

# Gulf of Mexico News



NOAA Ocean Service, Office of Ocean & Coastal Resource Management

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## NOAA Gulf of Mexico News

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### ***Return of El Niño Yields Near Normal 2006 Atlantic Hurricane Season***

As the 2006 Atlantic hurricane season comes to a close today, NOAA scientists announced that seasonal activity was lower than expected due to the rapid development of [El Niño](#) – a periodic warming of the ocean waters in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific which influences pressure and wind patterns across the tropical Atlantic.

The 2006 Atlantic hurricane season produced near-normal activity with a total of nine named storms, including five hurricanes, two of which became major hurricanes of category 3 strength or higher. An average Atlantic hurricane season has 11 named storms, with six becoming hurricanes and two becoming major hurricanes. Unlike the past three seasons, the stronger hurricanes stayed well out at sea, sparing the Americas and the Caribbean islands from major hurricane damage this season.

“The development of [El Niño conditions](#) by September helps explain why this Atlantic hurricane season was less active than predicted,” said Dr. Gerry Bell, NOAA’s lead forecaster on the Atlantic hurricane seasonal outlook team. “El Niño developed quickly and the atmosphere responded rapidly, reducing hurricane activity during an otherwise active era that began in 1995.”

El Niño, combined with the large-scale weather patterns over the southeastern U.S., produced sinking air in the middle and upper atmosphere, along with higher than anticipated wind shear (the change in winds through the atmosphere) over the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Sea. These conditions minimized thunderstorm activity, which inhibited tropical storm and hurricane formation.

Analysis by NOAA scientists has linked El Niño’s rapid development and intensification to a series of large subsurface ocean waves that affect ocean temperatures – which began in June. These waves produced a progressive warming of the tropical Pacific Ocean during the summer months. A particularly strong wave led to a significant warming of the entire eastern half of the equatorial Pacific in early September. This led NOAA in early September to report that an El Niño had developed. These warmer waters produced enhanced rainfall near the international date line, resulting in suppressed hurricane activity.

“Getting a quick handle on El Niño events which rapidly intensify is essential for predicting seasonal hurricane activity,” said Bell. “The last time we had a rapidly developing El Niño was during the 2002 hurricane season, which also led to near-normal activity. NOAA continues to develop and improve climate models to better predict the onset of El Niño, its impacts on weather patterns in the United States and its effects on Atlantic hurricane activity.”

To detect and monitor the formation, duration and strength of El Niño, NOAA established the ENSO Observing System in 1994. Today’s operational system is based on work done by the Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory, which is a branch of NOAA Research. The ENSO Observing system is an example of NOAA research activities being translated into operational forecast products. NOAA’s operational ENSO observing system includes the [TAO/TRITON](#) array of moored buoys and the Argo drift buoys, that observe ocean patterns in conjunction with NOAA’s polar orbiting satellites. The satellites, in combination with the [TOGA TAO](#) operational array, are critical for allowing NOAA to monitor, assess, and predict El Niño events. The data from the ocean observing system provides

substantial benefit to both NOAA's research and operational forecasts of climate patterns that can strongly affect weather across the nation.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA's Atlantic Hurricane Outlook & Seasonal Climate Summary Archive:

<http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/outlooks/hurricane-archive.shtml>

NOAA's Climate Prediction Center: <http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/>

NOAA: El Niño Makes a Comeback: <http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2006/s2699.htm>

## ***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](#).

## ***New Publication on Harmful Algal Blooms Will Help Environmental Managers to Develop Better Forecasts and Assess Risks***

Scientists from the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) authored five papers in the recently published book "Ecology of Harmful Algae" as part of the Ecological Studies - Analysis and Synthesis series. This book represents a major resource to coastal managers in collecting and organizing state-of-the-art information on harmful algae including possible mitigation approaches. The volume includes sections on the distribution, ecology, and physiology of harmful algae as well as their effects on food webs, links to eutrophication, human impacts, and mitigation. New insights into these areas provide information needed to develop stronger predictive models of harmful algal blooms and to more accurately assess the potential risks to humans, wildlife, and ecosystems associated with toxic events. For more information, contact [Greg Doucette](#).

## ***OCRM and the South Carolina Coastal Management Program Hold Regional Meeting***

Coastal managers from NOAA and the Southeast, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean regions gathered in Charleston, South Carolina for the 9th annual Southern and Caribbean Regional Meeting. The managers heard talks and exchanged information on topics such as beach and island management, coastal hazards planning and response, offshore energy development, sea level rise, and tools available to local governments to manage coastal growth.

Local, state, and federal government staff attended and made presentations to the group. The new NOAA Gulf Services Center also conducted a focus group with the Gulf coastal managers to further develop the Center's needs assessment. For more information, contact [Josh Lott](#).

## ***Coral Reef Watch Participates in Community Workshops in Keys***

On Nov. 14-15, Coral Reef Watch (CRW) scientist, Jessica Morgan, attended two workshops on climate change and coral reefs in Key Largo, Florida. The World Wildlife Fund sponsored a stakeholder meeting attended by over 20 teachers, residents, volunteers, managers, and scientists. CRW data from the 2005 Caribbean bleaching event were used to illustrate trends in thermal stress in the region over the past 20 years. At the 2nd Community Workshop of the Florida Reef Resilience Program (FRRP), Ms. Morgan presented a two-part talk on “The Basics of Coral Bleaching,” and an introduction to the newly published *A Reef Manager’s Guide to Bleaching*. Both talks were well received by a diverse audience of over 60 stakeholders, managers, and scientists. CRW is an important part of NOAA’s Coral Reef Conservation Program. For more information, contact [Mark Eakin](#).

## ***New Version of Model to Improve Forecasts of Wave Exposure for Extreme Wind Events***

National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) scientists are developing an updated version of the Wave Exposure Model (WEMo) version 3.0 to improve forecasts of wave exposure in coastal and estuarine environments to wind events. WEMo 3.0 calculates wave height and wave energy across a body of water. Previous versions produced a Relative Exposure Index. The improvement will allow comparisons of exposure among sites in different physical environments. Currently wave data are being collected in the field for validation of WEMo 3.0. Release of the software to the public, via download from the Center for Coastal Fisheries and Habitat Research (CCFHR) website is expected by end of this year. For more information, contact [Amit Malhotra](#) or [Mark Fonseca](#).

## ***NCCOS Scientists Distinguish Sources of Microbial Pollution for Improved Risk Management of Surface Waters***

Subtyping of viruses can be used to help distinguish human from animal sources of water pollution and identify the source of contamination. Coliphages, the viruses that infect E. coli, were typed from 117 surface water samples, and the majority belonged to subtypes associated with animal sources of pollution. However, samples from 14 sites located downstream of municipal wastewater discharges contained human-associated viruses. This approach was applied by researchers at the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) to surface waters designated as impaired for recreational water use, and results are published in the *Journal of Applied Microbiology*. Use of this method may help resource managers identify pollution sources to focus remediation efforts and to develop more accurate risk assessments. For more information, contact [Jill Stewart](#).

## ***NCCOS Research Provides Assessment of Sentinel Habitat Model Linkages to Improve Monitoring of Human Fecal Contamination of Estuaries***

Scientists at the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science’s (NCCOS) The Center of Excellence in Oceans and Human Health (OHH) at the Hollings Marine Laboratory (HML) have obtained research results that confirm the use of tidal creek systems as sentinel habitats for water quality conditions along the coast. Using novel methods generated in the OHH program, concentrations of all tested microbes

were generally higher in the headwaters of the creeks systems and in more developed watersheds, both of which represent areas of increased human interaction with the waters. Concentrations of norovirus, a human pathogen, did not correlate with concentrations of any tested microbial indicator. Varying levels of coastal development categorized into urban, suburban and forested classifications based on impervious surface coverage were evaluated for a wide range of environmental parameters including pathogens (i.e., fecal coliforms, enterococcus, somatic and male-specific coliphages, and noroviruses) in the winter and summer of 2005 (SC) and summer of 2006 (SC, GA, NC). This work was presented at the Nov. 5-9 meeting of the Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (SETAC) in Montréal. For more information contact [Denise Sanger](#) or [Jill Stewart](#).

## In the Gulf States

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### ***FL DEP and SFWMD Celebrate Two Years of Construction Progress at Picayune Strand***

--Nearly 80 structures and 70 miles of roads removed --

NAPLES - The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) today celebrated two years of construction progress on the Picayune Strand Restoration Project in western Collier County. Part of the Acceler8 initiative launched by Governor Jeb Bush in October 2004, the project is restoring the natural sheetflow of water through more than 55,000 acres of lands, improving water quality and enhancing wetland ecosystems to protect threatened and endangered species.

“While most of the other Acceler8 projects focus on the building of massive reservoirs to store water and stormwater treatment areas to cleanse the water, the Picayune Strand Restoration Project is one of only three projects restoring the natural water flow through demolition,” said DEP South District Office Director Jon Iglehart. “The unwavering commitment by local and state leaders to restore and stabilize the Everglades is vital to maintaining the quality of life that makes South Florida so unique.”

Among the milestones achieved to date, nearly half of the more than 160 existing structures on the Picayune Strand have been demolished as part of the restoration. In addition, more than 400 industrial truck loads totaling 7,200 tons of milled asphalt have been removed from nearly 70 miles of roads that are currently being degraded to restore blocked flowways. In addition, the Florida Division of Forestry is stockpiling the milled asphalt for future road maintenance, and used tires, concrete rubble and steel from abandoned vehicles have been set aside for recycling.

“One of the great benefits of this project will be the creation of new, prime habitat for various threatened or endangered species,” said Alice J. Carlson, ex-officio chair of the Big Cypress Basin Board and member of the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board. “In particular, the Florida panther needs large tracts of land to survive, and this project will restore more than 50,000 acres of pristine panther habitat adjacent to the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge. The expanded range should have a very favorable impact on Florida’s panther population.”

Project managers anticipate that more than 40 miles of canals will be plugged by the end of 2007 to allow back-flooding into adjacent wetlands and restore the natural habitat of numerous protected species. Demolition of all manmade structures also is projected to be completed by next year, and altogether, more

than 260 miles of roads are expected to be removed or regraded by 2009, completing the restoration effort.

“The Picayune Strand Restoration Project is setting the pace for all of the more than 60 planned projects within the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, and the importance of achieving these milestones cannot be understated,” added Carol Ann Wehle, executive director of the South Florida Water Management District. “This collaborative effort has brought together a very talented, dedicated team of scientists and engineers, who have been on the ground daily, addressing numerous challenges successfully and breaking new ground in environmental restoration.”

Announced by Governor Jeb Bush in October 2004, Acceler8 is stepping up the pace of funding, design and construction to complete eight Everglades restoration projects over seven years. The projects will restore 100,000 acres of wetlands, expand water treatment areas by close to 29,000 acres and provide 428,000 acre-feet of additional water storage for Everglades restoration a decade ahead of schedule. Six of the eight Acceler8 projects are already underway. Since February 2006, the State has expanded three Everglades Agricultural Area treatment wetlands and launched construction on the C-43 Caloosahatchee West Storage Reservoir, the C-44 St. Lucie Canal Reservoir/Stormwater Treatment Area, the Acme Basin B Discharge Project and the Everglades Agricultural Area Reservoir.

Under the leadership of Governor Bush, Florida has forged ahead to implement the \$10.9 billion, state-federal Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. Since 2000, Florida has invested more than \$2 billion of the committed \$3.3 billion through the end of the decade to clean up and restore the famed River of Grass. For more information on Acceler8, visit [www.evergladesnow.org](http://www.evergladesnow.org).

## ***Coastal Protection Master Plan Released for Louisiana***

This week, the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) of Louisiana released the preliminary draft of the Comprehensive Coastal Protection Master Plan for Louisiana. The report, released for public comment by the CPRA, represents a milestone in decades of efforts to restore and protect America's wetlands. Following a period for public comment, the CPRA will present a final plan to the Louisiana Legislature in April 2007. The plan will guide how money is allocated to protect and restore the coast, and it will inform future land use decisions. The Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) and the Corps of Engineers are both using the Master Plan to inform their ongoing planning processes. The LRA will use the Master Plan as it considers redevelopment options for south Louisiana through its Louisiana Speaks Initiative, a planning process that will guide the region's recovery and long-term growth. To view the plan visit [http://www.louisianacoastalplanning.org/prelim\\_draft.html](http://www.louisianacoastalplanning.org/prelim_draft.html).

## ***Web Cast of the Community Dialogue on Transportation and Land Use in South Louisiana Now Online***

BATON ROUGE, La. - South Louisiana residents that missed this week's episode of "Louisiana Public Square," which focused on the challenges of land use and transportation in South Louisiana, now have access to view and hear rebroadcasts of the show through a variety of mediums.

Residents can watch the program online anytime by [clicking here](#). (The Web cast is in Windows Media Player format. To download Windows Media Player, [click here](#).) A transcript from the show is also available online [here](#).

The segment was taped before a live studio audience that included residents that are concerned about the critical transportation and land use issues facing the rebuilding of post-hurricane South Louisiana. Main panelists included Andy Kopplin, Executive Director of the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA); Cedric Grant, Deputy Secretary of the Louisiana Dept. of Transportation and Development; Peter Calthorpe, principal of Calthorpe Associates and lead planner for Louisiana Speaks; and Walter Brooks, Executive Director of the New Orleans Regional Planning Commission.

Titled "Gridlock 2050: Transportation and Land Use in South Louisiana," the program features a focused discussion and potential solutions to address traffic congestion, increased capacity on major connecting roads, and other factors limiting our transit between communities. "We have a mission to rebuild South Louisiana safer, stronger and smarter than ever before, and that means we're going to have to plan better too," said Andy Kopplin, LRA Executive Director. "Through forums such as this, the Louisiana Speaks process will enable us to be more strategic with future investments because we can be more responsive to what people really want."

### ***Governor Blanco, Chairman Francis Urge Congressional Delegation to Support GO Zone Extension***

BATON ROUGE, La. - Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco and Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) Chairman Norman C. Francis renewed their push for Louisiana's Congressional Delegation to support extending several key provisions of the Gulf Opportunity Zone (GO Zone) Act of 2005. They are calling on Congress to move this week to address the bonus depreciation, housing rehabilitation and small business assistance programs. And they are urging them to take up additional extensions as soon as the new Congress convenes. Set to expire in 2008, the historic legislation spurred investor confidence and prompted immeasurable economic development and housing rehabilitation investments for the state following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"First and foremost, I want to thank our delegation for their leadership and continued commitment to helping our great state recover from two of the worst disasters in American history," said Governor Blanco. "Now, I am asking for their consideration on this important legislation that provides valuable incentives for economic development and the housing sector."

"The GO Zone has served as a catalyst for billions of dollars in investment, not just in South Louisiana, but across the Gulf Coast region," said Dr. Francis. "We want to continue encouraging the private sector to bring and keep their businesses here - but we need Congress's help to make that happen." Governor Blanco and Dr. Francis today sent a letter to the delegation, asking them to support several provisions, in addition to extending the Bonus Depreciation. The letter can be found [here](#).

### ***An Evaluation of Chemical Contamination in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina***

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, concerns over a potential "toxic gumbo" in New Orleans and concerns for public safety were paramount for state and federal agencies. This concern was evidenced by the unprecedented nature of the investigation of residential floodwater sediment contamination. In [An Evaluation of Chemical Contamination in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina](#), the authors look at the Environmental Protection Agency's residential sediment and soil sampling results and attempt to place these results in the appropriate scientific context, to provide some preliminary

suggestions concerning the lessons learned, and to examine policy issues that have arisen in this situation and that may arise in a future disaster. The authors believe the compressed risk management approach used by EPA may be useful in other large scale contamination events. The report was reproduced by the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality with permission from Daily Environment Report, No. 214, pp. B-1 - B-12 (Nov. 6, 2006). Copyright 2006 by The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc. (800-372-1033) [www.bna.com](http://www.bna.com).

## **Governor Barbour Receives Award**

Governor Barbour has been named the nation's most outstanding governor and a 2006 Public Official of the Year in recognition of his resourcefulness and cool-headed leadership in the face of Hurricane Katrina. The award was given by *Governing* magazine, an independent, Washington, D.C.-based magazine devoted to coverage of state and local government.

"I am honored to receive this award from *Governing* magazine, but Marsha and I feel it is more a tribute to the people of Mississippi because of the character, resilience, courage and selflessness they displayed after Hurricane Katrina," Governor Barbour said. "I graciously accept this award on their behalf."

Governor Barbour is profiled in the November issue of *Governing* for "being straight with the facts about the utter devastation in the area, but also for his own demeanor in public appearances that suggested the state would summon the will to rebuild." The profile, titled "Steady in a Storm," credits Governor Barbour for putting his state on a road to recovery, as evidenced by the prompt reopening of public schools and the unprecedented provision of temporary housing for more than 100,000 residents.

The article also highlights Governor Barbour's erasing of a \$700 million-plus budget deficit without raising taxes, his increase of state spending on K-12 and higher education, boosting job training and economic development programs, and his successful promotion of broad policy changes, including a tort reform measure that has been hailed as one of the most successful in the nation. This year's group of nine recipients of Public Official of the Year 2006 awards represents the thirteenth to be honored in *Governing's* annual awards program, which was launched in 1994.

## **Nation's Second Largest Port Becomes First**

*Houston's Port recommits to premier environmental performance program*

(Dallas, Texas – November 20, 2006) The Port of Houston Authority was recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today for renewing its commitment to implement environmentally beneficial practices that go beyond state and federal regulatory requirements. Houston is the first and only port in the nation to achieve recognition in EPA's Performance Track program. As part of the National Environmental Performance Track program, the port has committed to reduce total water use by 5 percent, non-hazardous waste by 15 percent, emissions of volatile organic compounds by 15 percent, and energy use by 10 percent. It will also construct about 70 acres of valuable wetlands from recycled construction material.

"The Port of Houston Authority charted a new path for others to follow when it became the first port in the nation to join Performance Track three years ago," said Richard E. Greene, EPA Regional Administrator. "They continue to encourage other top companies by showing that environmental stewardship and economic prosperity can go hand-in-hand."

The Performance Track program recognizes facilities that work with their communities, set three-year goals for continuous improvements in environmental performance beyond regulatory compliance, and have internal systems in place to manage their environmental programs. Performance Track facilities must meet all environmental regulatory requirements and make additional commitments to the environment.

“The Port of Houston Authority is committed to taking the lead on environmental initiatives that provide quality of life improvements in neighboring communities, and being a part of the Performance Track Program reinforces this commitment. Our environmental stewardship is embraced by every level of our organization. It is and will continue to be engrained in every thing we do,” said H. Thomas Kornegay, Executive Director for the Port of Houston Authority.

The Port of Houston Authority is also a member of EPA’s innovative clean air program known as the Blue Skyways Collaborative and Clean Ports USA. The Blue Skyways Collaborative is implementing over \$90 million in projects that use innovations in diesel engines, alternative fuels and renewable energy technologies to reduce air emissions along major transportation corridors. Clean Ports USA is an incentive-based, voluntary program designed to reduce emissions from existing diesel engines and nonroad equipment at ports with comprehensive strategies and information for the diverse range of ports and their staff.

The Performance Track program was named as one of 50 top government programs in the country by the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. The recognition was for uniqueness, effectiveness, significance and potential for replication. Since the Performance Track program's inception in 2000, membership has grown to 417 members in 46 states and Puerto Rico, and those members have made 1,500 commitments to benefit the environment. To date, members have collectively reduced their water use by 3.5 billion gallons, cut the equivalent of 88,000 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions, and conserved more than 14,000 acres of land. Performance Track members come from a wide range of industries, such as paper, personal care products, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, resorts and government agencies, among others. More information about the Performance Track program is available at <http://www.epa.gov/region6/6xa/innovation.htm>. More information about the Blue Skyways Collaborative is available at [http://www.epa.gov/region6/6xa/blue\\_skyways\\_collaborative.htm/](http://www.epa.gov/region6/6xa/blue_skyways_collaborative.htm/), and Clean Ports USA at <http://www.epa.gov/cleandiesel/ports/>.

## Other News

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### ***Corps of Engineers Expands Hurricane Protection System Online Format***

NEW ORLEANS— The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mississippi Valley Division, Task Force Hope announced today it has expanded and updated its Hurricane Protection System Web site at [www.mvn.usace.army.mil/hps](http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/hps). The Web site enables all stakeholders, including residents, elected officials, property owners, and the general public, to get the most up-to date information on the hurricane protection system’s ongoing projects through online access.

Expanded information includes the status for all authorized projects. Projects can be found by clicking on the link for the appropriate parish. Project information includes the number of projects and the design, construction and completion status, along with contract progress and upcoming contract solicitations/awards.

The most recent issue of Task Force Hope's Status Report Newsletter is regularly posted under the "Items of Special Interest." "Items of Special Interest" also includes new project photos and levee assessment height maps, as well as links to the volume summaries of the released findings of the Interagency Evaluation Performance Task Force (IPET). The IPET looked at the performance of the hurricane protection system during Hurricane Katrina and evaluated how the system's components performed as part of an integrated system.

Additionally, a virtual media resource center, <http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/hps/mediacenter.htm> is now available online especially for media representatives to have quick access to news releases on Hurricane Protection System projects, Corps contact information and background on projects and Task Force Hope. Users who may have questions after reading the Corps material posted on the site will find contact information for public information officers.

"This Web site enables interested persons to have access to information on subjects ranging from contracting to pumping capacities," said Dan Hitchings, Director, Task Force Hope. "Visitors to the site will be able to examine several complex projects in detail to get a better understanding of the Corps' ongoing hurricane protection work."

## ***U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Publishes Final Environmental Impact Statement for Condominium Projects***

(Daphne, Ala.) – The [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) today published in the Federal Register a Notice of Availability for its final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Beach Club West and Gulf Highlands condominium projects on the Fort Morgan Peninsula of Baldwin County, Alabama.

The final EIS was prepared by the Service to consider possible reaffirmation of the Incidental Take Permits (ITPs) issued to the developers of the two condominium projects in April 2002, and to assure that National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements to assess the significance of the proposed project on environmental factors have been fully met.

At the time the ITPs were originally issued, the Service prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the two projects. Following issuance of the ITPs, a lawsuit was filed challenging the decision and, with guidance from the court, the Service decided that preparation of an EIS was appropriate.

The final EIS takes into account conclusions drawn from an analysis of the cumulative impacts of all development on the Fort Morgan Peninsula in making its recommendations specific to the two condominium complexes. The final EIS was prepared after a careful review and consideration of all comments received during the public comment period.

Under the Endangered Species Act, an Incidental Take Permit may be issued if, after an opportunity for public comment, it is determined that: any taking of a threatened or endangered species will be incidental; the applicant will, to the maximum extent practicable, minimize and mitigate the impacts of such taking; the applicant will ensure that adequate funding for the habitat conservation plan will be provided; and the taking will not appreciably reduce the likelihood of the survival and recovery of the species in the wild.

These are the issuance criteria used by the Service.

Following publication of the final Environmental Impact Statement, the Service will complete documentation related to the applicants' requests for Incidental Take Permits and prepare a Record of Decision (ROD) regarding the permits. The ROD will be signed no sooner than 30 days following publication of today's Notice of Availability of the FEIS in the Federal Register.

You can request a copy of the final EIS by phone at 404-679-4144, by fax at 404-679-7081, by e-mail at [aaron\\_valenta@fws.gov](mailto:aaron_valenta@fws.gov), or by mail at: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-Southeastern Regional Office, 1875 Century Boulevard, Suite 200, Atlanta, GA 30345.

## Energy

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### ***Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Gulf LNG Clean Energy Project***

November 24, 2006

FERC staff prepared a Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Gulf LNG Energy, LLC and Gulf LNG Pipeline, LLC's (Gulf LNG) Gulf LNG Clean Energy Project. The purpose of the LNG Clean Energy Project is to provide a new, long-term, and timely source of natural gas to markets in the United States. To accomplish this purpose, Gulf LNG proposes to construct and operate a new LNG import terminal in the Port of Pascagoula in Jackson County, Mississippi that would include marine facilities for LNG ship unloading, LNG storage, and vaporization. Gulf LNG would also construct a new natural gas sendout pipeline to deliver natural gas to three points of interconnection along the proposed pipeline route. Gulf LNG's proposed facilities would have a maximum sendout capacity of 1.5 billion cubic feet per day of natural gas.

We conclude that, with the use of Gulf LNG's proposed mitigation and adoption of our recommended mitigation measures, construction and operation of the proposed facilities would have limited adverse environmental impact. The impacts would be most significant during the construction period. As part of our analysis, we have developed specific mitigation measures that we believe to be appropriate and reasonable for construction and operation of the proposed project. We believe these measures would substantially reduce the environmental impact of the project. The primary reasons for our decision are:

- The LNG terminal facility would make use of a site previously used for dredged material placement;
- The LNG terminal facility would be located on lands designated for water-dependent industrial development with access to a deep water federal navigation channel;
- Gulf LNG would implement the FERC staff's Plan and Procedures to mitigate impacts on soils, wetlands, and waterbodies;
- Gulf LNG would implement approved Mitigation and Monitoring Plans to minimize and mitigate for impacts on wetlands, essential fish habitat, and Gulf sturgeon;
- Gulf LNG has routed the proposed natural gas sendout pipeline so that it would be collocated with existing facilities to the maximum extent possible;
- Appropriate consultations with the FWS; NMFS; and the MDMR Coastal Management Program could be completed before Gulf LNG would be allowed to begin construction;

- Appropriate safety features would be incorporated into the design and operation of the LNG import terminal and LNG ships;
- Operational controls may be imposed by the local pilots and Coast Guard to direct the movement of LNG ships and security provisions would be imposed to deter attacks by potential terrorists; and
- An environmental inspection and mitigation monitoring program would be implemented to ensure compliance with all mitigation measures that become conditions of any FERC authorization.

FERC Commissioners will take into consideration the staff's recommendations and the Final EIS when they make a decision on the Project. Read the full press release and EIS [online](#).

## ***MMS Issues Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Holds Public Hearings on Proposed Sales for 2007-2012***

Sales Proposed in Western and Central Planning Areas

**NEW ORLEANS** – The Minerals Management Service (MMS) announced the availability of the draft environmental impact statement (EIS) and dates of public hearings on 11 proposed oil and gas lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico. The sales are included in the proposed Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program: 2007 -2012 (5-Year Program). There are five proposed sales in the Western Planning Area (WPA) and six proposed Central Planning Area (CPA) Sales.

The Notice of Availability of the Draft EIS published in the Federal Register opens a 45-day comment period that ends January 2, 2007. Copies of the draft EIS are available through the MMS Gulf of Mexico Region, Public Information Office, or via at the MMS website at <http://www.gomr.mms.gov/homepg/regulate/environ/nepa/nepaprocess.html>.

This EIS provides an environmental analysis of the effects of OCS oil and gas development in the proposed areas. MMS invites Federal, State, and local government agencies, and other interested parties to submit comments on the draft EIS. The preferred method for commenting is electronically using MMS's new Public Connect online commenting system at <https://occonnect.mms.gov>. Comments may also be submitted electronically to the MMS e-mail address: [environment@mms.gov](mailto:environment@mms.gov). Written comments must be enclosed in an envelope labeled "Comments on the Multisale EIS" and mailed (or hand carried) to:

Minerals Management Service  
Regional Supervisor, Leasing and Environment (MS 5410)  
Gulf of Mexico OCS Region  
1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394

In addition, five public hearings will be held in order to give interested parties an opportunity to comment on the draft EIS. The public hearings are scheduled for Houston, TX and Mobile, AL on December 5th, New Orleans, LA and Panama City Beach, FL on December 6th, and Larose, LA on December 7th.

Oral and written statements will be taken at the hearings. Although time limits may be set on oral testimony to allow for all speakers to participate, all written statements submitted at a hearing will be considered part of the hearing record and given equal weight with comments provided via OCS Connect at: <https://occonnect.mms.gov>.

## **States Earn Record \$2.2 Billion in Royalty Receipts**

DENVER – A record \$2.2 billion was distributed to 34 states during Fiscal Year 2006 as part of their share of federal revenues collected by the Department of the Interior’s (DOI) Minerals Management Service (MMS). The MMS is the federal bureau within DOI responsible for collecting, auditing and disbursing revenues associated with mineral leases on Federal and American Indian lands. Disbursements are made to states on a monthly basis as royalties, rents, bonuses and other revenues are collected by MMS. The \$2,210,258,105 distributed to states during the Fiscal Year that ended Sept. 30, 2006, is an increase over Fiscal Year 2005 payments of approximately \$1.7 billion. The disbursements represent the states’ cumulative share of revenues collected from mineral production on Federal lands located within their borders, and from Federal offshore oil and gas tracts adjacent to their shores on the outer continental shelf.

Alabama	\$18,620,175.14
Alaska	\$25,713,481.42
Arizona	\$73,434.85
Arkansas	\$6,825,233.39
California	\$57,523,765.02
Colorado	\$147,194,118.49
Florida	\$143,336.44
Idaho	\$1,256,756.16
Illinois	\$180,912.68
Indiana	\$59.25
Kansas	\$2,457,972.44
Kentucky	\$379,097.05
Louisiana	\$33,242,487.68
Michigan	\$658,765.54
Minnesota	\$15,126.42
Mississippi	\$1,598,916.47
Missouri	\$1,979,893.69
Montana	\$38,236,440.10
Nebraska	\$27,539.36
Nevada	\$8,611,602.24
New Mexico	\$573,425,254.18
North Carolina	\$39.50
North Dakota	\$15,511,698.59
Ohio	\$489,184.98
Oklahoma	\$5,100,262.76
Oregon	\$652,546.75
Pennsylvania	\$92,322.70
South Dakota	\$850,892.44
Texas	\$22,049,461.76
Utah	\$173,074,712.94
Virginia	\$217,103.32
Washington	\$1,081,923.29
West Virginia	\$494,294.56
Wyoming	<u>\$1,072,479,293.75</u>
Total	\$2,210,258,105.35

## Training and Conferences

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### ***State of the Bay 2007 Educator Summit: Teaching Science using our Bay System as an Integrating Context***

**January 23-25, 2007**

The Galveston Bay Estuary Program and [Galveston Bay Watershed Academic Partnership](#) are pleased to announce the State of the Bay 2007 Educator Summit.

- On-site workshops - January 23, 2007 at the Hilton Galveston Island Resort
- Eighth Biennial State of the Bay Symposium education-focused sessions - January 24, 2007 at the Galveston Island Convention Center at the San Luis Resort
- Field workshops - January 25, 2007 at the Armand Bayou Nature Center and Waterborne Education Center

#### ***Who should attend?***

4<sup>th</sup> grade – 12<sup>th</sup> grade science teachers, science department chairs, & district science coordinators.

#### ***Purpose***

To share ideas, gather resources, and receive training on methods for teaching science concepts using the Galveston Bay system as an integrating context.

#### ***Agenda***

On-site workshops - January 23, 2007 from 9:00AM – 4:30PM at the at the at the [Hilton Galveston Island Resort](#)

Project WET - provided by the Environmental Institute of Houston (6 hours)

Project WILD Aquatic - provided by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (6 hours)

Wonders of Wetlands - provided by Environmental Institute of Houston (3 hours)

Aquatic Sampling - provided by Galveston Bay Watershed Academic Partnership (3 hours)

**[Eighth Biennial State of the Bay Symposium Education- Focused Sessions - January 24, 2007 from 8:30AM – 5:00PM](#)** at the Galveston Island Convention Center at the San Luis Resort

Presentations, discussions, and panels on integrating bay science concepts into the curriculum, successful projects, and opportunities for collaboration. Exhibit hall with academics, non-profit organizations, and commercial vendors sharing information on projects and opportunities for students.

**Field workshops** - January 25, 2007 (*transportation to workshops on your own*)

[Armand Bayou Nature Center's](#) Bayou and Prairie Field Workshop, 8500 Bay Area Boulevard, Pasadena from 9:00AM-12:30PM. *Limit 24 passengers.*

A hands-on exploration of the Trinity River Delta – provided by the [Waterborne Education Center](#) and sponsored by the Chambers-Liberty Counties Navigation District, 810 Miller Street, Anahuac from 9:30AM-2:30PM. *Lunch provided. Limit 50 passengers.*

#### **Other**

Networking Luncheons will be provided on January 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>. Field *and* classroom resources including posters, books, and educational CDs. SBEC credit for educators will be available for participation in the workshops, symposium, and field workshops!

### ***Cost and Registration***

There are two options to choose from:

Option 1: Educator Summit Package - all the above, including registration for [Eighth Biennial of the Bay Symposium](#) plenary and concurrent sessions on January 24<sup>th</sup>, for the early registration fee of only \$100! NOTE: early registration deadline is January 12, 2007. Late registration after January 12, 2007 is \$125.

Option 2: Workshop Only Package – January 23<sup>rd</sup> on-site workshops and January 25<sup>th</sup> field workshops only, for \$50. Late registration after January 12, 2007 is \$75.

You must first register for the event. Register over the Internet using [Texas Online](#). You will be able to register on-site with a check or credit card, but you will have to pay the late registration fee. Mail-in registration forms will be available soon. Then, reserve your on-site workshop and field workshop spaces by contacting Brent Stafford at 713-743-4267 or e-mail [brentstafford@gmail.com](mailto:brentstafford@gmail.com); space is limited.

NOTE: Field workshops are available only to Educator Summit attendees; space is limited. Transportation to the field workshop site is on your own. Prepare for weather conditions, mud, and insects. Field workshops are subject to cancellation if attendance is inadequate.

### ***Accommodations***

The [Hilton Galveston Island Resort](#) is offering sleeping rooms the nights of January 22-25 at a rate of \$85+tax/night. *Please note: the deadline for this rate is December 23, 2006.*

#### *Reserve via phone:*

1. Call 1-800-475-3386 or 409-744-5000.
2. Ask for the State of the Bay Symposium (SOB) rate.

#### *Reserve online:*

1. Go to [www.hilton.com](http://www.hilton.com)
2. Under the "Find a Hotel by City" tab, enter "Galveston, TX" and your check-in and check-out dates (any dates from January 22-25).
3. On the resulting page, under the "Hilton Galveston Island Resort" section, click on the "View Rates" button.
4. On the resulting page, scroll down until you see the "Special Accounts" section. In the group/convention code field, enter "SOB" and click the "Continue" button.
5. Follow the remaining instructions to book your room.

### ***Contact for more information***

Brent Stafford  
Galveston Bay Watershed Academic Partnership  
Phone: (713) 743-4267  
E-mail: [brentstafford@gmail.com](mailto:brentstafford@gmail.com)

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## **Center for Natural Resource Economics & Policy Announces Call for Abstracts**

The Center for Natural Resource Economics and Policy (CNREP) is announcing a Call for Abstracts for CNREP 2007: Challenges of Natural Resource Economics & Policy, the 2nd National Forum on Socioeconomic Research in Coastal Systems.

The conference is scheduled for May 20-23, 2007, in New Orleans, Louisiana. The conference focus will include opportunities and challenges of socioeconomic research in developing coastal zone management policy. Potential session topics include, but are not limited to, market and nonmarket valuation of coastal resources, environmental benefit-cost analyses, economic linkage/impact assessment, input-output modeling, and comparative assessments of resource management and restoration policy.

Basic and applied research, extension-oriented, and policy discussion submissions are all welcome.

The deadline for abstract submission is February 15, 2007.

For more information, go to: <http://www.cnrep.lsu.edu/2007/abstracts.htm>  
[www.CNREP.lsu.edu](http://www.CNREP.lsu.edu)

Did you find this edition useful? Please send suggestions, comments, and new items for publication to [Laurie.Rounds@noaa.gov](mailto:Laurie.Rounds@noaa.gov)

