keep the fish.

NOAA researchers have determined that lionfish reach sexual maturity within two years and spawn multiple times during the spawning season. Each spawn can produce up to 30,000 eggs. Lionfish are

believed to spend the winter from North Carolina to the Bahamas, with juveniles found as far north as Rhode Island during summer months where the potential for successful survival during the winter months is not possible due to cold water temperatures.

Prevention of future [invasive species](#) will require continued outreach efforts to discourage the release of exotic marine species into the wild. Early detection methods through regular monitoring programs can focus on detecting non-native species before they become established and aid in determining best practices for dealing with possible impacts of lionfish on fisheries.

Lionfish impacts to reef fish communities can potentially be reduced by local control in smaller regions. For example, lionfish have not been found in the NOAA [Gray's Reef](#) or [Florida Keys](#) national marine sanctuaries. "We are currently considering early detection and rapid response efforts to keep lionfish out of the sanctuaries," said ecologist James Morris, NOAA National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science. "It is unclear at this time if these attempts will be successful."

Coastal managers are included in a cooperative of federal, state and local agencies and the private sector administered by the Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel of the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force and the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council. The group seeks to prevent the spread of exotic or nonnative species through intentional or inadvertent transport.

#### **Relevant Web Sites**

[NOAA Lionfish Pages](#), [NOAA Invasive Species Program](#),  
[NOAA National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science](#)

#### **Media Contact:**

[Daniel Parry](#), [NOAA Ocean Service](#), (301) 713-3066; Photos courtesy of NOAA ecologist James Morris.

## ***NOAA Awards Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission \$4.7 Million Over Five Years to Study the Role of Nutrients in State Red Tide Events***

Oct. 25, 2006 — [NOAA](#) awarded \$813,998 to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's [Fish and Wildlife Research Institute](#) for the first year of funding of a \$4.7 million, five-year grant to examine the underlying causes of the red tide blooms along Florida's Gulf Coast. The grant, from the Ecology and Oceanography of Harmful Algal Blooms, or [ECO HAB](#), program, managed by the [NOAA Center for Sponsored Coastal Ocean Research](#), will support research, conducted by a multidisciplinary team of scientists led by the institute. The team will seek to better understand the causes of red tide ([K. brevis](#)) along Florida's Gulf Coast, especially how and what types of nutrients fuel the blooms.

"A better understanding of the underlying causes of *K. brevis* blooms is essential for predicting when blooms will occur and evaluating what prevention options may be available to coastal managers," said retired Navy Vice Adm. [Conrad C. Lautenbacher](#), Ph.D., undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "NOAA's partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute will help provide a more thorough understanding than is currently available."

At a [July 2006 NOAA-supported red tide workshop](#) held in Sarasota, Fla., national and international red tide experts agreed that not enough is known about the nutrient sources that support growth of the red tide organism in the Gulf. Public input to this workshop also provided strong support for the need to understand the relationship between nutrients and these blooms. The new research, which will combine

biological, chemical and physical measurements with predictive modeling efforts, seeks to address a critical knowledge gap using both experimental and modeling approaches, as well as retrospective data analysis. Investigators also will seek to identify alternatives for coastal managers.

The red tide organism blooms in Florida almost annually, leading to severe economic and environmental impacts. Annual economic impacts in Florida from the blooms have been estimated to be at least \$15 million to \$25 million. The red tide is currently affecting shore areas from Pinellas to northern Collier County. Last year, an unusually large and persistent bloom occurred, lasting from January 2005 to February 2006. *K. brevis* produces neurotoxins that can kill marine mammals, fish and other marine creatures, cause shellfish to be unfit for human consumption, and sicken humans with chronic respiratory problems such as asthma.

NOAA supports research to understand how, when and why blooms occur through its Ecology and Oceanography of Harmful Algae Blooms program in order to develop better methods of detecting and predicting blooms, and to find ways to reduce or prevent impacts on humans, coastal economies and ecosystems. In fiscal year 2006, the NOAA Center for Sponsored Coastal Ocean Research provided approximately \$10 million in competitive grants to institutions of higher education, state, local and tribal governments, and other non-profit research institutions to advance the understanding of major national coastal management issues, including harmful algal blooms. NOAA-sponsored competitive research programs, such as ECOHAB, demonstrate NOAA's commitment to its historic responsibilities of science and service to the nation for the past 35 years.

#### **Relevant Web Sites**

[NOAA Center for Sponsored Coastal Ocean Research](#)

NOAA Ecology and Oceanography of Harmful Algal Blooms, or [ECOHAB](#)

[NOAA Harmful Algal Bloom Forecasting System for Gulf of Mexico](#)

#### **Media Contact:**

[Ben Sherman](#), [NOAA Ocean Service](#), (301) 713-3066 ext. 178

## ***Researchers Promote Enhanced Beach Water Quality Testing Approach***

Researchers will distribute DVD tutorials on an enhanced approach to beach water quality testing at the Florida Marine Biotechnology Summit in Gainesville, Florida, this week. The approach involves a DNA hybridization assay adapted by researchers at NOAA's National Atlantic Oceanic and Meteorological Laboratories and the University of Miami to detect a variety of microbial contaminants important to coastal water quality. CICEET, the Cooperative Institute for Coastal and Estuarine Environmental Technology and a partnership of NOAA and the University of New Hampshire, has funded the development and transfer of the assay. The assay allows sensitive, species-specific molecular analysis in a convenient, adaptable, and relatively inexpensive format. Water quality managers can adapt this technique to the molecular probes of their choice, or it can be used as an introduction to molecular methods for educational purposes. The assay process and a video tutorial are now available online at [http://ciceet.unh.edu/project\\_extras/microplate\\_assay](http://ciceet.unh.edu/project_extras/microplate_assay). For more information, please contact [Dr. Kelly Goodwin](#) at NOAA's National Atlantic Oceanic and Meteorological Laboratories.

## ***Autonomous Water Quality Sensing Vehicle May Improve Monitoring and Management of Shallow Coastal Water***

An autonomous underwater vehicle (AUV) and water quality sensor, successfully tested by staff National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science last week, may improve shallow water monitoring of estuaries and coastal oceans for managers. Tests in both environments in North Carolina were successful, yielding data on pH, dissolved oxygen, salinity, temperature, depth, turbidity, and fluorescence. The AUV was directed by acoustic signals or navigated autonomously via an internal Global Positioning System and pre-entered way points of latitude and longitude. The sensor package is removable and can be used for vertical profiling or attached to a fixed station. A Small Business Innovations Research Grant was used to create the sensor package and to modify the AUV that was originally designed as a mine detector for the Department of Defense. For more information, contact [Pat Tester](#).

## ***Coastal Services Center Finishes Integrated Ocean Observing System Needs Assessment***

The NOAA Coastal Services Center has completed a needs assessment of the Integrated Ocean Observing System Regional Associations (RAs). The information gleaned from this needs assessment will help RAs emerge as leaders in the national ocean observing community. Assessment findings focus on marine data acquisition and management, public education and outreach capabilities, technological capacities, and interaction with other coastal and ocean management agencies. The report is available on-line [at www.csc.noaa.gov/cms/human\\_dimensions/IOOS\\_RA\\_Needs\\_Assessment.pdf](http://www.csc.noaa.gov/cms/human_dimensions/IOOS_RA_Needs_Assessment.pdf) or, for more information, contact [Chris Ellis](#).

## ***New CORS Station at Nancy Foster Research Center***

National Geodetic Survey is installing a new Continuously Operating Reference Station (CORS) at the Nancy Foster Florida Keys Environmental Center. In addition to supplying precise real-time positioning data, the station will be co-located with a tide gage to provide crucial data for analyzing local and world-wide sea level trends. NOAA manages the nationwide CORS network of over 1,000 stations which support three-dimensional positioning activities. For more information, contact [Richard Snay](#).

## In the Gulf States

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### ***Are Man Made Barriers Aiding the Proliferation of Invasive Aquatic Vegetation? A Salinity Study in the Mobile Delta Region***

Habitat modifications are among mankind's most pervasive alterations of our nation's estuarine ecosystems. When such modifications are extensive, as is the case for the Mobile Bay Causeway, they can alter patterns of natural hydrography. Among the possible consequences of the Causeway is the reduction of water exchange between the fresh water in the lower reaches of Mobile-Tensaw Delta, and the saltier waters of the Gulf of Mexico. If true, this barrier may have created persistent low salinity conditions that local conservationists believe have provided refuge for an exotic species of submerged aquatic vegetation, the Eurasian Milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) to survive in during periods when salinity is high throughout this estuary.

When salinity is low, milfoil fragments from these freshwater refuges end up in nearby estuarine grassbeds, where they subsequently outgrow and competitively displace native submerged grasses.

To test these hypotheses, Dr. John Valentine and Marine Technician Susan Sklenar, both of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab (DISL) in Alabama, are currently comparing the results of salinity tolerance experiments they have conducted using milfoil at the DISL with two years of field data which document salinity patterns within the upper reaches of Mobile Bay.

The preliminary results of these experiments suggest that only the most extreme salinities, those observed during hurricane landfalls in the northern Gulf of Mexico, are lethal to milfoil. "Right after Hurricane Katrina, we noticed that milfoil was not as abundant in those places where it used to be plentiful," recounts Dr. Valentine. "Whether it was the turbidity from the storm or the salinity from waters crashing over the MBC, we're hoping these experiments will be able to help determine the cause."

In the coming year, Dr. Valentine and his colleagues will be conducting additional field experiments to determine if in fact milfoil will outcompete native grasses for habitat within this estuary. It is hoped that these experiments, when completed, will allow DISL to make data-based recommendations for habitat restoration later next year. Dr. John Valentine – [jvalentine@disl.org](mailto:jvalentine@disl.org).

### ***Dauphin Island Sea Lab Scientist Seeks Improved Method to Detect Microalgae in Coastal Waters***

Dr Hugh MacIntyre, Senior Marine Scientist at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Alabama, and colleague Richard Cox of Kaitech Inc. have been awarded \$270,274 to develop a tool for improved detection of microalgae by the Cooperative Institute for Coastal and Estuarine Environmental Technology (CICEET).

Microalgae are the foundation of the aquatic food web. However, 'blooms', which are very dense populations, lead to low oxygen "dead zones," fish kills, and—depending on the species—human health risks. To protect their communities, coastal managers must monitor and characterize algal populations that change quickly over space and time. In vogue are fluorescence-based optical monitors that 'see' chlorophyll a, a plant pigment that is present in all algal species. However, these tools are less effective in

turbid coastal waters and do not identify alternative pigments, so cannot distinguish between different types of algal species.

The researchers will build on a previous CICEET project to develop a field stage prototype of a laser fluorometer that detects multiple target pigments and can differentiate between different types of algae. "Knowledge is power. We hope this instrument will characterize microalgal populations rapidly and easily, for instance for pre-screening samples for the potentially-harmful types during a red tide," said Dr. MacIntyre. "This fluorometer could be of enormous use for those who monitor our waters to determine their safety, as well as an effective tool for scientists and researchers."

Dr. MacIntyre will work closely with the Weeks Bay, AL.; Grand Bay, MS; and North Inlet-Winyah Bay, SC, National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERRs).

## ***Halloween Environmental Education Event a Success***

Heeding the urgent need for public education as stated by the Joint Ocean Commission, on October 27, 2006, the Dauphin Island Sea Lab Foundation (DISLF) staged an evening of Halloween fun, activity AND environmental education with Spooktacular: The Adventures of Sharkman and Octoboy. Open to children of all ages, this fun-filled and environmentally engaging event brought together agencies that normally travel in different circles, such as the Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile Baykeeper, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, the Mobile Theater Guild and the local actors' playhouse, the Joe Jefferson Players.

The principles of the Joint Commission's report were embodied in such agency-sponsored games as Pollution Fear Factor (a local favorite) and Knock-out Pollution designed by Auburn University Landscape Architectural students. Meanwhile, visitors were treated to a series of skits featuring villains such as Dr. O-Zone, Katarina Kudzu, and the evil twins Aqua and Land Phill. Luckily, superheroes Sharkman and OctoBoy are on the job, and entreat the visitors to join the fight against reckless developers, careless polluters and uninformed policymakers.

Close to 500 visitors came to the Dauphin Island Sea Lab on that wind-tossed evening to play environmental games, see thrilling skits of marine adventure, and have a great time. By creating a lively, safe and engaging series of activities, the DISLF provided both Halloween fun AND environmental education. Dr. George Crozier, Director of the Sea Lab (and Dr. O. Zone) commented. It was a little over the top, but kids of all ages seemed to have really gotten the message that the oceans were in some real danger and where that was coming from.

## ***Florida Sea Grant and University of Florida Law School Partner to Support Public Access Policy Initiatives***

Grant Watson is a recent graduate of the University of Florida College of Law who worked with Florida Sea Grant on public access issues through the UF Law Conservation Clinic. Thomas T. Ankersen is a Legal Skills Professor at the UF College of Law and directs its Conservation Clinic in the Center for Governmental Responsibility. He also serves as a statewide legal specialist for Florida Sea Grant.

Florida enjoys one of the nation's longest coastlines and a year-round climate conducive to maritime activities. Historically, marine industries have thrived because of an abundance of waterfront property on which to establish water-dependent activities and their support facilities. Commercial waterfront activities

have not been the only beneficiaries of Florida's vast coastline and coastal resources. Recreational boaters have also been able to enjoy Florida's coastal waters without concern over access to the water. Today, however, there are more than one million registered boaters in the state and boating access infrastructure, already overtaxed, is facing a wave of waterfront privatization that threatens two Florida traditions, commercial fishing and recreational boating. Competition for once-abundant space on the water has also become increasingly problematic with growing conflict among user groups and with marine resources such as manatees, sea grasses and corals. A unique collaboration between the Florida Sea Grant Boating and Waterway Management Program and faculty and students at the University of Florida College of Law's Center for Governmental Responsibility and Conservation Clinic has been assisting the state and its communities with these issues.

After a fitful beginning, the Florida legislature began to face up to the access problem by passing the 2005 Working Waterfronts Legislation - a multifaceted attempt to stem the tide of waterfront privatization. Key to the legislation is its parcel-based definition. A "working waterfront" can be either recreational or commercial in nature, and is "a parcel of real property that provides access for water-dependent commercial activities or provides access for the public to the navigable waters of the state." Some examples of a "working waterfront" are docks, wharfs, lifts, wet and dry marinas, boat ramps, boat hauling and repair facilities, commercial fishing facilities, boat construction facilities, and other support structures over the water. Thus the term "working waterfront" in Florida has been expanded to include waterfronts that serve the access needs of recreational boaters as well as commercial maritime industries.

The new legislation has provisions that require local governments to address public access through the local government comprehensive planning process. The new legislation also codifies the Waterfronts Florida Partnership Program, a cooperative arrangement between the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Florida Department of Community Affairs (DCA) that assists certain designated coastal communities with a variety of issues related to their waterfronts, including revitalization and the provision of public access. The new legislation also includes a complex property tax deferral program that local governments may adopt and apply to "working waterfront" property, enabling owners to defer paying skyrocketing waterfront property taxes until there is a change in ownership or use. Finally, the law directs the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to survey state parks for additional public access capacity.

Even before public access for recreational boating became a hot button political issue, Florida Sea Grant had begun to address recreational use of the State's waters through the creation of a Boating and Waterway Management Program that brought mapping technologies, planning principles and policy analysis to bear on the State's waterways. Focusing first on the waters of Southwest Florida, and the vision of the West Coast Inland Navigation District, Sea Grant and CGR attorneys have been working to develop the conceptual framework for a regional waterway management system focused on the "adaptive reuse" of the federal intracoastal waterway as the artery for a still evolving network of interconnected channels and public access points linking the region to its marine cultural and natural resources. While Sea Grant's planners and geographers mapped the resources and assessed needs, CGR attorneys and law clinic students addressed rights of navigation, created a model local harbor management ordinance and facilitated regional consensus building through a boater-driven initiative known as the Southwest Florida Regional Harbor Board.

More recently, the UF attorneys, students in the Conservation Clinic and Florida Sea Grant have begun working with the state and local governments on a variety of projects to address public access, surface water zoning and the protection of traditional waterfront uses. Under contract with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and its marine law enforcement division, CGR attorneys and Sea Grant geographers have launched a challenging effort to identify and map all local marine regulatory zones, effectively creating a "maritime cadastre" for use by planners, resource managers and law

enforcement officials. At the same time faculty and students in the law clinic are working with the State's Department of Community Affairs to develop the policy planning tools communities need to ensure public access and retain traditional waterfront community character. Recent local initiatives include assistance to the cities of Bradenton Beach, Punta Gorda and Saint Augustine with proposals for managed mooring fields, and to the City of Crystal River and the panhandle community of Panacea with proposals for water-dependent, thematic resource overlay districts. For inland Alachua County Sea Grant has partnered with several units of the UF campus, including the law school, to develop a "waterways master plan" to address conflicts on rivers, lakes and springs. The Clinic is also evaluating the viability of the 2005 tax deferral legislation, reviewing state submerged lands leasing policies and local land acquisition programs for their ability to contribute to the provision of public access.

Despite these efforts, the challenge presented by the changing character of the Florida waterfront and increasing congestion on the water remains a daunting one. Their success will tell whether "working waterfronts" - both commercial and recreational - will not only have a history in Florida, but also a future.

### ***Coastal Restoration Design Work Awarded for New Barrier Shoreline Project***

SJB Group, LLC in Baton Rouge has been awarded the engineering and design contract for the Riverine Sand Mining / Scofield Island Restoration Project by the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the National Marine Fisheries Service.

The Riverine Sand Mining / Scofield Island Restoration Project is expected to protect and preserve the structural integrity of the barrier shoreline at Scofield Island in Plaquemines Parish by repairing breaches and tidal inlets in the shoreline, reinforcing the existing shoreline with sand, and increasing the island's width with back barrier marsh creation to increase longevity. As previous restoration efforts on the barrier headlands have utilized offshore sediment sources for restoration, a primary objective of this project will be to determine the feasibility of mining and transporting Mississippi River sediments for island reconstruction.

The conceptual project features include construction of approximately 100 acres of dune and 330 acres of supra tidal elevations of dune fore and back slopes and marsh platform. Additional features could include sand fencing, dike gapping for marsh platform tidal exchange and long-term construction of tidal ponds and other tidal features incorporated during the final design phases.

The project is located between Scofield Bayou and where Bay Coquette has merged with the Gulf of Mexico along the barrier shoreline. This project is funded and authorized by the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA). The contract amount is \$2.1 million. For more information, contact DNR Office of Coastal Restoration and Management Project Manager Kenneth Bahlinger at 225-342-7362. Or call SJB Group, LLC, Jamie Edwards at 225-769-3400.

### ***Bayou Plaquemine Waterfront Projects Tour Held Friday, Nov. 17th***

Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Atchafalaya Basin Program (ABP) and City of Plaquemine hosted a fall tour for Phase II of the Plaquemine Bayou Waterfront Park and the Bayou Plaquemine freshwater diversion project Friday, Nov. 17, 2006 at 9:00 a.m. at 57845 Foundry Street. Waterfront Park is one of the most popular attractions in the area with boat docks, fishing areas, an extensive boardwalk and park area. This second phase of the waterfront park project included a gateway

entry structure, an overlook/pavilion facility, grading and drainage improvements, parking areas, and handicap accessible sidewalks.

The second phase of the freshwater diversion project included two submersible pumps located on the flood side slope of the Mississippi River levee. The pumps will allow water from the Mississippi River to travel through pipes over the levee and into Bayou Plaquemine through the old Plaquemine locks. The project will allow freshwater into Bayou Plaquemine to improve the aquatic habitat and prevent long-term stagnation.

DNR, City of Plaquemine, and U.S. Corps of Engineers provided funding of \$4.4 million for both projects through a federal, state and local cost-share agreement. Local and state officials and the public were invited for a boat trip and visit to the Plaquemine Locks, Iberville Museum and Iberville Parish Tourist Information Center.

## ***Back to the Dock***

In response to a request from the Louisiana Fishing Community Recovery Coalition, the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) proposed an allocation of \$20 million for Back to the Dock. The dock program is similar to LRA's Road Home program and helps underinsured and uninsured fisherman get Back to the Dock. This much-needed assistance should help Louisiana's proud fishing families pick up the pieces and get back to work.

The coalition members represent many commercial and recreational fishing groups who will stay in communication with LRA's Infrastructure and Transportation Task Force. The LRA is scheduled to hold a final vote with the full quorum on the Back to the Dock allocation on Dec. 15, 2006. After attending the LRA meeting this morning, Ewell Smith, executive director of the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board, expressed his enthusiasm for this first major step from the LRA toward assisting our fishing families. "We look forward to working with LRA as we execute our Back to the Dock program," he said.

The Center for Natural Resource Economics and Policy with Louisiana State University estimates damage to Louisiana fisheries sectors at nearly \$582 million. Losses include commercial fishing vessels, seafood processing facilities, seafood wholesaling plants, and recreational vessels, among other essentials. Furthermore, rebuilding these communities would reinstall a crossbeam in the economic structure of the state. A recent Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries report pointed out that the pre-storm marine fisheries sectors contributed a total economic benefit to the state exceeding \$3.3 billion. For more information, contact Ewell Smith 504-214-3985 or Mike Voisin at 985-665-8494.

## ***New Habitat Research Database Seeks Project Entries***

A new database is giving researchers in Mississippi and Alabama the opportunity to let others learn from their successes and setbacks in the field of habitat conservation and restoration. The recently launched Mississippi-Alabama Habitat Conservation, Restoration and Enhancement Database is ready for use. Resource managers, scientists and other researchers are encouraged to enter their habitat projects into the easy-to use system.

"At this point, we want resource managers to submit entries," said Roberta Arena Swann, deputy director of Mobile Bay National Estuary Program and manager of the Mississippi-Alabama Habitat Conservation,

Restoration and Enhancement Database. “This database is only going to be useful if it captures a wide range of projects.”

If all habitat researchers share their work, the database may prove to be a valuable tool in replenishing and protecting habitats in the bi-state area. “It is our hope that this database will improve networking and coordination among grassroots groups, resource managers, scientists and local governments for better habitat conservation along the northern Gulf Coast,” Swann said. The database, which also maps project locations, currently logs 11 projects in the 11 southern-most counties in Alabama and Mississippi. Projects deal with issues such as restoring stable channel dimensions, eradicating invasive species and stabilizing shoreline to help increase wildlife habitat.

Stewardship Coordinator Christopher May of Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve said there are two particularly useful database features. “First, the ability to upload images adds a valuable dimension to this database,” May said. “Users will be able to see how a site looked before and after management activities occurred. The second feature I find useful is the interactive map. Users can locate projects nearby or projects in particular habitat types that might be most relevant.”

Swann said the database will allow resource managers to work together. “The hope is that resource managers can gain insight into available conservation methods, funding sources, etc.,” Swann said. “They can network with other resource managers to tie small-scale restoration efforts into ecosystem-level projects.” The process for submitting projects consists of obtaining a user name and password and entering all project information, including photos and location. The public also is invited to view the projects and learn about what scientists are doing to protect and restore habitats on the coast. The Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium provided funding and technical expertise during Dauphin Island Sea Lab’s initial development of the database. The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program provides ongoing funding and technical support.

The Mississippi-Alabama Habitat Conservation, Restoration and Enhancement Database can be found at <http://restoration.disl.org/database/>.

Contact: Melissa Schneider, Communications Coordinator, [melissa.schneider@usm.edu](mailto:melissa.schneider@usm.edu)  
Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium  
(228) 818-8838 (office) (228) 238-4850 (cell)  
[www.masgc.org](http://www.masgc.org)

## ***Mississippi DMR to Work with Oyster Harvesters to Relay Oysters, Repair Hurricane-Damaged Reefs***

BILOXI, Miss. – The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR) Shellfish Bureau will be working with Mississippi commercial oyster harvesters to relay oysters from Biloxi Bay and Graveline Bayou to oyster reefs in the western Mississippi Sound to replace reef material lost during Hurricane Katrina. The project will begin Nov. 13 and will be completed in December.

Oysters will be tonged out of Graveline Bayou and transferred to the DMR vessel Conservationist; in Biloxi Bay, Oysters will be dredged and placed on a barge. The oysters will then be deployed to the oyster reefs in the western Mississippi Sound.

“This is a great opportunity for the commercial fishermen to get involved with the oyster reef rehabilitation process,” said DMR Biological Program Coordinator Bradley Randall. “With the help of

the fishermen, we will be able to put them to work and begin some of the healing process of the oyster reefs damaged by Hurricane Katrina.”

The oyster relaying project is part of a five-year oyster recovery plan funded through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Hurricane Katrina Disaster Grant. The first phase of this plan took place in the spring and fall of this year, with the planting of oyster shells and other suitable reef material to attract larval oysters. Placing live adult oysters adjacent to these areas during the oyster relaying phase will increase the opportunity to attract larvae.

The oysters harvested during this project will not be used for personal or public consumption. They will be used solely as broodstock for future spat recruitment. The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources is dedicated to enhancing, protecting and conserving marine interests of the State by managing all marine life, public trust wetlands, adjacent uplands and waterfront areas to provide for the optimal commercial, recreational, educational and economic uses of these resources consistent with environmental concerns and social changes. Visit the DMR online at [www.dmr.state.ms.us](http://www.dmr.state.ms.us).

## ***Texas Joins Race for New Wind Turbine Research Facility***

\$80 Billion International Market for Turbines at Stake

AUSTIN — Jerry Patterson, Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office, announced that Texas is now in the nationwide race for a new U.S. Department of Energy-backed large-scale wind turbine research and development facility. Patterson made the announcement on behalf of the Land Office and the Lone Star Wind Alliance, a Texas-led coalition of universities, government agencies and corporate partners created to prepare the proposal for submission to the federal government. The University of Houston co-headed the effort with Commissioner Patterson and filed the proposal yesterday. Patterson said he expects the bid winner, or a short list of candidates, to be announced in December.

“Where else but Texas can they build a test facility large enough to handle the nation’s needs for the next generation of wind turbines?” Patterson asked. “The General Land Office and our fellow Alliance members are confident that our proposal will bring this facility to Texas.” Patterson has likened the potential impact of the Alliance’s proposed National Large Wind Turbine Research & Testing Facility to that of NASA on Houston during the space race in the 1960s. “Anyone building wind turbines will want to be next to this facility,” Patterson said. “Our facility will be a magnet for research and manufacturing. It will establish Texas as a worldwide leader in wind power for many years to come.”

The Lone Star Wind Alliance includes the University of Houston’s Cullen College of Engineering, The University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M University, Texas Tech University, West Texas A&M University, the Houston Advanced Research Center, Stanford University, Montana State University, New Mexico State University, Old Dominion University, the Texas General Land Office, the State Energy Conservation Office, Lt. Governor David Dewhurst, the Texas Workforce Commission, Governor Rick Perry’s Emerging Technology Fund, Good Company Associates and the Wind Coalition. The Consortium’s proposal to DOE enjoys the full support of the Texas Congressional delegation, as well as leadership at the state level including Governor Perry, Lieutenant Governor Dewhurst, Speaker Tom Craddick and several Texas State House and Senate members.

“The Alliance possesses extensive world-class university research centers and expertise on all aspects of wind power,” said Ray Flumerfelt, Dean of the University of Houston’s Cullen College of Engineering. “What’s more, our proposal enjoys strong political support in Texas and in Washington, DC. That support will ensure the viability of the project, which will make the U.S. wind power industry more competitive

on a global basis.” In May, the Department of Energy announced it is seeking partners to build a new facility capable of testing blades up to 70 meters long.

The Texas General Land Office is the management agency for state lands and mineral rights totaling 20.4 million acres. This includes vast properties in West Texas, the Gulf Coast beaches and bays and other "submerged" lands extending 10.3 miles out from the shoreline, a variety of state agency acreage and timberlands in East Texas. Texas leads the nation in offshore wind development and is committed to establishing itself globally as a wind friendly state. Every penny earned by the Land Office from wind development projects is constitutionally dedicated to the Texas Permanent School Fund, which helps pay for public education in Texas.

## ***Public Reefing Program, Offshore Aquaculture Regs Move Forward***

AUSTIN, Texas — The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission Nov. 2 adopted new rules that pave the way for a public reefing program in the state’s nearshore waters. In a separate action, the Commission voted to adopt regulations governing offshore aquaculture. The new rules concerning artificial reefs establish a mechanism to govern the deployment of artificial reef materials in coastal waters by private individuals or entities. The changes give TPWD the authority to inspect and approve the artificial reef materials prior to them being placed at an approved TPWD location.

Public reefing sites will be located in state waters less than 60-feet deep near each of the navigable Gulf passes. Each site will be 160 acres in size and divided into blocks approximately 260ft by 260ft. The center of the reef site will be marked by a 10-ft yellow spar buoy chained to an anchor. The public will be assigned an individual block to reef their materials. “The purpose of this program is to increase marine habitat in the Gulf of Mexico through the creation of nearshore reefs and thereby enhance fishing and some diving opportunities,” said Dale Shively, TPWD’s Artificial Reefing Program coordinator. “We’re going to develop reef sites that are closer to shore and will accommodate more small boat anglers.”

The artificial reef program will continue the efforts to get larger materials suitable for reefing in these nearshore areas as well as efforts for larger structure offshore. This new initiative allows for more local coastal involvement in the program.

The new rules concerning offshore aquaculture provide a process for obtaining a permit to conduct offshore aquaculture in Texas state waters, while ensuring protection of Texas coastal waters and native stocks. The new rules will establish a \$1,500 licensing fee for each offshore aquaculture permit and procedures that the permittee must follow in order to maintain the permit. These procedures include requirements which will ensure the genetic integrity and protection of wild stocks in Texas waters and other requirements regarding the facilities and the introduction and removal of aquatic organisms in those facilities. .

Offshore aquaculture, a growing concern in some parts of the world, is relatively new to the Gulf of Mexico. “We are trying to get ahead of the curve for two reasons,” said Larry McKinney, Ph.D., director of TPWD’s Coastal Fisheries division. “We see this coming on the horizon as a new development in the Gulf and we want to lay out a regulatory model that businesses can follow. Within that model, our primary goal is to protect our native fish stocks.” The new regulations for both programs go into effect 20 days after publication in the Texas Register.

## ***Improved Red Tide Response Tracks Decline of Texas Bloom***

AUSTIN, Texas — A red tide event that lingered along the coastal bend for nearly a month appears to have largely subsided, according to Texas Parks and Wildlife officials. Water samples taken in the Corpus Christi and Port Aransas areas have shown decreasing concentrations of the red tide alga since mid-October, and there have been no reports of fish kills or respiratory irritation for over three weeks. All the Gulf beaches appear to be free of red tide.

This year's red tide, which is a high concentration (or bloom) of an alga called *Karenia brevis*, first showed up near San Jose Island, causing fish kills along the island, as well as along the Corpus Christi Ship Channel and at Cedar Bayou. It first began spreading north along both sides of Matagorda Island but then was pushed south to Mustang and Padre Islands, all the while lingering in portions of Corpus Christi, Aransas and Redfish bays. At one point the bloom was visible at the north Port Mansfield jetty, but it never did spread further south.

Dead fish as a result of the red tide numbered into the millions, but game fish made up less than 5 percent of the total. The majority of the fish killed were forage fish, including Gulf menhaden, Gulf whiting, Atlantic bumper, and mullet. Biologists do not expect the bloom to have a lasting impact on fish populations. This red tide was fairly typical of previous Texas blooms, which tend to begin in late summer or early fall and can last for weeks to months. Though it is not clear what factors cause red tides, it is known that they are a natural occurrence in the Gulf of Mexico.

The state's response to the red tide was enhanced by a twice-weekly bulletin from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration which provided satellite images showing the location of red tide and forecasting where it might impact the coast. University and state agency scientists, as well as volunteers, played an important role in finding out where red tide was occurring, where it was absent and whether it was increasing or declining.

The volunteer Red Tide Rangers in South Padre Island regularly collected water samples south of Port Mansfield as an early warning system; fortunately the red tide never impacted that area. Texas A&M University-Galveston and Texas State Department of Health Services scientists sampled portions of the upper coast showing red tide was absent from Matagorda Bay up to Galveston. University of Texas Marine Science Institute researchers tracked red tide in the Port Aransas area on a daily basis and communicated their results as the red tide was blooming and later disappearing.

Filter-feeding shellfish, such as oysters, clams, whelks and mussels, accumulate the red tide toxin in their tissues, where it can remain for weeks after a red tide has ended. The toxin, which is not destroyed by the cooking process, causes a type of food poisoning called neurotoxic shellfish poisoning.

For this reason, shellfish harvesting season is delayed in parts of San Antonio Bay and all of Mesquite, St. Charles, Aransas, Copano and Corpus Christi bays. Information about shellfish closures can be obtained by contacting the Seafood and Aquatic Life group of the Texas Department of State Health Services at (800) 685-0361.

## Other News

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### ***Corps Extends Public Notice Comment Period for Proposed Regional General Permit***

Mobile, Ala. – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District is extending the public notice comment period for the proposed Regional General Permit SAM-20 until December 10, 2006. The decision to give the public more time to review the proposal was based on comments received which clearly indicated more time was needed to review and understand the proposal.

“Based on the comments we have received, there appears to be a misunderstanding of what is being proposed,” said E. Patrick Robbins, Public Affairs Officer. “The proposal, and at this time that is all it is, only streamlines what is normally required to get a permit. It does not change any of the requirements.”

Post-Katrina redevelopment has created numerous individual residential permit applications. Under the current individual application process the applicant must go through a very defined process. This process involves the applicant clearly showing how they have attempted to totally avoid wetlands, if unable to do so how they have minimized the impact, and how they plan to mitigate for any impacts. The delineation of wetlands must meet an established criterion which clearly indicates they type and value of the wetlands being impacted. The individual application is then coordinated with other state and federal agencies and an environmental assessment is written for each application. In addition, the application goes out for a 30-day public review.

“The Corps has several Nationwide permits and Regional General Permits already in place. They don’t alleviate the need for an applicant to follow the rules and regulations,” said Robbins. “What they do provide for is an analysis which says IF, and note that’s a capital IF, the applicant has met all the requirements and it has been validated that they have, the 30 day public notice and individual Environmental Assessment won’t be required.”

“This streamlines the process but doesn’t change any of the basic requirements an applicant would normally have to abide by,” he continued. The proposed Regional General Permit for the six counties - Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, Pearly River, Stone and George - excludes any coastal or tidally influenced wetland areas.

“As we receive input from the public and other agencies, other areas may also be excluded from the Regional General Permit proposal,” said Robbins. “That is why we urge everyone who has an interest to fully review the proposal so we can determine what modifications may be necessary or if this type action is necessary.”

The public can review the proposed RGP and submit comments by going to the district web page at <http://www.sam.usace.army.mil/>.

The public can mail comments to:  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District  
Regulatory Division  
P.O. Box 2288, Mobile, AL 36628-0001

Or they can email comments to: [dll-cesam-rd-pn@sam.usace.army.mil](mailto:dll-cesam-rd-pn@sam.usace.army.mil).

## Energy

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### **Minerals Management Service Proposes to Expand Lease Sale 205 Available Acreage**

Friday, November 17, 2006

WASHINGTON — The Interior Department’s Minerals Management Service (MMS) has released for comment in the [Federal Register](#) a proposal to expand the available acreage in Lease Sale 205. MMS will accept comments on the proposal through December 29, 2006. In the Proposed 5-Year Program for 2007-2012, Lease Sale 205 originally included acreage located along the eastern boundary of the Central Gulf of Mexico Planning Area (see Map 1). MMS proposes to expand Lease Sale 205 to include all available acreage in the Central Gulf of Mexico Planning Area (see Map 2). While this additional acreage would be new to Sale 205, it is the same acreage proposed for the other Central Gulf of Mexico lease sales scheduled for 2008– 2012.

Lease Sale 205 is currently included in the Proposed 5-Year Program for 2007-2012 and accompanying Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The comment period for the Proposed 5-Year Program remains open until November 24, 2006 and the comment period for the Draft EIS is open until November 22, 2006.

Lease Sale 201 scheduled for 2007 was part of the 5-Year Program for 2002 – 2007 and included all of the available acreage in the Central Gulf of Mexico Planning Area as proposed in the 5-Year Program for 2002 – 2007. As part of a lawsuit settlement agreement with the State of Louisiana, MMS has agreed to prepare an EIS before conducting any additional lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico. *As a result of this agreement, MMS is cancelling Lease Sale 201. The proposal to expand the available acreage in Lease Sale 205 includes the acreage that would have been offered in Lease Sale 201.*

The MMS will accept comments submitted electronically using [MMS’s Public Connect](#) online commenting system. You may also mail comments and information to:

Renee Orr, 5-Year Program Manager  
Minerals Management Service (MS-4010), Room 3120  
381 Elden Street  
Herndon, Virginia 20170

Please label your comments “Comments on Revisions to Proposed 5-Year Program for 2007-2012”.

The DEIS is available on the [MMS website](#). You may comment electronically using [MMS’s Public Connect](#) online commenting system. You may also mail comments to:

James F. Bennett, Chief, Branch of Environmental Assessment  
381 Elden Street, Mail Stop 4042  
Herndon, Virginia 20170-4817

Envelopes or packages must be marked “Comments on 2007-2012 Oil and Gas Program Revisions for Draft Environmental Impact Statement”.

## Grant Opportunities

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### ***NOAA Marine Debris Program Announces FY07 Internal Funding Opportunity***

The NOAA Marine Debris Program (MDP) is soliciting 12-month proposals for projects addressing specific marine debris focus areas for possible funding in FY2007. This solicitation is open to NOAA employees and offices, with partnerships among NOAA and non-NOAA entities are encouraged. Since 2005, the MDP has used its funding to help build collaborations among NOAA programs and offices to support a wide variety of important marine debris efforts. The internal call for proposals seeks to build on NOAA's capacity to monitor and assess the impact of ocean debris, to reduce and prevent the introduction of debris and to work with partners to accomplish these efforts. Proposals should not exceed \$200,000 and should address the focus areas outlined in the formal call for proposals. The formal call for proposals and the proposal template can be accessed by contacting [Megan Forbes](#) or [Sarah Morison](#). All proposals must be submitted by December 13, 2006, to [Sarah Morison](#).

### ***BTNEP Invites Application for Mini-Grants***

The Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP) is pleased to announce the third consecutive year of funding for their successful Mini-Grants Program. The BTNEP created the program in January 2005 to support community-based restoration, outreach and education projects. BTNEP has \$30,000 available in 2007 for eligible Mini-Grants Program projects, with a minimum of \$1,000 and a maximum of \$5,000 for any one proposal. Additional funding has been provided by a generous donation from Chevron/Texaco. Any school, organization, individuals, nonprofit, government, churches, businesses, or other community groups may apply for Mini-Grant funding, provided that the project takes place within the Barataria- Terrebonne Estuary System (BTES) and meets one or more BTNEP goals.

The request for proposal (RFP) for the 2007 Mini-Grants Program will take place from November 15, 2006 to December 14, 2006. The deadline for proposals is NOON on Thursday, December 14, 2006. To apply for a BTNEP Mini-Grant, download and complete the 2007 Mini-Grant Program Request for proposals and Application Packet from the Web at <http://grant.btneep.org/> (click twice). For more information, contact Susan Testroet- Bergeron at 985-447-0686 or [Susan@btneep.org](mailto:Susan@btneep.org).

## Training and Conferences

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### ***Two-day Event to Examine Environmental Status of Gulf***

The **Alabama-Mississippi Bays and Bayous Symposium** will be held **Nov. 28 and Nov. 29** at the Arthur Outlaw Convention Center in Mobile, Ala. The two-day event will feature scientific presentations on water quality, living resources, habitat management, natural hazards and coastal development in Alabama and Mississippi. A highlight will be Sylvia Earle's keynote address, "Sea Change," on Nov. 28. She will examine the impacts humans are having on the world oceans, from heightened mercury levels in fish to tsunami devastation in coastal areas once protected by corals and mangroves. Earle, a renowned underwater explorer and scientist, has been an Explorer in Residence at the National Geographic Society since 1998, the year Time magazine named her its first "Hero for the Planet."

The symposium is designed to attract scientists, resource managers and the general public for four informative sessions on current environmental status and trends in the northern Gulf of Mexico and the impacts of human activity on coastal conditions. Organizers say the dialog between these groups will increase the level of knowledge and awareness regarding the challenges facing the coastal zone. The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, the Alabama Center for Estuarine Studies and The University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Coast Research Laboratory are hosting the event.

"Over 80 high-quality abstracts were received, abstracts that cover critical issues for residents of coastal Alabama and Mississippi," said LaDon Swann, director of the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium. "The scientific and applied information that will be available can be used by scientists, policy-makers and citizens." Three other distinguished guests will speak during the symposium. Orrin Pilkey, Professor Emeritus at Duke University and a noted coastal geomorphologist will speak at a Nov. 28 social event. Nancy Rabalais, director of the Louisiana University Marine Consortium and a nationally known expert on hypoxia (oxygen-depleted waters), also will speak that day. Frank Muller-Karger, director of the Institute for Marine Remote Sensing at the University of South Florida and one of President George W. Bush's appointees on the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, will speak Nov. 29.

This will be the first program directed at a better understanding of the Alabama and Mississippi coastal environment. There is still time to register for the symposium, and the public is invited. For more information or to register, go to: <http://ambbs.mobilebaynep.com> or contact Tiffany England at (251) 431-6409 or Shonda Borden at (251) 438-5690.

### ***Registration Still Open: Restore America's Estuaries 3rd National Conference***

Registration is still open for the 3rd National Conference on Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration in New Orleans, December 9-13. The response to this year's Conference has been tremendous, and there is still time to join more than 1200 of the best professionals and volunteers working to restore the health and abundance of our coasts. Register online at: [www.estuaries.org/conference](http://www.estuaries.org/conference). A block of rooms at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside -- where this year's Conference is being held -- has been reserved for December 6--16 at \$109 per night + tax, single or double occupancy (based on availability). However, this special room rate will only be available until November 17th. The rooms are filling up quickly, so we

recommend you make your reservation as soon as possible. Go to <http://www.estuaries.org/?id=33> to reserve your room online - or you can call 504-584-3999 and ask for the Restore America's Estuaries rate of \$109.

#### CITY PARK RESTORATION EVENT!

The Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana will host a City Park restoration event on Saturday, December 9, 2006. More than 250 local volunteers and RAE conference participants will help to restore New Orleans City Park -- one of the largest urban parks in the United States. For more information, go to [www.estuaries.org/conference](http://www.estuaries.org/conference).

#### FIELD SESSIONS ARE FILLING UP FAST!

Don't miss your opportunity to learn about the restoration of Coastal Louisiana and Mississippi first-hand. Knowledgeable local leaders will guide field sessions on Saturday, December 9 and Sunday, December 10. There is still room available in six field sessions: 1) Louisiana Chenier Plain Tour; 2) Pontoon Boat Tour of Manchac Swamp and Surrounding Marshes of Pass Manchac; 3) French Quarter Walking Tour; 4) Terrebonne Bay Research Cruise and Tour of the Defelice Marine Center; 5) New Orleans Levee Tour; and 6) On the Road to Restoration: Emergency Restoration Work. For details on these field sessions, visit <http://www.estuaries.org/?id=150>. To register for a field session, access online registration at [www.estuaries.org/conference](http://www.estuaries.org/conference).

### ***OCS Information Transfer Meeting***

**January 9-11, 2007 Kenner, Louisiana**

The 24th Information Transfer Meeting (ITM) is being hosted by the Gulf of Mexico Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Region of the Minerals Management Service (MMS) at the Airport Hilton, Kenner, Louisiana. The purpose of the ITM is to foster sharing of information among participants about current research, accomplishments, or issues of concern to the MMS. Presentations at the ITM pertain to the MMS Gulf of Mexico OCS oil and gas program, as well as regional environmental, social, or economic concerns, or current OCS industry activities or technologies. Participants can also find the latest information at: [http://www.conferences.uno.edu/confCalendar\(MMS\).htm](http://www.conferences.uno.edu/confCalendar(MMS).htm).

Participants can register for the conference at:  
[http://conferences.uno.edu/MMS\\_ITM\\_2007\\_RegForm.htm](http://conferences.uno.edu/MMS_ITM_2007_RegForm.htm).

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