

# Gulf of Mexico News



NOAA Ocean Service, Office of Ocean & Coastal Resource Management

February 2007

<i>NOAA Gulf of Mexico News</i> .....	3
<b>Hypoxia Summit Results in Strategy to Develop a Long-term Monitoring/Observation Plan for Improved Management of the Gulf of Mexico “Dead Zone”</b> .....	3
<b>Volunteer Algal Observing Program Provides Unique Opportunity</b> .....	3
<b>GIS Land Cover and Change Maps are Available for Gulf of Mexico</b> .....	4
<b>NCCOS Improves NOAA Imagery to Advance Gulf of Mexico Alliance and U.S. Ocean Action Plan</b> .....	4
<b>La Niña May Soon Arrive</b> .....	4
<b>New Severe Storm Tide Station Sites Identified for the Gulf Coast</b> .....	5
<b>Assessment to Raise Awareness of Apparent Worldwide Sea Grass Decline</b> .....	5
<b>Persistent Contaminants Found in Plasma of Bottlenose Dolphins May Pose a Dolphin Health Risk</b> .....	6
<b>Optimization of Toxin Detection Method for Dolphin Blood Improves Quality Assurance for Analysis of Florida Red Tide Events</b> .....	6
<b>OR&amp;R Trains U.S. Coast Guard for Spill Response</b> .....	6
<b>Completed NCCOS Study on Blasting and Pile Driving Advances “One NOAA” Success in Ecosystem Management</b> .....	6
<b>NCDDC Announces Partnership with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission</b> .....	7
<b>Seafood Consumption Declines Slightly in 2005</b> .....	7
<b>NOAA Actions Helping to Keep Seafood on Your Table</b> .....	8
<b>NOAA Fisheries Service Begins Process to End Overfishing by 2010</b> .....	8
<b>National Sea Grant Law Center Announces 2007 Grant Winners</b> .....	9
<i>In the Gulf States</i> .....	10
<b>Alabama Forever Wild Program Makes Additional Public Land Purchases</b> .....	10

<b>Governor Riley, Commissioner Sparks Form Alternative Energy Committee .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Rookery Bay Offers Audio Tour at Environmental Learning Center.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Florida Reaches Everglades Land Acquisition Milestone.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Project Greenshores Provides Outdoor Classroom.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Louisiana DNR Announces Next Steps to CIAP Plan Approval.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Louisiana Speaks Begins Distributing Planning Toolkit.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Mississippi DMR and Oyster Harvesters Work to Repair Reefs .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Six Marine Debris Removal Projects Complete, Marine Debris Mapping Web Site Launched... </b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Mississippi DMR to Deploy Limestone Reefs South of Horn Island .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Realtors Can Earn Continuing Education Credits by Attending Smart Growth Conference .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Marine Habitat Placemats Available Free to Coast Restaurants.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Mississippi Alternative Housing Program.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>GLO Launches Web Site Providing Information on Texas Coastal Resources.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Land Office Awards Texas' First Geothermal Lease.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Galveston FeatherFest 2007: Thurs. March 29 through Sun. April 1 .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Shore Protection for Port Aransas Nature Preserve on the Way.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Winter Texans Haul Nearly 3 Tons of Trash Off South Padre Island .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Nearly 6 Tons of Trash Hauled Off During Winter Cleanup.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b><i>Energy</i>.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>    Farming a New Industry for Louisiana and the Nation.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b><i>Training and Conferences</i> .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>    Hypoxia Workshop to Be Held in Bay St Louis in March .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>    Global Climate Change: The Status of Science and Implications for Coastal Louisiana .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>    Gulf Coast Floods Recovery: Mission Mitigation.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>    2007 National Hurricane Conference .....</b>	<b>26</b>

## NOAA Gulf of Mexico News

---

### ***Hypoxia Summit Results in Strategy to Develop a Long-term Monitoring/Observation Plan for Improved Management of the Gulf of Mexico “Dead Zone”***

At the [National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science \(NCCOS\)-sponsored \*Summit on Long-Term Monitoring of the Gulf of Mexico Hypoxic Zone: Developing the Implementation Plan for an Operational Observation System\*](#), NOAA Leadership met alongside scientists and resource managers to develop a long-term comprehensive monitoring plan for the Gulf of Mexico “dead zone.” The goals of the Implementation Plan are to (1) improve measurement of the size of the hypoxic zone (the key goal of the [Action Plan](#)), (2) support further research on its causes and impacts, and (3) advance the development of a hypoxia observation system as part of the Integrated Ocean Observing System and Gulf of Mexico Coastal Ocean Observing System. The meeting was held on January 30-31, 2007 in Stennis, Mississippi. Over the past decade, NCCOS-supported research has provided monitoring data that have served as the basis for the current Action Plan, now marking a transition to operational status. For more information, please contact [Alan.Lewitus@noaa.gov](mailto:Alan.Lewitus@noaa.gov).

### ***Volunteer Algal Observing Program Provides Unique Opportunity***

The National Coastal Data Development Center (NCDDC) and the Northern Gulf Institute hosted the first Southeast Phytoplankton Monitoring Network (SEPMN) training at Stennis Space Center, February 6, 2007. Participants in this hands-on session included staff from Mississippi State University, Louisiana State University, Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, Environmental Protection Agency Gulf of Mexico Program and NCDDC. Training included a plankton tow from a dock and then viewing the results under a microscope to search for common phytoplankton.

Marine phytoplankton are single-celled, microscopic organisms living in the ocean. While they are usually very beneficial to the environment and other animals, harmful algae blooms cause an estimated \$100 million dollar loss per year in the United States. Human health can also be impacted from harmful algal blooms. There are about 50 known species of phytoplankton that produce a toxin, and humans can contract illnesses from eating contaminated shellfish and fish.

SEPMN is a volunteer observing program made up of schools, organizations, and the general public trained to monitor and sample algal blooms (to include training in microscopy and photography) and forward collections to Coastal Center for Biomolecular Health and Research (CCEHBR) Charleston, South Carolina for verification and validation into a national data base. The link SEPMN provides fosters a more informed public while providing qualitative data to scientists. Anyone can become a SEPMN volunteer, either as an individual or as a group. For further information on this unique program, visit [www.chbr.noaa.gov/PMN](http://www.chbr.noaa.gov/PMN).

## ***GIS Land Cover and Change Maps are Available for Gulf of Mexico***

New GIS land cover and change maps are available, free of charge. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Coastal Services Center (CSC) seeks to complement existing data in your region by providing these land cover maps, circa 2005, for the northern Gulf of Mexico. The NOAA Coastal Services Center previously announced the availability of 1996, 2001, and 1996-2001 change maps for the northern Gulf of Mexico and the 2005 land cover is a follow-up to this effort. Land cover and land cover change information, circa 1996 and 2001, will be completed for northern Florida by the summer of 2007. The land cover maps available for this region can be downloaded from the following [www.csc.noaa.gov/crs/lca/gulfcoast.html](http://www.csc.noaa.gov/crs/lca/gulfcoast.html). Contact [Susan Fox](#) for more information.

## ***NCCOS Improves NOAA Imagery to Advance Gulf of Mexico Alliance and U.S. Ocean Action Plan***

Scientists from the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS), working with the northern Gulf of Mexico Cooperative Institute (NGOM-CI), have improved spatial accuracy of NOAA CoastWatch Advanced Very High Resolution Radiometry and Sea Surface Temperature images, 1994 to 2006, for determining impacts of hurricanes and supporting integrated assessments for Gulf of Mexico coastal waters. A new procedure reported by NCCOS in 2006 was applied to reduce error as large as 10 km in images prior to 2004 to an average less than 1 km for use in collaboration with partners of the NGOM-CI, a non-governmental organization funded by NOAA. The NGOM-CI is a cornerstone of NOAA's commitment to the Gulf of Mexico Alliance and response to the U.S. Ocean Action Plan to support coastal management needs through coordinated research efforts in the northern Gulf of Mexico. For more information, contact [Erik Davenport](#).

## ***La Niña May Soon Arrive***

On the heels of El Niño, its opposite, La Niña may soon arrive. In a weekly update, scientists at NOAA's Climate Prediction Center noted that as the 2006-2007 El Niño faded, surface and subsurface ocean temperatures have rapidly decreased. Recently, cooler-than-normal water temperatures have developed at the surface in the east-central equatorial Pacific, indicating a possible transition to La Niña conditions. Typically, during the U.S. spring and summer months, La Niña conditions do not significantly impact overall inland temperature and precipitation patterns, however, La Niña episodes often do have an effect on Atlantic and Pacific hurricane activity.

“Although other scientific factors affect the frequency of hurricanes, there tends to be a greater-than-normal number of Atlantic hurricanes and fewer-than-normal number of eastern Pacific hurricanes during La Niña events,” said retired Navy Vice Adm. [Conrad C. Lautenbacher](#), Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. “During the winter, usual La Niña impacts include drier and warmer-than-average conditions over the southern United States.

“NOAA's ability to detect and monitor the formation, duration and strength of El Niño and La Niña events is enhanced by continuous improvements in satellite and buoy observations in the equatorial Pacific,” Lautenbacher added. “These observing systems include the TAO/TRITON moored and Argo drift buoys, as well as NOAA's polar orbiting satellites.”

La Niña conditions occur when ocean surface temperatures in the central and east-central equatorial Pacific become cooler than normal. These changes affect tropical rainfall patterns and atmospheric winds over the Pacific Ocean, which influence the patterns of rainfall and temperatures in many areas worldwide. “La Niña events sometimes follow on the heels of El Niño conditions,” said Dr. Vernon Kousky, research meteorologist at NOAA’s [Climate Prediction Center](#). “It is a naturally occurring phenomenon that can last up to three years. La Niña episodes tend to develop during March-June, reach peak intensity during December-February, and then weaken during the following March-May.

“The last lengthy La Niña event was 1998-2001, which contributed to serious drought conditions in many sections of the western U.S.,” said Douglas Lecomte, NOAA’s Climate Prediction Center drought specialist. NOAA will issue the U.S. Spring Outlook on March 15, and its Atlantic Hurricane Season Outlook in May. Both outlooks will reflect the most current La Niña forecast. “While the status of El Niño/La Niña is of vital importance to our seasonal forecasts, it is but one measure we use when making actual temperature and precipitation forecasts,” said Kousky.

On the Web:

Weekly Updates & Diagnostic Discussions

[http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis\\_monitoring/enso\\_advisory/index.shtml](http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis_monitoring/enso_advisory/index.shtml)

Climate Prediction Center’s ENSO Page

<http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/precip/CWlink/MJO/enso.shtml>

## ***New Severe Storm Tide Station Sites Identified for the Gulf Coast***

A field team from the [Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services](#), working with the [Office of Coast Survey](#), state and local authorities, and pilots, completed field work last week to identify specific sites for the installation of five new NOAA tide stations designed to withstand severe storm and storm-surge conditions. The plan is to install the new stations at sites in Mississippi and Louisiana. In the coming months, a report and graphics showing the plots of the new stations will be developed, as will updates on the stations' construction and installation. The target date to complete installation is June 2007. For more information, contact [Bruce.Servary@noaa.gov](mailto:Bruce.Servary@noaa.gov).

## ***Assessment to Raise Awareness of Apparent Worldwide Sea Grass Decline***

The National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science, in collaboration with sea-grass experts from around the world, have found that 65 percent of sea-grass abundance investigations worldwide show declines in the resource, with an accelerating rate of decline evident in the most recent studies. The findings were analyzed as part of an international workshop funded by the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis at the University of California-Santa Barbara. The project will further examine regional trends to evaluate the correlation between sea-grass changes and environmental and human stressors, and will strive to inform resource managers and the public. The project has access to the largest data set ever compiled on the global distribution and abundance of sea grasses. For more information, contact [Jud Kenworthy](#).

## ***Persistent Contaminants Found in Plasma of Bottlenose Dolphins May Pose a Dolphin Health Risk***

The National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science and research partners found polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and hydroxylated (OH)-PCBs in plasma of bottlenose dolphins from the Western Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. Since the profile of PCB contamination was similar among the sites, dolphins may be exposed to similar mixtures of PCBs or have similar biotransformation processes which lead to the formation of OH-PCBs. This is a concern as OH-PCBs in biological samples have molecular structures very similar to thyroid hormones which could affect normal thyroid function. These results indicate that OH-PCBs are important environmental contaminants in dolphins and suggest that decades after the production ban in the U.S., PCBs may still pose a threat to wildlife. For more information, please contact Pat Fair at [Pat.Fair@noaa.gov](mailto:Pat.Fair@noaa.gov).

## ***Optimization of Toxin Detection Method for Dolphin Blood Improves Quality Assurance for Analysis of Florida Red Tide Events***

Scientists from the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science and AgResearch Ltd. (New Zealand) have optimized methods to detect brevetoxin in dolphin blood in field samples from areas susceptible to red tide events. The improved methodology, published in *Environmental Science and Technology*, consists of new techniques to both improve detection limits ten-fold and eliminate sample interference. The method is also the first to be ground-truthed for the two most common metabolites of brevetoxin found in dolphins. This is the first toxin identification technique to be systematically quality assured for dolphin samples and is currently being used to support multiple organizations in the Gulf of Mexico that monitor both live capture dolphins and those stranded in association with red tides. For further information, please contact [John Ramsdell](mailto:John.Ramsdell@noaa.gov).

## ***OR&R Trains U.S. Coast Guard for Spill Response***

U.S. Coast Guard spill response specialists in New Orleans and Houston received training from NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration (OR&R) emergency response specialists in the use of Computer-Aided Management of Emergency Response (CAMEO) Chemicals. CAMEO Chemicals is a new online version of the chemical library from OR&R's CAMEO software, used by first responders throughout the U.S. and around the world. Course participants learned to access chemical data sheets, identify chemicals, predict their reactivity, assess their hazards, manage their response data, and their responses to spilled chemicals using the Chemical Response Tool, an online response encyclopedia and decision aid designed specifically for the Coast Guard. Within two hours after the completion of the training course in New Orleans, participants used the new Web sites to respond to a spill of a hazardous acid into the Mississippi River. For more information, contact [David Wesley](mailto:David.Wesley@noaa.gov) or [Mark Miller](mailto:Mark.Miller@noaa.gov).

## ***Completed NCCOS Study on Blasting and Pile Driving Advances "One NOAA" Success in Ecosystem Management***

A National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science study has determined the impact of pressure waves emanating from operations such as submarine detonations for dredging and pile driving for docks and piers on larval fishes and adjacent ecosystems. The findings have been discussed with National Marine

Fisheries Service (NMFS) and other coastal managers, advancing a “One NOAA” success in ecosystem management. The information is in a utilitarian form to aid NOAA managers in estimating consequences of such operations on fishes, habitat destruction and restoration activities, which will result in sound management decisions. For more information, please contact [Jeff Govoni](#).

## ***NCDDC Announces Partnership with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission***

NOAA’s National Coastal Data Development Center (NCDDC) announced on February 5, 2007 the formation of a new partnership with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). After an extensive trial period, the FWC adopted NCDDC’s Metadata Enterprise Resource Management Aid (MERMAid) as their organizational Web-based Metadata Management System. NCDDC, located at Stennis Space Center in Mississippi, is a division of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) National Oceanic Data Center.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), headquartered in Tallahassee, Florida, is the regulatory and executive power of the state with respect to wild animal life and fresh water aquatic life. FWC has more than a decade of metadata experience with over 1,000 records currently managed. MERMAid allows these records to be managed via the internet and accessible from multiple sources. The user’s ability to access data and information is at the core of NCDDC’s mission, and NCDDC will be working closely with FWC to optimize this data sharing opportunity.

NCDDC developed a secure internet-based software tool to create, validate, manage, and publish metadata records. This tool, known as MERMAid, has gained broad community acceptance and is offered free of charge (<http://www.ncddc.noaa.gov/Metadata>). Successfully validated records are compliant with the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) Content Standard for Digital Geospatial Metadata (CSDGM) in accordance with Executive Order 12906. FGDC validation is significant because validated metadata records can be published as part of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) which facilitates data discovery and access. Where appropriate, MERMAid publishes the metadata record to the NCDDC Catalog. From here, the NSDI FGDC Clearinghouse indexes the record, making it searchable through the Clearinghouse metadata search engine. The published record is also harvested by the Geospatial One-Stop (GOS) using a Z39.50 server; this process makes the record discoverable from multiple sources. For more information contact [Russ.Beard@noaa.gov](mailto:Russ.Beard@noaa.gov).

## ***Seafood Consumption Declines Slightly in 2005***

Americans ate 16.2 pounds of fish and shellfish per person in 2005, a two percent decrease from the 2004 consumption figure of 16.6 pounds. Despite the decline in consumption, consumer expenditures for seafood products increased by \$3.3 billion, representing a five percent increase for a total of \$65.2 billion. The commercial marine fishing industry contributed \$32.9 billion to the U.S. Gross National Product in 2005, up from \$31.6 billion in 2004. In 2005, Americans spent \$44.5 billion in seafood restaurants, a \$1.7 billion increase over 2004. Americans purchased \$20.5 billion worth of seafood for home consumption, an increase of \$1.6 billion over 2004. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration released the statistics today in the 2005 edition of its annual publication, “[Fisheries of the United States](#).”

Despite the slight decrease in 2005, overall seafood consumption in the United States has trended upwards in the past five years: In 2001 the consumption rate was 14.8 pounds, in 2002 it was 15.6 pounds, and in 2003 it was 16.3 pounds. Americans consumed a total of 4.8 billion pounds of seafood in

2005. The nation still imports roughly 80 percent of its seafood, and remains the third largest global consumer of fish and shellfish, behind Japan and China. “The seafood industry continues to be big business in the United States,” said [Bill Hogarth](#), director of [NOAA Fisheries Service](#). “Seafood remains a favorite food choice among Americans due to its high value for nutrition and health.”

Of the total 16.2 pounds consumed per person, 11.6 pounds were fresh and frozen finfish and shellfish, down 0.2 pounds from last year. Canned seafood consumption dropped 0.2 pounds to 4.3 pounds per capita. A record figure was consumption of fillets and steaks, up 0.4 pounds to 5.0 pounds per person. Canned tuna consumption fell 0.2 pounds to 3.1 pounds per person.

Shrimp continues to be the top consumed seafood in the United States at 4.1 pounds of shrimp consumed in 2005, down 0.1 pounds from 2004. In 2005, shrimp exports increased by 27 million pounds, for a 10-year record high of shrimp exports at 95.5 million pounds, while shrimp imports decreased by 53 million pounds. Both statistics are calculated based on a heads-off basis.

NOAA Fisheries Service’s calculation of per capita consumption is based on a “disappearance” model. The total U.S. supply is calculated as the sum of imports and landings minus exports, converted to edible weight. This total is divided by the total U.S. population to estimate per capita consumption. NOAA Fisheries Service has been calculating the nation’s seafood consumption rates since 1910 to keep consumers and the industry informed. This information is published every year in the NOAA Fisheries Service annual report, “Fisheries of the United States.”

## ***NOAA Actions Helping to Keep Seafood on Your Table***

If you’ve followed the recent media blitz about the state of the oceans’ fish, it’s easy to understand why you might be concerned about the health of America’s seafood supply. Conscientious seafood consumers face unparalleled challenges when deciding what to eat. Even the savvy consumer will have a tough time sorting through the vast array of conflicting, often misleading information available through news articles, environmental campaigns and other special interest forums. People often ask NOAA: is seafood safe and healthy to eat, and if they eat fish, will it contribute to depletion of the species and environmental problems? As the government agency responsible for monitoring and regulating the seafood industry and America’s marine fish populations, NOAA can help consumers find credible, unbiased, up-to-date facts and make informed decisions about seafood choices. The full story is available [online](#).

## ***NOAA Fisheries Service Begins Process to End Overfishing by 2010***

New Magnuson-Stevens Act First Step to Implementation / Comments Sought

NOAA Fisheries Service has begun the process of developing new guidance to assist regional fishery management councils in developing measures to end overfishing in all U.S. commercial and recreational fisheries by 2010. This deadline is a new requirement under the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 2006. NOAA provides guidelines to facilitate consistent application of the law’s 10 national standards among the nation’s fishery managers. This action would modify the guidelines for National Standard 1 of the Act, also known as the “overfishing standard.”

Overfishing still occurs at various levels in 48 fisheries in U.S. waters, although NOAA has significantly improved the situation in recent years. The highest priority in the Magnuson-Stevens Act reauthorization was to strengthen the Act to ensure an end to overfishing. The U.S. Ocean Action Plan also called for expansion of market-based management systems, improved recreational data, and the use of peer-

reviewed science in resource management decisions. Initial funding for these activities is included in the 2008 budget request for NOAA Fisheries Service.

“The President is determined to stop overfishing and rebuild the nation’s marine fisheries to sustainable levels to maximize their economic and environmental benefit to the nation,” said [Bill Hogarth](#), director of NOAA Fisheries Service. “We are pleased that Congress gave us new tools to end all overfishing and we look forward to continued support in the 2008 budget process.”

To end overfishing and prevent it from occurring in the future, the new law requires all fisheries to be regulated under annual catch limits, with accountability measures to ensure that catches do not exceed the limit. The new law also elevates the importance of following scientific advice in fishery management decisions, so the new guidelines for National Standard 1 will address the role of science in establishing annual harvest caps.

The public is offered this opportunity to discuss these issues and provide comment on how the nation can meet the law’s new mandates. Upon consideration of public input that NOAA receives during this scoping period, the agency will develop a proposal for specific regulations, and then will hold another public comment period. The agency aims to finalize the modified National Standard 1 guidelines by the end of 2007.

An initial public scoping meeting will be held March 9, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at 1315 East-West Highway, Room 4527, Silver Spring, Md. Additional public scoping meetings will be set in the near future. Written comments may be emailed to: [annual.catch.limitDEIS@noaa.gov](mailto:annual.catch.limitDEIS@noaa.gov); faxed to: (301) 713-1193; or mailed to: Mark Millikin, NOAA/NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway; Silver Spring, MD 20910. The deadline for comments is April 2, 2007. Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorized Act of 2006: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/msa2007>.

## ***National Sea Grant Law Center Announces 2007 Grant Winners***

OXFORD, Miss. -- The National Sea Grant Law Center has awarded \$550,000 in competitive grants for legal research and outreach projects as part of the center’s 2007 grant competition.

The 11 projects selected for funding address marine issues relevant to the National Sea Grant Program’s mission of conducting research, education, training and extension projects to foster environmental stewardship, long-term economic development and responsible use of America’s coastal, ocean and Great Lakes resources.

The grant competition program is funded by the National Sea Grant College Program and administered by the National Sea Grant Law Center at The University of Mississippi. Funded projects will develop courses to improve understanding of wetlands and fisheries laws; study the governance structure of the new Northwest Hawaiian Islands National Monument, working waterfront laws in Maine and the public trust doctrine in South Carolina; and organize workshops on cooperative harvesting agreements and community-based management.

This year’s grant competition attracted applicants from universities, nonprofit organizations, commercial organizations and state governments. The Law Center received 28 full proposals seeking over \$1.7 million in funding. Stephanie Showalter, director of the National Sea Grant Law Center, was impressed with the number and quality of the received proposals. “The overwhelming response to our grant competition underscores the great need for non-advocacy legal research and training to help coastal managers and the public understand and utilize existing legal frameworks designed to protect fragile

coastal resources,” she said. The National Sea Grant Law Center was founded in 2002 to provide legal research and outreach services to the Sea Grant community and its constituents. The Law Center conducts research on coastal and marine laws and policies, organizes Continuing Legal Education classes and other training courses, and disseminates information to coastal and ocean policymakers.

A full list of the funded projects is available [online](#).

**Southeast/Gulf of Mexico:**

Braxton Davis, South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, *Examining the Evolving Public Trust in South Carolina*, \$26,545.

Richard McLaughlin, Texas A&M University Corpus Christi, *Legal, Policy, and Management Strategies for Effective Stewardship of the Gulf of Mexico: Developing a Consortium for an Adaptive Management Strategy*, \$75,000.

## In the Gulf States

---

### ***Alabama Forever Wild Program Makes Additional Public Land Purchases***

February 23, 2007

Two tracts of ecologically sensitive property were recently purchased through the Forever Wild Program and the State Lands Division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

In Mobile County, a 1,642-acre tract in the Grand Bay Savannah was purchased adjacent to existing Forever Wild property, which now totals 5,000 acres. “This is a unique wetlands,” said Greg Lein of the State Lands Division. “It’s a pine savannah with the largest pitcher plant bog complex in the state of Alabama. The Grand Bay Savannah is a very popular area for the Coastal Birding Trail.” Lein said the majority of the money for the Grand Bay purchase was provided through a \$1 million grant from the National Coastal Wetlands Program through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The other tract recently purchased was 9,304 acres in Baldwin County currently in the Perdido River Wildlife Management Area, an 18,000-acre tract with 15 miles of frontage on the Perdido River. “This secures a large block of contiguous habitat along the river and the Highway 112 corridor,” Lein said. “This is currently mainly pine plantation that will be converted to its native longleaf pine habitat. The tract also provides habitat for the Atlantic white cedar along the river banks, the gopher tortoise and the indigo snake.”

Grants from the Coastal Impact Assistance Program and Coastal Estuarine Land Conservation Program, both administered by NOAA and the U.S. Department of Commerce, were used to purchase the Perdido property. The Nature Conservancy, which held the 9,304-acre tract until Forever Wild could purchase the land, owns an additional 5,000 acres in the Perdido River WMA. Lein said the division is exploring options to obtain federal funds to purchase the remaining acreage in 2007. The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources promotes wise stewardship, management and enjoyment of Alabama’s natural resources through five divisions: Marine Police, Marine Resources, State Parks, State Lands, and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries.

## **Governor Riley, Commissioner Sparks Form Alternative Energy Committee**

MONTGOMERY – Governor Bob Riley and Commissioner Ron Sparks of the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries on Monday announced they have jointly formed a committee charged with developing a comprehensive alternative energy policy for the state. The Alabama Alternative Energy Committee is made up of energy experts and leaders from the state’s universities, forestry and agriculture sectors, manufacturers, energy providers, and state and local government officials.

“This bipartisan alliance will work to find common ground on proposals that promote homegrown sources of energy,” Governor Riley said. “We are eager to advance the development of renewable energy resources that help secure our energy future and also provide an opportunity for rural economic development in Alabama.”

“Alabama is one of the few states in the U.S. without a formal energy policy,” said Commissioner Sparks. “This committee will ensure that we are heading in the right direction. Not only does producing fuel right here in Alabama help our farmers by creating a demand for their products, it will also allow us to become less dependent on foreign oil.”

In Plan 2010, which he unveiled last fall, Governor Riley said he wanted to encourage the commercial development and private use of alternative fuels in Alabama. Commissioner Sparks created the Center for Alternative Fuels within the state agriculture department, which is focused on promoting the development and usage of alternative fuels.

The committee will make recommendations that can be implemented by executive order from the Governor and new laws passed by the Legislature. The committee currently has about 65 members, but it could grow if others express an interest in joining, Governor Riley said.

## **Rookery Bay Offers Audio Tour at Environmental Learning Center**

--New device provides self-guided experience for visitors--

NAPLES – Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) recently added an audio tour to the reserve’s Environmental Learning Center. The tour guides visitors through the exhibit hall while providing detailed information about research and stewardship efforts at the reserve. “We are pleased to include the guided audio tour to the educational opportunities available at the Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center,” said Rookery Bay NERR Education Coordinator Randy McCormick. “The tour brings the center’s exhibits to life and heightens each visitor’s experience.”

The audio tour consists of a series of professional narrations and interviews with reserve staff recorded on a listening wand. Visitors are invited to take a wand with them as they navigate the exhibit hall, directed by signs prompting audio use. Ten wands have been put into use at the center to date and more are likely to be added soon due to overwhelming acceptance by visitors.

Rookery Bay was established 28 years ago as a partnership between the State of Florida and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The reserve is one of 27 research reserves operating across the nation. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection manages Rookery Bay along with 44 other sites that include aquatic preserves, National Estuarine Research Reserves and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. The Reserve’s programs are designed to help Floridians better understand and protect

the State's resources through research, education and preservation. For information about Rookery Bay or Florida's estuaries, visit [www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/). For more about the Friends of Rookery Bay, visit [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org).

## ***Florida Reaches Everglades Land Acquisition Milestone***

--More than 124,000 acres for the Acceler8 initiative set aside

WEST PALM BEACH - As environmental leaders celebrate Florida Forever Day in Tallahassee, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) announced that the state has acquired more than 99 percent of the land needed to complete Acceler8 – Florida's initiative to speed up eight vital Everglades restoration projects. To date, Florida has invested more than \$744 million to acquire more than 124,000 acres to complete critical restoration projects over seven years. "Land acquisition is essential to complete the largest environmental restoration project in the nation," said Governor Charlie Crist. "By moving forward aggressively to acquire the remaining land, we are reaffirming Florida's commitment to the restoration of America's Everglades."

Governor Charlie Crist has made Everglades restoration a priority for the Fiscal Year 2007-08 budget by recommending \$100 million for the Save Our Everglades Trust Fund, \$50 million for the restoration of Lake Okeechobee as well as \$40 million to protect the health of the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries.

Announced 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 a decade ahead of schedule. Six of the eight Acceler8 projects are already underway, such as the C-44 St. Lucie Canal Reservoir/Stormwater Treatment Area, the Acme Basin B Discharge Project and the Everglades Agricultural Area Reservoir.

"Restoring the Everglades is a massive program covering hundreds of thousands of acres, and it is critical to secure the land needed at a fair price," said DEP Secretary Michael W. Sole. "The vast effort by the State and South Florida Water Management District to acquire land quickly is advancing restoration and leading to the long-term recovery of America's Everglades."

In addition, more than 200,000 acres have been acquired – or 55 percent of the land needed – to implement the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), the state-federal partnership forged to restore America's Everglades. Of that, the SFWMD has acquired more than 199,000 acres, or approximately 52 percent of the total needed, with state financial assistance of approximately \$740 million from the Save Our Everglades Trust Fund.

For the past two years, the State purchased an average of more than 23,000 acres annually to ensure the success of the projects. Since 2001, the State of Florida has allocated more than \$1 billion towards land acquisition. Other Everglades land acquisition milestones in 2006 include: A 12,000-acre purchase, made by the SFWMD in conjunction with Martin County, to construct the C-44 (St. Lucie Canal) Reservoir and Stormwater Treatment Area. This Acceler8 initiative will capture and treat runoff from the 116,516-acre C-44 basin in Martin County, decreasing flows into the St. Lucie Estuary and improving water quality.

Completion of the total 102,061-acre land acquisition needed to finish the Kissimmee River Restoration. The SFWMD also celebrated the successful completion of a decade-long negotiation with Lykes

Brothers, Inc, ultimately resulting in the need for 9,000 fewer acres for the Kissimmee River Restoration Project. The acquisition of 4,726 acres for the Lake Okeechobee Fast Track Project to capture stormwater runoff north of Lake Okeechobee and treat it before entering the lake.

“Because South Florida property values continue to rise so quickly, our strategic focus on early land acquisition is saving hundreds of millions of dollars and ensuring that property is available for use in these critical environmental projects,” said SFWMD Executive Director Carol Ann Wehle. “Aided by both state and federal funding sources, the South Florida Water Management District’s land acquisition efforts are ahead of schedule, and we look forward to sustaining this momentum into 2007 and beyond.”

Florida has forged ahead to implement the \$10.9 billion, state-federal Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, one of the largest environmental restoration programs in history. 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, please visit [www.evergladesnow.org](http://www.evergladesnow.org). For more information on CERP, please visit [www.evergladesplan.org](http://www.evergladesplan.org)

### ***Project Greenshores Provides Outdoor Classroom***

--Students include shoreline studies in gifted curriculum

PENSACOLA – Today, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is coordinating educational stations for students in the Program for Academically Talented Students (PATS). Program students will learn about estuary environments on the shoreline of DEP’s Project GreenShores. “The estuaries of our coastlines are essential habitat where marine creatures mature and grow,” said DEP Northwest District Director Dick Fancher. “Project GreenShores provides an excellent opportunity to nurture the importance of habitat and restoration with our youth through hands-on experiences.”

PATS students from Brentwood Middle School in the Escambia County School District are learning how a community can come together to restore the natural habitat of an area. Launched in 2001, Project GreenShores has restored 15-acres of salt marsh in areas dredged during the development of Pensacola. Utilizing over 20,000 tons of recycled concrete and limestone, the seven-acres of man-made breakwaters safeguard aquatic plants and the shoreline. Now solidified with the abundant growth of oysters, the reef provides a rest stop for migratory and local birds and shelters a diversity of marine life. A three-day shoreline study of the project will provide the students an exposure to living elements of the estuary such as birds, shoreline plants, submerged aquatic plants and marine wildlife.

Project GreenShores is managed by DEP and supported by more than 60 local and national entities, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, NOAA, the City of Pensacola and Escambia County. Volunteers have played an important role with more than 375 volunteers contributing over 1200 hours of work to the restoration and monitoring of this project. For more information, visit <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/northwest/Ecosys/section/greenshores.htm>.

### ***Louisiana DNR Announces Next Steps to CIAP Plan Approval***

Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Secretary Scott Angelle has announced today the release of the Louisiana Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP) draft plan, which includes over 100 proposed projects within the 19 coastal parishes. The release of the draft plan was presented at a meeting of the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA).

DNR and other state officials have been working closely with coastal parishes since early 2006, to prepare a list of projects that identify restoration, conservation, and infrastructure repairs and improvements to be funded over a four-year period. According to DNR Secretary Angelle, “Some projects will be implemented with the state’s share of the CIAP funding, many will be constructed with the local government’s share of CIAP funds, and some will be jointly supported with state and parish CIAP funds.”

DNR Office of Coastal Restoration and Management’s Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary David Frugé said, “The CIAP Plan must be approved by the U.S. Mineral Management Service (MMS) before Louisiana can receive funding.” He said this last step to finalizing the plan includes public review, with hearings scheduled for February 26 to March 1. Once MMS approves the final plan, the state and the parishes must then apply for non-competitive grants from MMS to implement the projects listed in the approved plan. Frugé said the project proposal process began last May, and at that time some 337 proposals were made. Later in the process, there were public meetings, an independent scientific review, DNR technical review, and finally a CIAP Project Selection Committee review.

CIAP was authorized by Section 384 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, providing an estimated, \$523 million in federal monies to Louisiana and its coastal parishes during fiscal years 2007 through 2010. The state’s funding portion will be 65 percent while the parishes will be allotted 35 percent. Lafourche Parish President Charlotte Randolph noted at the CPRA meeting today that she appreciates the interaction and involvement the state has had with parish officials and the public in bringing the plan to fruition.

There is a broad range of restoration projects in the draft plan including enhanced management of the Mississippi River freshwater, sediment and nutrient; creating marsh with dredge material; restoring shoreline along Gulf of Mexico, bays and interior lakes; modifying hydrology to benefit wetlands; and resurfacing roads damaged by OCS-related traffic. According to Secretary Angelle, “ From the onset of CIAP Plan development, we placed a very strong emphasis on projects, not studies. With the backlog of needed restoration work, it is imperative that we use these new funds to make a difference on the ground.”

Some of the state proposed projects include emphasis on interior shoreline protection, including the Freshwater Bayou Bank Stabilization in Vermillion parish and Grand Lake Shoreline Protection in Cameron parish. Infrastructure enhancement projects include work on the Houma Navigational Canal Lock in Terrebonne parish and La. Hwy. 1 improvements in Lafourche parish. Highlighting examples of state-sponsored restoration projects are the Violet Diversion in St. Bernard parish and East Grand Terre Island Restoration project in Plaquemines parish.

Secretary Angelle pointed out, “The efforts in CIAP thus far, have been coordinated with the agency’s CPRA Integrated Planning Team so that protecting and rebuilding our coast will be within the framework of a comprehensive master plan for Louisiana.” Secretary Angelle also noted that the state planned to move forward with implementation of some key projects included in the plan, using state funds, before actually receiving CIAP funds from MMS.

Public hearings were held in Houma, Lake Charles and New Orleans. Feb. 26th at the Houma Terrebonne Civic Center, Feb. 27th at the L’Auberge Dulac Hotel and Casino, and on Feb. 28th at the UNO Research and Technology Park Conference Center Auditorium. There will also be a public meeting in Abbeville at the Abbeville Branch Library on March 1st at 6:30 p.m. Questions and comments about the CIAP program or the draft CIAP Plan can be directed to DNR Project Manager Greg Grandy at 225-342-7308 or by email at [ciap@la.gov](mailto:ciap@la.gov). The draft CIAP Plan Executive Summary with the complete list of proposed projects by parish can be viewed at [www.dnr.louisiana.gov/ciap](http://www.dnr.louisiana.gov/ciap).

## ***Louisiana Speaks Begins Distributing Planning Toolkit***

BATON ROUGE -- The Center for Planning Excellence (CPEX) has begun distributing the Louisiana Speaks Planning Toolkit, a planning, development and design guidebook to help communities rebuild and manage growth. CPEX's distribution of the Planning Toolkit at the Louisiana Municipal Association Mid-Winter Conference in Baton Rouge starts a year-long campaign to circulate the document. CPEX, which has been providing regional and local planning after hurricanes Katrina and Rita, is distributing the toolkit to elected officials, builders, planners and interested Louisiana residents. The Planning Toolkit is available online at [www.LouisianaSpeaks.org](http://www.LouisianaSpeaks.org).

The Toolkit is a planning guide for rebuilding across neighborhoods and regions. It accompanies the Louisiana Speaks Pattern Book, which was released in 2006 as a blueprint for rebuilding homes that can withstand storms and fit in with existing architecture.

The new Toolkit provides concise, bulleted lists for six key planning issues: landscape and natural systems; flood, wind and stormwater management; transportation and utilities infrastructure; sustainability; equity, accessibility and affordability; and development patterns. Created by Urban Design Associates, the Planning Toolkit was funded through the Louisiana Recovery Authority Support Foundation, the Fannie Mae Foundation and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Louisiana Speaks is the long-term planning initiative of the Louisiana Recovery Authority. With support from the LRA Support Foundation, Louisiana Speaks has engaged a team of top local and national planning experts to gather public input and support the development of a regional vision for South Louisiana that will guide long-term recovery and future growth.

## ***Mississippi DMR and Oyster Harvesters Work to Repair Reefs***

The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources' Shellfish Bureau has been 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 began Nov. 13, 2006 and was completed Jan. 10. About 75,059 sacks were planted on the Katrina-damaged reefs. Eighty-two Mississippi oyster boats participated. Oysters were tonged out of Graveline Bayou and transferred to the DMR vessel Conservationist in Biloxi Bay. Oysters were dredged and placed on a barge. The oysters were then deployed to the oyster reefs in the western Mississippi Sound.

"We have received a lot of praise about this project from the fishermen," said DMR Biological Program Coordinator Bradley Randall. "It was successful because we were able to put our fishermen to work and we will reap the benefits in the future. This project along with the spring cultch plants is a huge jumpstart in the recovery of our oysters resources."

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 2006, 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.

## ***Six Marine Debris Removal Projects Complete, Marine Debris Mapping Web Site Launched***

BILOXI, Miss. – The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR) is working closely with its federal partners to identify and remove marine debris from Mississippi's coastal waterways and shorelines and to develop useful and effective methods of disseminating information to mariners about the location, physical properties and abundance of the debris.

### **Marine Debris Removal Projects Detailed**

As the work to clean up beaches, waterways and the Mississippi Sound continues, six of 16 projects are completed. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which heads the multi-agency effort with the U.S. Coast Guard, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources and other partners, is moving forward with 10 other projects. Of the \$230 million allocated for Mississippi's marine debris removal, \$222 million is part of an intra-agency agreement that began October 1, 2006. So far, nearly \$14 million has been spent on the six completed projects.

Three of the six completed projects were initial test sites for the marine debris removal initiative: Enger Street in Jackson County, Henderson Point in Harrison County, and Jourdan River Isles in Hancock County. The fourth completed site includes the Pearlinton area and the Pearl River. Work to clean the beaches from mean high tide to one-half mile into the Mississippi Sound and the inland waterways north of Interstate 10 were recently finished. More than 17,000 cubic yards of debris was removed in the inland project.

"No other hurricane before Katrina left so much marine debris," said Jeff Byard, acting director of the Mississippi Transitional Recovery Office. "FEMA, the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, the Coast Guard, Mississippi's Marine Resources and other partners have broken ground in developing ways to work together to identify hazards and remove them safely." "Working together, we are making a lot of progress," said Mike Womack, director of the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. "We still have a long way to go, but we're moving away from cleaning up and much closer to rebuilding along the Coast."

A separate project to clean up the Mississippi Sound from one-half mile out to four miles out is tentatively scheduled to begin in March. The contract for cleaning debris from Bayou Caddy, Heron Bay, Lakeshore, Bayou Phillip, and Four Dollar Bayou in Hancock County was recently awarded. Eight other projects are in progress, but are yet to be bid out. Three are in Harrison County, three in Jackson County, and two in Hancock County. More than 60,000 cubic yards of debris have come out of the water since marine cleanup began last September. Funding for the marine debris removal projects is 100 percent federally funded until May 15, 2007.

### **Gulf of Mexico Marine Debris Mapping Web Site Launched**

In response to the threat of submerged marine debris in the Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama coastal zones, NOAA's Gulf of Mexico Marine Debris Project team is developing interactive maps from hydrographic surveys of debris left in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. A collaborative effort among NOAA's Marine Debris Program, Office of Response and Restoration and Office of Coast Survey, the team is working with the U.S. Coast Guard and other federal and state agencies, including the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, to ensure coordination of ongoing recovery efforts in the Gulf of Mexico.

NOAA's Gulf of Mexico Marine Debris Project has made available free scaleable maps indicating location, abundance and physical properties of marine debris left in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The

maps can help boaters and fishermen avoid gear-damaging debris and keep users updated on the status of debris removal in the survey areas. The maps are available at <http://gulfofmexico.marinedebris.noaa.gov>. The data is available for downloading in a variety of formats. The Web site is updated weekly as new survey data comes in.

## ***Mississippi DMR to Deploy Limestone Reefs South of Horn Island***

BILOXI, Miss. – The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR) will deploy 60 Florida Limestone artificial reefs on Fish Haven 1 and Fish Haven 2, beginning Feb. 27. The reefs are located about 10 miles south of Horn Island—25 miles south of Biloxi. The DMR will deploy a total of 240 of Florida Limestone artificial reefs during the next several months.

Florida Limestone reefs are triangular pyramid-shaped reefs that are made of concrete and limestone, allowing marine life to easily attach themselves. Each reef is eight feet in height with a base of 12 feet. “These reefs will provide an excellent habitat for reef fish,” said DMR Artificial Reef Program Coordinator Kerwin Cuevas. “The benefit of using this type of material and design, in addition to being excellent habitat, is that it is extremely durable and suitable in storm events.”

The Florida Limestone reef is manufactured by and will be deployed by Walter Marine of Orange Beach, Ala. This artificial reef project is being funded through the Mississippi Hurricane Katrina Disaster Restoration, Enhancement and Monitoring Program to Study the Recovery of Gulf Fisheries. Hurricane Katrina damaged about 80 percent to 90 percent of Mississippi’s nearshore and offshore artificial reefs on Aug. 29, 2005.

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).

## ***Realtors Can Earn Continuing Education Credits by Attending Smart Growth Conference***

BILOXI, Miss.—Real estate agents can earn 10 hours of continuing education credit by attending the eighth annual Coastal Development Strategies Conference (Smart Growth), May 9-10 at IP Hotel and Casino Resort Spa in Biloxi. The Comprehensive Resource Management Plan (CRMP) is hosting the event in association with CRMP stakeholders and the Mississippi Gulf Coast Chamber of Commerce.

The Mississippi Real Estate Commission approves this conference as an elective Real Estate Course for 10 continuing education hours. Receipts will be provided to all other professions—such as, engineers, teachers and architects—to submit for credit to their respective organizations.

CRMP is a program within the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR). CRMP’s mission is to develop a plan to sustain Mississippi’s coastal resources while providing a healthy economy in the region. The multidisciplinary event draws elected officials, city and county staff, contractors, developers, bankers, planners, realtors, engineers, landowners, industry students, federal and state agencies, county boards of supervisors, lawyers, private and corporate entities, environmentalists, resource managers and others committed to rebuilding the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

The deadline for pre-registration is April 27, 2007 and is \$125 per person (\$80 for students). After April 27, the registration fee will be \$155 (until May 8) and on-site registration is \$175. Conference fees include two breakfasts, refreshment breaks, two lunches, one evening reception and conference materials.

For more information or to register for this year's conference, contact the DMR at (228) 374-5000 or the Mississippi Gulf Coast Chamber of Commerce at (228) 604-0014, or visit the DMR online at [www.dmr.state.ms.us](http://www.dmr.state.ms.us) or the Coast Chamber at [www.mscoastchamber.com](http://www.mscoastchamber.com).

## ***Marine Habitat Placemats Available Free to Coast Restaurants***

BILOXI, Miss. – The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR) is distributing disposable paper placemats to restaurant owners, while supplies last. The placemats, which are illustrated with full-color depictions of valuable marine species and descriptions of their habitats, are free to restaurant owners and can be picked up at the DMR, 1141 Bayview Ave., Biloxi.

The placemat is [illustrated](#) by Texas Parks and Wildlife artist Clemente Guzman. “By having these placemats in local restaurants, we hope to remind everyone of the importance of our oyster reefs, wetlands and estuaries to the viability of the Mississippi seafood industry,” said Irvin Jackson, DMR Seafood Marketing Program manager. “Without these nursery grounds for our fish, shrimp and shellfish populations, we wouldn't have the one industry that has shaped the rich heritage of our Gulf Coast.”

Restaurant owners who would like to reserve a supply of the marine habitat placemats for use in their business should call Linda Wakefield at (228) 523-4156. The placemat illustration is also featured on an 18 x 24-inch poster, which is available free to the public at the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, 2404 Government Street, Ocean Springs, (228) 875-5912.

## ***Mississippi Alternative Housing Program***

The Governor's Office is currently finalizing plans and policies for the Mississippi Alternative Housing Program, which is intended to exhibit a better way to deliver emergency housing following major natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina. FEMA will allocate up to \$281 million for the construction of three alternative housing units: the Mississippi Cottage, Park Model and Green Mobile.

Approximately 5,000-7,000 FEMA-provided travel trailers located in Hancock, Harrison and Jackson counties will be replaced with the new units. An application process is currently being developed for current travel trailer tenants interested in moving into an alternative model. Informational meetings for potential tenants will be held in late February, and application announcements will be made through local media and the Governor's Office of Recovery and Renewal website.

The state plans to begin placing the new housing on the ground in June 2007. Design specifications for the housing units are currently being refined, and modular builders will receive bidding information for the program within the next few weeks. The Governor's Office will hold a pre-bid conference for interested manufacturers.

In March 2006, Governor Haley Barbour proposed a pilot program to Congress that would provide more temporary housing options for the next major natural disaster and remove Mississippians from the

cramped conditions of FEMA travel trailers. Congress appropriated \$400 million for the Alternative Housing Pilot Program, which solicited competitive proposals from five Gulf Coast states. Out of 29 proposals submitted from the five states, Mississippi's three proposals were ranked #1, #2 and #5. The state's top two proposals will receive up to \$281 million in funding. Click here to read [FEMA's press release](#) announcing the project awards. For information and updates concerning the Mississippi Alternative Housing Program, please visit [www.governorbarbour.com/recovery/alternativehousing.htm](http://www.governorbarbour.com/recovery/alternativehousing.htm).

## ***GLO Launches Web Site Providing Information on Texas Coastal Resources***

To mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Texas Coastal Management Program (CMP), the General Land Office (GLO) launched in January a new Web site that provides the public with easy access to a wide array of online resources on coastal marine issues. The Texas Coastal Connection ([www.TexasCoastalConnection.com](http://www.TexasCoastalConnection.com)) provides resources for the public, scientists and teachers and students; highlights hot topics along the Texas coast; assists users in finding answers to questions on coastal issues and serves as a source for information on the state's rich coastal resources.

“In looking around at what other organizations were doing, we found a lot of information out there about the Texas coast, but it was spread among a multitude of Web sites and organizations,” said Mark Evans, information and outreach coordinator for the GLO’s Coastal Resources Program. “We wanted to pull this information together on one Web site where people could start their searches for information on Texas coastal resources.”

The Web site provides links to other organizations that are active along the Texas coast and offer free programming, publications or services to the public. These links are categorized based on the type of information offered by each organization, including publications, educational and technical resources. The site also includes links to coastal events calendars maintained by other groups. In addition, each month, a new “hot topic” will be posted that delves into a current issue or topic facing the Texas coast. These hot topics will be archived, so that visitors to the Web site can use this information as a resource.

On Jan. 10, the CMP celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, so it seemed only fitting for the Web site’s inaugural hot topic to focus on this program and what it means to the citizens of Texas, Evans said. Future hot topics will examine beach trash, coastal water quality, coastal erosion and sea turtles. “In designing this site, we wanted a way to explore timely topics affecting the Texas coast,” Evans said. “For example, in June, we may do a feature on hurricane preparedness or the roles these storms have played in shaping coastlines because hurricane season starts the first of June. By providing the public with timely, interesting information on coastal issues, we hope we will encourage them to learn more about the Texas coast and why it is important to all Texans.”

## ***Land Office Awards Texas’ First Geothermal Lease***

*Coastal tracts of land in seven counties went to highest bidder*

AUSTIN — Texas reinforced its status as the nation’s new frontier for renewable energy today, awarding the state’s first lease for geothermal energy production. Nevada-based geothermal industry leader, Ormat (NYSE: “ORA”), had the high bids Tuesday for six tracts of coastal land in seven counties totaling more than 11,000 acres. The lease allows Ormat to explore the potential of the land’s geothermal resources and produce geothermal power from the tracts.

“Texas is hot for geothermal energy,” said Jerry Patterson, Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office. “At the Land Office, renewable energy means renewable revenue for the schoolchildren of Texas.” Geothermal energy provides a steady, reliable power source that doesn’t create any carbon dioxide and its “fuel” — the earth’s natural heat — is unlimited.

Ormat paid \$55,645 to lease the submerged land for an average of about \$5 an acre, or more than twice the minimum bid of \$2 an acre. In addition to the lease bonus, the Texas Permanent School Fund will earn 10 percent of any electricity produced from the geothermal leases. Multiple bids received for the land ensured that the bidding process was very competitive, Patterson said. “We got more bids than we expected,” he added. “I think that’s a good sign geothermal might just be an economically viable form of renewable energy for Texas.”

The tracts of land range from 1,174 acres to 2,480 acres and are along the coast in Jefferson, Galveston, Chambers, Calhoun, Jackson, Nueces and Kleberg counties. Geothermal energy is heat energy from the earth’s molten interior. Heat can be brought to the surface from movements in the Earth’s crust or by deep circulation of groundwater, which forms reservoirs of hot water under pressure. Texas isn’t exactly known as a geothermal hot spot like Hawaii or California, which sit on the volatile Pacific Rim. But relatively new technologies, such as binary power plants, are primed to take advantage of Texas’ medium-heat geothermal potential.

Binary power plants take hot water from an underground reservoir and use it to heat a secondary fluid with a lower boiling point. The resulting vapors can drive a turbine and create electricity. That electricity can then be sent to the power grid and used to power homes, businesses or industry. Much as with oil and gas leases, the Texas General Land Office would make money from a royalty, or a percentage of the energy production, from any geothermal lease. “There’s no way to tell what the potential is until private industry invests its capital to find out,” Patterson said.

Since 1854, the Land Office has deposited more than \$9 billion into the state’s Permanent School Fund, mostly from oil and gas production on state lands. But oil and gas production in Texas peaked in 1971. Since taking office in 2003, Patterson has aggressively sought new sources of income for the Permanent School Fund.

Patterson made history in 2005 when he signed the nation’s first lease for offshore wind power. In 2006, he signed the nation’s second — and biggest — lease for offshore wind energy development. All proceeds from lease sales, as well as a percentage of proceeds from energy produced from them, goes into the state’s Permanent School Fund, which helps pay for the state’s share of public education.

Ormat is a publicly traded company with about 70 U.S. patents and has geothermal projects operating in more than 20 countries worldwide. Ormat power plants are producing clean, renewable energy in New Zealand, the Philippines, Mexico, Iceland and Kenya, as well as in Nevada, California and Hawaii. Ormat has manufactured and supplied geothermal power plants that produce more than 800 MW. Ormat isn’t new to Texas, either. It provided the power plant technology used in the El Paso solar pond project in the 1980s. In that project, an Ormat Rankine cycle unit operated for 16 years at temperatures as low as 175 degrees Fahrenheit. “Ormat is very pleased to return to Texas to explore and develop its geothermal potential,” said Lucien Bronicki, chairman and chief technology officer.

Bronicki explained the company has made improvements to its organic Rankine cycle technology, which allows for electricity production at lower temperatures, and is using it to provide about 900 MW worldwide. “These leases provide Ormat the opportunity to capitalize on low temperatures associated with geothermal water in oil and gas wells, for which Ormat has field-proven technology,” Bronicki said.

## **Galveston FeatherFest 2007: Thurs. March 29 through Sun. April 1**

"FeatherFest 2007" Galveston's fifth annual celebration of the birds of the Upper Texas Coastal area, and of nature in general will be held March 29<sup>th</sup> through April 1<sup>st</sup>. The theme of FeatherFest 2007 will be "nature preservation" and its theme bird will be the Brown Pelican, a preservation success story. In 2002, responding to a seminar sponsored by George Mitchell (founder of the Mitchell Energy Company) and led by Ted Eubanks, the Galveston Nature Tourism Council was formed and was chaired by Lyda Ann Thomas, now Galveston's Mayor. Its purpose is to increase the Galveston business community's share of the growing nature tourism market and encourage environmental awareness as our island prospers. A start toward these ends occurred when the group voted to hold an annual birding and nature festival and created the name "FeatherFest" for it.

Since its inception the festival has been held during the first weekend that has an April date. Thus for 2007 the dates will be **Thursday March 29 through Sunday April 1**. The first weekend in April is not the peak of the spring birding migration season (which would be late April, early May.) but it provides an opportunity to see numerous spring migrant species plus some of the bird species that winter on the Gulf coast and who have not yet departed for their breeding grounds to our north. For a fix on the birds you could see at FeatherFest 2007, check on the [lists of birds seen during FeatherFest 2004 – 2006](#). But the festival is not ALL about birds, there will be nature trips with a focus on Butterflies, Dragonflies and Damselflies, the Bay fringes, photography etc and seminars on a whole range of topics.

Blessed with great weather and some excellent local press coverage, FeatherFest 2006, Galveston's fourth Birding and Nature festival, broke new ground with 336 persons registering for a sampling of the 64 events offered. This represented an 8% increase over 2005. While the majority of registrants, as usual, came from the greater Houston/Galveston area, almost 30% arrived from deep Texas, 16 other states and 3 countries (Canada, Mexico and the UK).

Those who have attended before know that forms are passed whose purpose is to capture the economic impact of the festival on the City. This is an extremely important activity for those who are trying to save habitats for nature tourists to tour, and for keeping this wonderful festival growing. Surveys passed out at FF 2006 were returned by 30% of our guests. The economic studies revealed an economic impact on the City of almost \$200,000 with 222 room nights in hotels/motels etc. The "satisfaction" index for guests was between 4 and 5 on a 0 to 5 scale. The top reasons given for attending were "diversity of birds and breadth and scope of festival". For more information visit <http://www.galvestonfeatherfest.com/>.

## **Shore Protection for Port Aransas Nature Preserve on the Way**

*\$6.3 million project will protect natural treasure from ship channel traffic*

AUSTIN — Work to protect the Port Aransas Nature Preserve from passing ships in the Corpus Christi Ship Channel is under way, announced Jerry Patterson, Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office. "This \$6.4 million effort is the biggest single project we've ever done under the Coastal Erosion Planning and Response Act," Patterson said. "This will protect more than 1,000 acres of wetlands and allows the state to more than double its money. That's a good investment by any measure."

The state's \$2 million contribution to the project helped draw an additional \$2.9 million investment from the federal government, Patterson said. Local contributions of an additional \$1.5 million also helped leverage the state's investment. "A project like this shows what can be done when local, state and federal officials all pull together," Patterson said.

The Port Aransas Nature Preserve is an ecological treasure of wetlands and coastal prairie. Rare birds, such as the Painted Bunting, have been found to nest in the area. Erosion from the ship channel has been the greatest threat to the preserve. The Port Aransas Nature Preserve Shoreline Protection project will build a rock revetment along 6,132 feet of the Corpus Christi Ship Channel. This stone revetment will protect the nature preserve from the eroding waves of passing tankers in the ship channel, which chew up an average of 17 feet a year of shoreline. More than 47,304 tons of limestone will be trucked down from New Braunfels to build the revetment. At about 15 tons a truckload, that's 3,153 trucks of stone.

The Land Office worked with the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program, Port Aransas and the Airport and Channel Corporation to bring the project to fruition. Coast and Harbor Engineering of Austin designed the two, 800-foot steel sheet pile jetties that will be placed to protect Piper Channel and HDR Engineering of Corpus Christi planned the stone revetment. Orion Construction of Houston will build the jetties and Lester Contracting of Port Lavaca will build the revetment. The project is expected to be complete by September. For more information on CEPR projects, please visit the Texas General Land Office Web site at [www.CoastalTexas2020.org](http://www.CoastalTexas2020.org).

## ***Winter Texans Haul Nearly 3 Tons of Trash Off South Padre Island***

*Volunteers brave chilly winds for Texas General Land Office Winter Texan Adopt-A-Beach Cleanup*

AUSTIN — The 74 volunteers who braved Friday's chilly winds hauled more than 5,200 pounds of trash off the beaches of South Padre Island, in the Tenth Annual Texas General Land Office Winter Texan Adopt-A-Beach Cleanup.

"It was bitter cold down there, but these Winter Texans, like most Texans, are a hardy lot," said Jerry Patterson, Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office. "These volunteers came out here to help us keep our beaches clean despite the cold. They never fail to impress me with their can-do attitude." At Edwin Atwood Park, on South Padre Island, volunteers from Ohio, Minnesota, Illinois, North Dakota, Nebraska, Colorado, Missouri and Kansas started the morning early with donuts donated by H-E-B, orange juice donated by the Cameron County Parks Department and water provided by the South Padre Island Convention and Visitors Bureau. Among the items found on South Padre Island were several pairs of ladies panties, a Maryland license plate, hardhats, house keys, a household cabinet, a ladies ring, a funeral wreath, a box spring and parts of baby dolls.

## ***Nearly 6 Tons of Trash Hauled Off During Winter Cleanup***

*Warmhearted volunteers brave chilly morning winds for good cause*

AUSTIN — A total of 368 volunteers hauled more than 6 tons of trash off Coastal Bend beaches Saturday, making the Third Annual Texas General Land Office Adopt-A-Beach Winter Cleanup the biggest yet. Volunteers picked up 12,440 pounds of litter from 18 miles of beaches, more than twice as much as the previous year's total.

The 3rd Annual Texas General Land Office Adopt-A-Beach Winter Cleanup took place at three sites in the Coastal Bend area. Sites participating in this year's event were Aransas Pass – Redfish Bay, Port Aransas – Mustang Island State Park, and Corpus Christi Beach at the Texas State Aquarium. The day began with a chilly wind and a low of 41 degrees. But by the time the cleanup was over the temperatures had climbed to the mid-60s, resulting in a wonderful day at the beach. Some of the more unusual items found this year were shoes, car tires, propane containers, a fishing knife, a dead pelican, five crab traps and two bags of women's clothing.

Participants in this year's event ranged from area schools, church groups and Girl Scouts to local businesses and various organizations. Everyone who participated in the cleanup was given a \$3 discount on admission to the Texas State Aquarium. Some of the volunteers were lending a hand to complete community service hours for school or to receive a scout badge, but all are committed to keeping Texas beaches and bays clean of debris. After all, no one enjoys a dirty beach.

The Winter Texan Beach Cleanup is one of three all-volunteer seasonal cleanups coordinated through the Adopt-A-Beach Program of the Texas General Land Office. The next cleanup will be the Spring Adopt-A-Beach effort. Texas beaches receive large amounts of marine debris due to a convergence of currents in the Gulf of Mexico. Since 1986, more than 349,000 Adopt-A-Beach volunteers have picked up more than 6,600 tons of this debris, some of it originating from as far away as South America. Volunteers record data on the trash to learn more about the causes of marine debris and to help mitigate pollution along Texas' 367 miles of coastline. For additional information on the Winter Texan Beach Cleanup and the Adopt-A-Beach Program, visit [www.texasadoptabeach.org](http://www.texasadoptabeach.org), or contact the GLO at 1-877-TXCOAST.

## Energy

---

### ***Farming a New Industry for Louisiana and the Nation***

*Feb 26, 2007: [A Column by Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco](#)*

A future of American energy independence, clean air and strong rural economies is taking root in sugar cane fields across Louisiana. Our state is now on its way to being a national leader in providing an alternative energy source to meet America's demand for clean fuel. Last week, I participated in the historic groundbreaking of a new facility in Jennings operated by Celunol Corporation. This facility is designed to produce 1.4 million gallons of cellulosic ethanol per year from crops grown right here in Louisiana. It is the first plant of its kind built in our nation and part of my aggressive agenda to grow our economy and generate good jobs.

Only a few short years ago ethanol was seen as an economic booster only for Midwestern farmers. With the promise of increased corn prices and new markets, corn derived ethanol was being touted as a way to help the farm economy while reducing our nation's dependence on foreign oil. Today, ethanol has moved beyond the "corn belt." The Energy Policy Act of 2005 helped make this a reality and included significant incentives for developing and commercializing cellulosic ethanol.

This legislation makes it attractive to construct new ethanol facilities in states like Louisiana that have sugar rich fuel stock like sugarcane bagasse (biomass remaining after sugarcane stalks are crushed to extract their juice), wood chips and fiber cane. We are growing the economy of rural Louisiana while protecting the quality of our environment. To improve air quality and achieve the ambitious renewable fuels goals outlined by the President and Congress, we must increase ethanol development and Louisiana is up to the challenge. By contributing this "new" ethanol, we are protecting our environment and our national security.

Last year, at my urging, the legislature enacted a measure to establish minimum ethanol and bio-diesel content standards for gasoline and diesel. These standards only go into effect when there is enough production of ethanol and other renewable fuel to make sure prices remain competitive. This is good for our economy, good for our farmers, and puts our reliance on producing fuel here at home instead of in

foreign countries. Our nation's effort to diversify its fuel supply is Louisiana's gain. By demonstrating this technology and commercializing cellulosic ethanol, Louisiana will show our unique ability to supply America's energy needs. We will no longer be referred to as simply an oil and gas state, but instead as the state that started the cellulosic ethanol revolution.

## Training and Conferences

---

### ***Hypoxia Workshop to Be Held in Bay St Louis in March***

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), in conjunction with the Northern Gulf Institute, is hosting The *Ecological Impacts of Hypoxia on Living Resources Workshop* on March 26-27, 2007 in Bay St Louis, Mississippi. This workshop will assess the state-of-knowledge of the impacts of hypoxia (a condition of abnormally low levels of oxygen in the sea) on ecologically, commercially, and recreationally important fish and shellfish populations. The meeting will focus on application of science to coastal decision-making in three coastal systems noted for seasonally recurring and persistent hypoxic zones – Chesapeake Bay, Gulf of Mexico, and Lake Erie. While there is no charge for this workshop, registration is required by March 15, 2007. Visit the workshop website at [www.ngi.msstate.edu/hypoxia](http://www.ngi.msstate.edu/hypoxia) to register or for more information or contact [Russ.Beard@noaa.gov](mailto:Russ.Beard@noaa.gov).

### ***Global Climate Change: The Status of Science and Implications for Coastal Louisiana***

**March 20, 2007 — 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.**

The Third Presidents' Forum on Meeting Coastal Challenges will provide an opportunity for state and community leaders to learn about the accepted pool of scientific information on global climate change and discuss its implications for coastal Louisiana. The one-day meeting will focus on four areas:

- trends in temperature, precipitation and run off;
- tropical storm frequency and intensity;
- sea level rise in coastal sustainability; and
- future planning/lessons learned.

The morning and afternoon science panels will consist of presentations by national experts in each area, followed by a local or regional expert on the same topic. The last afternoon panel will consist of discussions about how state and community leaders can use what they've learned for future planning. The Forum, to be held at the Lod Cook Alumni Center on the LSU Baton Rouge campus, is hosted by LSU System President William Jenkins and UL System President Sally Clausen. Other organizers include the Governor's Coastal Commission, U.S. Geological Survey's National Wetlands Research Center, and the state's higher education community.

**Persons wanting to attend the forum can contact Jo Paula Lantier at [jopaula@lsu.edu](mailto:jopaula@lsu.edu) or (225) 578-6445 to reserve a seat.** A block of rooms has been set aside at the Lod Cook Hotel at a rate of \$96 per night for conference participants. For hotel reservations, call (225) 383-2665 and ask for the SEA GRANT block of rooms.

For additional information please contact:

Bob Stewart – [bob\\_stewart@louisiana.edu](mailto:bob_stewart@louisiana.edu)

Virginia Burkett – [virginia\\_burkett@usgs.gov](mailto:virginia_burkett@usgs.gov)

Chuck Wilson – [cwilson@lsu.edu](mailto:cwilson@lsu.edu)

Paul Coreil – [pcoreil@agctr.lsu.edu](mailto:pcoreil@agctr.lsu.edu)

## ***Gulf Coast Floods Recovery: Mission Mitigation***

Intercontinental Hotel in New Orleans, LA April 9-12, 2007

This training workshop will identify mitigation measures Gulf Coast states and communities can undertake to minimize future damages as they cope with recovery and reconstruction. The speakers and facilitators are experienced practitioners who have successes to share from working with multiple programs and entities through the years.

The target audience is flood hazard management staff at all levels of government and decision makers in flooded communities. Topics will include flood mitigation planning and program options, funding sources, construction standards, lessons learned, success stories, insurance issues, recovery mapping, grant applications, coastal challenges and legal implications. Attendees also will be able to participate in group discussions.

The workshop will be held noon Tuesday, April 10, through noon Thursday, April 12, with special training classes on Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning, plus a "mobile class" (field tour) on Tuesday morning.

Registration forms will be posted at [www.floods.org](http://www.floods.org) by Feb. 1. Scholarships for registration and travel expense are available to local community officials in the Gulf Coast states. Hotel reservations may be made now by calling the Intercontinental Hotel at 504/525-5566, be sure to mention "Mission Mitigation" to receive the conference rate of \$148. For more information, contact Diane Brown at [diane@floods.org](mailto:diane@floods.org) or at 608/274-0123.

HOST: The Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM)

SPONSOR: FEMA Transitional Recovery Offices in the Gulf Coast States

COOPERATING PARTIES: State Chapter floodplain management associations and the NFIP State Coordinators in LA, MS, AL, FL, TX; Univ. of New Orleans, Center for Hazard Assessment, Response and Technology; NOAA - Coastal Services Center and Sea Grant.

## **2007 National Hurricane Conference**

April 2-6 Hilton Riverside New Orleans, LA

The primary goal of the [National Hurricane Conference](#) is to improve hurricane preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation in order to save lives and property in the United States and the tropical islands of the Caribbean and Pacific. In addition, the conference serves as a national forum for federal, state and local officials to exchange ideas and recommend new policies to improve Emergency Management.

To accomplish these goals, the annual conference emphasizes: Lessons Learned from Hurricane Strikes! State of the art programs worthy of emulation.

- New ideas being tested or considered.
- Information about new or ongoing assistance programs.
- The ABC's of hurricane preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation -- in recognition of the fact that there is a continual turnover of emergency management leadership and staff.

Two Ways to Register: Online (Credit Card Required) and Standard Mail

[Click Here for Online Registrations](#) (If you register without paying, your registration will be cancelled!)

[Click Here for Standard Mail](#)

For more information: Phone: 850-906-9224, E-mail: [mail@HurricaneMeeting.com](mailto:mail@HurricaneMeeting.com)

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)

