

Gulf of Mexico News



NOAA Ocean Service, Office of Ocean & Coastal Resource Management

March 2008

<i>NOAA Gulf of Mexico News</i>	3
NOAA Hurricane Hunter Aircraft to Embark on Gulf Coast Tour.....	3
NOAA Issues New Land Cover Assessment Showing Increasing U.S. Coastal Development.....	4
Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership Aquatic Habitat Plan	4
NOAA's Fisheries Seeks Comments on Loggerhead Sea Turtles	5
Florida CZM Program Receives Full Approval of Coastal Nonpoint Program.....	6
NOS Partnership Provides Web-Based Training	6
Underwater Survey Will Help Managers Assess Marine Debris Problem at FKNMS	7
NCCOS Assists Texas Resource Managers in Protecting Residents from Effects of Unusual Harmful Algal Bloom	7
New Film About Florida Red Tides	7
Hundreds Participate in Gulf of Mexico Research Planning Workshops	8
<i>Other NOAA News</i>	8
CICEET Publishes Regional Monitoring Syntheses	8
Revised Draft Framework for National System of MPAs Available for Public Comment.....	9
<i>In the Gulf States</i>	9
Summer of Learning at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab!	9
Florida Celebrates Value of State's Seagrasses.....	11
Florida Celebrates April as Water Conservation Month.....	12
Florida Celebrates Oceans Day	13
MSU Extension Service to Offer Master Naturalist Program.....	14
Fishermen and MS DMR Recover 1,259 Derelict Crab Traps.....	14
MS DMR Commercial Fisheries Recovery Programs Update	15

Grand Bay Reserve Conducts Plant Identification Class	15
MS DMR Sponsors Golf Tournament to Benefit Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain ..	16
Louisiana Invests \$19 Million in Fisheries Infrastructure.....	16
LA DNR Presents 2007 Coastal Projects Review Booklet	17
Louisiana Collaboration Keeps Oyster Harvest Safe.....	18
The Gulf of Mexico Alliance Diversity Project: Enhancing Local Capacity to Reach Underserved and Underrepresented Populations.....	18
America's WETLAND Foundation Encourages Students to Help Save Louisiana's Coastal Wetlands.....	19
Louisiana Launches Campaign Aimed at Removing Hurricane Debris from Waterways.....	19
FEMA Releases New Coastal Flood Maps for Louisiana	21
26 Cleanup Sites Along the Texas Coast.....	21
<i>Other News</i>	22
U.S. EPA Gulf Program Seeks Entries for 2008 Gulf Guardian Awards	22
EPA Announces Release of Estuaries Indicator Development Manual.....	23
May is American Wetlands Month - Start Planning!.....	23
New Online Environmental Education Clearinghouse	23
<i>Grant Opportunities</i>	24
Funding available through NOAA's Bay Watershed Education and Training Program.....	24
Marine Debris Research and Technology Grants	24
National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program	24
<i>Training and Conferences</i>	25
Lights! Cameras! Action!.....	25
Lt. Gov. Phil Bryant, National Author Douglas Brinkley to Speak at Smart Growth Conference May 5-6.....	25
1st Annual Gulf of Mexico Monitoring Forum.....	26
Southeast Regional Quality Growth Conference.....	27
NOAA to Host Regional Extension, Outreach and Education Workshop	27
Coastal Cities Summit on Climate Change and Sustainability	27

NOAA Gulf of Mexico News

NOAA Hurricane Hunter Aircraft to Embark on Gulf Coast Tour

Public and Media Invited to Tour Aircraft

NOAA hurricane experts will travel aboard a [NOAA WP-3 Orion](#) turboprop Hurricane Hunter aircraft in a five-day, five-city tour of the Gulf Coast beginning Apr. 14 to raise [awareness](#) of the hurricanes that can and have threatened the region. [Bill Read](#), the new director of [NOAA's National Hurricane Center](#); Jack Beven, Ph.D., senior hurricane specialist; and Eric Blake, hurricane specialist, will join the crew and scientists when the aircraft visits Corpus Christi, Tex., Galveston, Tex., New Orleans, La., Apalachicola, Fla., and Ft. Myers, Fla. The public and media are invited to tour the aircraft and speak with the delegation.

"As we saw last year with Humberto, hurricanes can develop rather quickly close to our coastline," said Read. "NOAA uses the hurricane awareness tour to get the message out to the communities that now is the time to prepare for a hurricane, rather than when a storm is at your doorstep."

"The tour brings middle school students to the aircraft to hear firsthand about the threat that hurricanes play in their lives," said James McFadden, Ph.D., chief of programs at [NOAA's Aircraft Operations Center](#). "Every member of the crew feels a certain amount of pride in being a part of these missions." The team of NOAA experts will be joined by emergency management officials, non-profit organizations such as the American Red Cross, and various local National Weather Service forecast offices.

The hurricane awareness tour has been conducted for more than 25 years, alternating between the Gulf and Atlantic coasts, and is followed by NOAA's hurricane hazard education campaign during national [Hurricane Preparedness Week](#), May 25 to 31. The Atlantic hurricane season begins June 1.

Tour Schedule

Mon., Apr 14: International Airport, Corpus Christi, Tex., 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Tue., Apr 15: Scholes International Airport, Galveston, Tex., 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Wed., Apr 16: Lakefront Airport, New Orleans, La., 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Thu., Apr 17: Municipal Airport, Apalachicola, Fla., 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Fri., Apr 18: Page Field Airport, Ft. Myers, Fla., 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems ([GEOSS](#)), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

NOAA Issues New Land Cover Assessment Showing Increasing U.S. Coastal Development

A NOAA survey of land use along U.S. coasts shows that 53 percent of the new development between 1996 and 2001 occurred along the Southeastern U.S. coast between Texas and North Carolina. The biggest areas of new development include Harris County (Houston), Texas; Palm Beach County, Fla.; and Will County (Chicago), Ill. Completing the top 10 list of developed areas are the Florida counties of Brevard (Melbourne), Hillsborough (Tampa), Lee (Fort Myers) and Orange (Orlando); Horry County (Myrtle Beach), S.C.; and Montgomery County (north fringe of Houston), Texas. Data being processed from 2005 shows the pace of development may be increasing. The Mid-Atlantic three-state area of Maryland, Virginia and Delaware, including the District of Columbia, now has development covering over 10 percent of the total land area. An additional area approximating half the size of Washington, D.C., is estimated to be already cleared for development.

This information was derived from the first NOAA nationwide study of coastal land cover change. NOAA maps are now standardized across the nation, allowing scientists for the first time to compare maps from different regions and maps from the same place but from different years. This comparison ability provides data that is critically important to both scientists and city planners as the U.S. population along the coastline continues to grow.

"Land cover maps document what's happening on the ground. By showing how that land cover has changed over time, scientists can determine how these changes impact our environmental health," said Nate Herold, a NOAA physical scientist who directed the mapping effort at [NOAA's Coastal Services Center](#) in Charleston, S.C. "Satellite imagery is the best way to get a big picture view of the cumulative impact of changes along our coasts."

The new standardized format allows updates to existing data to be completed in less time and at lower cost than the baseline data from 1996 and 2001. NOAA plans to complete a full national data set every five years. Work on the second five-year update is already well underway and will be completed in 2010. Data can be found [online](#).

Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership Aquatic Habitat Plan

The Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP) in February 2008 released the Southeast Aquatic Habitat Plan. This Plan lays out a regionally based, cross-jurisdictional approach for natural resource stewardship involving the public; state and federal agencies; non-governmental organizations; fishery management councils and commissions, and business and recreational interests. The NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region, Habitat Conservation Division, served as NOAA's representative during the development of the Aquatic Habitat Plan, which will become a key document for setting NOAA's regional priorities for habitat conservation in the southeast. As a partnership formally recognized by the National Fish Habitat Board, SARP now has established the foundation to implement strategic and cooperative habitat protection efforts in the southeastern U. S. using a science-based, landscape-scale template for setting aquatic habitat conservation priorities. SARP was formed in 2001 by the 14 southeastern states and was recognized in the President's Ocean Action Plan as a successful example of regional approaches to advance fisheries management. Heather.Young@noaa.gov and Kay.Davy@noaa.gov.

NOAA's Fisheries Seeks Comments on Loggerhead Sea Turtles Agency Petitioned to List Distinct Population

[NOAA's Fisheries Service](#) has determined that a petition to reclassify loggerhead turtles in the western North Atlantic Ocean as a distinct population segment with endangered status may be warranted, and is seeking comments on the petition action. Currently, loggerhead turtles are listed as a threatened species throughout the world.

NOAA's Fisheries Service found that the petition submitted by Oceana and Center for Biological Diversity presents substantial scientific and commercial information indicating the western North Atlantic population may be distinct due to physical, genetic, physiological, ecological, and/or behavioral factors, and thus, may warrant a separate listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

"We are assessing the global status of the loggerhead turtle. Identifying unique population segments and determining how each population contributes to the species' ability to survive is a key factor in the assessment," said Jim Balsiger, Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries Service.

NOAA's Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), who share jurisdiction of loggerhead turtles under the ESA, convened a Biological Review Team (BRT) to identify whether distinct populations exist, and to look at the threats these populations face. The team will assess the extinction risk for each distinct population segment they identify. NOAA's Fisheries Service and the USFWS would then determine which of these distinct populations should be listed as threatened and which should be listed as endangered.

NOAA's Fisheries Service and the USFWS concluded in a recent five-year review of the status of the loggerhead sea turtle that the annual number of nests laid on beaches in the southeast U.S. are declining significantly, indicating that fewer adult females are nesting annually. The number of nests recorded along the Atlantic coast from Georgia to North Carolina has declined approximately 2 percent each year from 1983 to 2005. The number of nests recorded along Florida's coasts shows a decrease of 22 percent from 1989 to 2005.

"The observed decline in nests over the past two decades represents a loss in the number of hatchlings that will enter the population, which in turn may further reduce the adult population over time," said Barbara Schroeder, NOAA Fisheries Service scientist and National Sea Turtle Coordinator. "With fewer breeding adults, the decline in nests may continue and affect the species' ability to survive and recover." NOAA's Fisheries Service is asking the public to submit comments and information related to the loggerhead petition finding no later than May 5, 2008. Information on how to submit comments and information may be found [online](#). The results of the loggerhead global assessment will publish in the Federal Register, and will be available to the public.

NOAA Ocean Discovery Day in Galveston

On March 8th, residents and visitors in Galveston, Texas, explored the diverse programs and services of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Named "Ocean Discovery Day", the Open House at the Galveston Laboratory brought NOAA to the public through fun, creative, and educational hands-on activities. Everyone attending learned why NOAA and partner agencies are relevant to the community.

NOAA scientists and volunteers manned displays, presented information on the agency's mission and programs, led activities, demonstrated sampling and research equipment, showed off sea creatures, and gave walking tours of the Ft. Crockett and sea turtle facilities. It was a unique opportunity for one-on-one interactions between NOAA employees and over 500 visitors.



Fisheries Service's Galveston Laboratory and Ocean Service's Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary sponsored the event. Other participating NOAA offices included Fisheries Southeast Regional Offices of Habitat Conservation and of Law Enforcement, Ocean Service's Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System (PORTS), and the Texas Marine Mammal Stranding Network.

Florida CZM Program Receives Full Approval of Coastal Nonpoint Program

On March 27th, the NOAA Office of Ocean & Coastal Resource Management, in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, fully approved Florida's Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program. The Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program was established by Congress in 1990 to encourage better coordination between state coastal zone managers and water quality experts to reduce polluted runoff in the coastal zone. Coastal states must develop programs, backed by enforceable authorities, to implement a suite of management measures that will control runoff from six main sources: forestry, agriculture, urban areas, marinas, hydro-modification (shoreline and stream channel modification), and the loss of wetlands and riparian areas. Florida is the 21st coastal zone management program to receive full approval for their Coastal Nonpoint Program.

NOS Partnership Provides Web-Based Training

The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) and the Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services (CO-OPS) produced a Web-based training program hosted by the Coastal Services Center (CSC), on tidal and geodetic datums, called Datums 101, for staff from the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS). The training teaches the fundamentals of height and water levels as they relate to wetland restoration. On March 25, the live training was delivered to over 20 NERRS staff. The two-hour conference gave an introduction to geodesy and geodetic datums, the national spatial reference system, water-level observation networks, tidal datums, and the utility of connecting land elevations and water levels in support of coastal research and management. For more information, contact [Galen Scott](#).

Underwater Survey Will Help Managers Assess Marine Debris Problem at FKNMS

Surveys showing lobster and crab traps account for over half of underwater debris in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) will help define the problem in support of possible management solutions. From June 2007 through February 2008, National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) and Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission staff completed 96 towed-diver surveys throughout FKNMS. They conducted sampling within six trap-fishery zones that consist of several habitats including coral reef, hard bottom, seagrass, algae, and sand. Coral reef habitats contained the highest density of trap debris per area surveyed. Geographically, most trap debris was located on the Atlantic side of the Middle Keys, a zone of historically high fishing pressure. Understanding the quantity and distribution of trap debris provides fishery managers and fishermen with a basis for developing ecologically sustainable fishing practices. NOAA's Marine Debris Program funded this study. For more information, contact Amy.Uhrin@noaa.gov.

NCCOS Assists Texas Resource Managers in Protecting Residents from Effects of Unusual Harmful Algal Bloom

Scientists from the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) are assisting the state of Texas after the discovery of a toxic bloom of the dinoflagellate *Dinophysis* in south Texas bays resulted in the closure of oyster and clam fisheries. NCCOS scientists are modeling potential transport of the bloom to nearby regions in order to help the state develop monitoring and sampling strategies to minimize negative effects on the economy and health of local residents. The bloom, first reported March 4, is the first time *Dinophysis* has been recorded at toxic levels in the Gulf of Mexico. The results of the modeling effort are being released in bulletins to the management community. For more information, contact Richard.Stumpf@noaa.gov.

New Film About Florida Red Tides

A new film, *Guardians of the Gulf*, features research funded by the NOAA National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science's ECOHAB and MERHAB Programs. The film, "Guardians of the Gulf", is a 60 minute documentary that educates the public on Florida Red Tides. Staff from both the Center for Coastal Monitoring and Assessment and Center for Coastal Fisheries Habitat and Research is featured in the film, which discusses the causative organism, *Karenia brevis*, and what scientists are doing to detect, monitor, and mitigate the effects of red tide blooms. *Guardians of the Gulf* will be shown during the Sarasota Film Festival Monday, April 7. (<http://www.sarasotafilmfestival.com/>). It was produced by the nonprofit Essential Image Source Foundation under the sponsorship of START (Solutions to Avoid Red Tide), a community-based organization. For more information, contact Richard.Stumpf@noaa.gov, or Pat.Tester@noaa.gov.

Hundreds Participate in Gulf of Mexico Research Planning Workshops

Nearly 300 individuals representing more than 100 organizations and agencies recently participated in workshops for the Gulf of Mexico Research Plan (GMRP).

The GMRP effort held five workshops to identify and prioritize research needs for the region. Workshops were held in Galveston, Texas; Baton Rouge, La.; Biloxi, Miss.; Spanish Fort, Ala.; and St. Petersburg, Fla., and focused on identifying research priorities within the theme areas defined in the Ocean Research Priorities Plan. The themes are Improving Ecosystem Health, Stewardship of Natural and Cultural Ocean Resources, The Ocean's Role in Climate, Increasing Resilience to Natural Hazards, Enabling Marine Operations and Enhancing Human Health.

Each workshop participants joined one of the themed breakout sessions that were held at each workshop. Numerous high-priority research topics (267 topics) were identified at the five workshops. In addition, participants identified 251 information needs or other priority topics related to policy, management and education.

The National Sea Grant Program and the four state Sea Grant College Programs (Mississippi-Alabama, Texas, Louisiana and Florida) sponsored the workshops. NOAA's Gulf Coast Services Center provided substantial workshop planning and facilitation support. State, federal and university entities (U.S. Geological Survey, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Mississippi State University, Louisiana State University and NOAA Fisheries Lab, Galveston) hosted the workshops.

Draft workshop reports from each event are being circulated. Once they are finalized, they will be available on the GMRP Web site (www.masgc.org/gmrp). The data collected from the workshops and the 1,200 survey responses and 117 strategic plans collected to date will be analyzed in order to develop a strategic plan that addresses the top regional research priorities. This plan will be available to all organizations and groups that conduct research or use research results in the Gulf of Mexico. After the strategic plan is developed an implementation plan will be developed to enable efficient and effective approaches to address the top regional research priorities.

Other NOAA News

CICEET Publishes Regional Monitoring Syntheses

The National Estuarine Research Reserve's (NERRS) System-Wide Monitoring Program (SWMP) provides environmental data to support the assessment of coastal resource management challenges at the national, regional, and local levels. With funding from the Cooperative Institute for Coastal and Estuarine Environmental Technology (CICEET), NERRS research teams applied SWMP data to priority coastal management issues in four regions: the Pacific Coast, Southeast, Mid-Atlantic, and the Northeast.

Each study summarized and interpreted SWMP data, relevant research, and monitoring datasets at the scale of the individual reserve and that of the region. The studies also included data collected from other regional programs, demonstrating the benefits of coordinating SWMP data with other regional research and monitoring datasets.

Results from these studies enhanced the toolkit used to manage and analyze vast quantities of environmental data at reserves, provided necessary assessments of regional water quality and habitat trends, and clarified the impacts of natural processes and human activities on coastal ecosystems. The reports for these studies are now available online at http://ciceet.unh.edu/news/releases/swmp_report/swmp_report.html.

CICEET is a partnership of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the University of New Hampshire. CICEET is dedicated to fostering the development of tools for clean water and healthy coastal environments nationwide. <http://ciceet.unh.edu>

Revised Draft Framework for National System of MPAs Available for Public Comment

NOAA and the Department of the Interior have completed a Revised Draft Framework for Developing the National System of Marine Protected Areas, which is available for public comment through April 16. The revised draft addresses comments from the public and the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee on the first draft, which was published in September 2006. The revised draft outlines key components of the national system, including a set of overarching national system goals and priority conservation objectives, MPA eligibility criteria and other definitions, a nomination process for existing MPAs to be included in the national system, a science-based, public process for identifying conservation gaps, and a process for improving regional, national and international coordination. It will be widely circulated to stakeholder groups for comment. To view the revised draft, visit <http://www.mpa.gov/>.

In the Gulf States

Summer of Learning at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab!

-2008 Summer Educational Programs at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab-

The Dauphin Island Sea Lab offers one of the most extensive summer marine science programs in the nation. With programs for everyone from graduate students to teachers to middle school students, the Sea Lab combines excellence in education with a beautiful location, right on the beaches of the Gulf of Mexico.

Children Ages 5-8 - Oceans Alive! Make exploring the beach with your children a rewarding educational experience. Create a shell collection and learn about the animals living on our beaches and in our oceans! These half-day camps are held from 1:00 pm until 4:30 pm and will be limited to 20 students; admissions are taken on a first-come, first-serve basis. Parents/guardians are required to attend, must be 18 years of age and may bring no more than 3 children. Cost: \$35 per student. Includes T-shirt, Estuarium pass, snack and certificate. Dates: May 29, May 30, June 27, & July 11

Children Ages 9-11 - Treasure Island. High-tech meets history at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab! Kids ages 9-11 are invited to join us for a treasure hunt on the sandy beaches of Dauphin Island. We'll use Global Positioning System technology to hunt for buried treasure while learning about the history and ecology of

the Island. This half-day adventure will take place from 1:00 to 4:30pm; child must be accompanied by an adult. Cost: \$35 per student. Includes T-shirt, Estuarium pass, snack and certificate. Dates: May 28 and July 18.

Middle School Students – Gulf Island Journey. Join the Sea Lab team for beach scavenger hunts, ghost crab crawls, marsh mushing and collection trips aboard our research vessel A.E. Verrill and watch bottlenose dolphins swim by. The group will visit a historic civil war fort and travel to another small island off the coast of Dauphin Island to see nesting sea birds and collect shells. This fun residential program instills a basic understanding of marine science with lots of hands-on activities. There are only 30 slots for each one-week program so sign up early. Designed for rising 7th, 8th & 9th grade students. Cost: \$550, includes tuition, room, meals and lab fees. June 15 – 20; July 6 – 11; July 13 – 18; July 20 – July 25; July 27 – August 1 (Two (2) sessions will be held during this week.)

High School Students – An intensive summer course introducing the student to the marine environment through classroom lecture, laboratory, and field activities is available to 9-11 grade students. The length of the course is four weeks, during which time the students live on campus and participate in over 150 hours of supervised academic activities. Classes are taught in an academic setting and are designed to give the student a better understanding and appreciation of the various fields in marine science. The Alabama State Department of Education approves the Discovery Hall Summer Programs and recommends that local systems grant participating students credit toward either an Advanced or Standard High School Diploma. Cost: \$1850. Dates: June 1 - June 27, 2008.

K-12 Educators – A variety of exciting courses are available to all teachers throughout the summer. Whether the topic is Sharks and Rays or the Delta, teachers will be able to bring the oceans back into the classrooms. Educators will be able to collect specimens for their classes, as well as receive an extensive teaching curriculum.

- The Delta –July 6 – 9 (\$350)
- Beaches, Birds and Barrier Islands – July 13 - 17 (\$410)
- Sharks and Rays - July 20 - 24 (\$450)

Most courses require overnight stays. Credit hours are available for most courses.

Special for Alabama Educators! The Sea Lab will be offering a FREE teacher workshop this summer, especially for Alabama educators, funded by the Alabama State Department of Education under Titles II and V of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Availability is limited, so please check on this right away:

- Marine Applications of Science and Technology - June 1–6 & June 22 – 27, 2008. Includes a GPS unit for classroom use and \$100 stipend. Applicant should be an Alabama math or science teacher for grades 6-12.

College and Graduate Students - University Programs of the Sea Lab offer a wide range of courses for credit for undergraduates and graduate students during the summer, ranging from Shark Biology to Coastal Birds of Alabama to Marine Ecology. Courses in this intense program will be offered from May to August; individualized directed research opportunities with resident faculty are also available. Sessions will run May 9-May 30; June 2 – July 4; and July 7-August 8.

General Public – Be sure to visit the Estuarium, the aquarium of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, for an exciting look at the animals and habitats of the Mobile Bay estuary. The Estuarium is a cool place to be on a hot summer day! Open seven days a week. For more information: (251) 861-7500 or visit

www.sealabestuarium.org. For more information on any of these programs, go to the Dauphin Island Sea Lab web site at www.disl.org, or call (251) 861-2141. **Costs and schedules on all programs are subject to change.

Florida Celebrates Value of State's Seagrasses

--March is Seagrass Awareness Month--

TALLAHASSEE – Highlighting March 2008 as Seagrass Awareness Month, Governor Charlie Crist and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection are supporting public awareness of seagrasses as they relate to Florida’s marine environment, the commercial and recreational fishing industry and the economy. As recognized in the Governor’s proclamation, “awareness of the problems facing this vital natural resource will help to create an understanding of the ways seagrass damage can impact both the economic and ecological value of marine resources.”

“Florida is home to some of the largest seagrass meadows in the world, supporting hundreds of species of fish, sea turtles, manatees and other wildlife at various stages of their development,” said Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary Michael W. Sole. “Preserving these underwater grasses is critical to the prosperity of Florida’s marine life, water quality and each citizen’s quality of life.”

One of the most productive communities on earth, seagrasses are flowering underwater grasses found in estuaries, lagoons and shallow, open shelves off Florida's coast. Florida is home to seven species of seagrasses, located throughout the state. A critical marine habitat, seagrasses provide a nursery ground for marine life and maintain water quality and clarity by stabilizing bottom sediments and filtering nutrients from stormwater run-off.

Many of Florida’s aquatic preserves help protect this vital natural resource. For example, the Gasparilla Sound-Charlotte Harbor Aquatic preserve program in Charlotte County monitors seagrass health at 52 stations located on 160,000 acres. Another example is a monitoring project at Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve, which spans more than 945,000 acres, evaluating current conditions and identifying management needs of this vital resource. Additionally, preservation efforts at Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserves in Miami-Dade and Monroe counties are helping to save Johnson’s seagrass, a threatened seagrass that exists only in southeast Florida.

In 2006, seagrass communities in Florida supported an estimated harvest of \$71.4 million for six seagrass-dependant commercial species of fish and shellfish. The state’s multi-million dollar fishing industry depends on healthy seagrasses to protect young fish and shellfish, coral reefs and other marine life, including sea turtles, manatees and wading birds. Recreational divers, snorkelers and fishing enthusiasts from around the world visit underwater Florida to experience the state’s world-class marine resources.

While affecting habitat, boating in seagrass beds can also damage vessel engines, hulls and propellers. Groundings that damage seagrass habitats are crimes subject to both federal and state fines. These fines help fund habitat restoration and long-term monitoring activities.

The following tips provide seagrass-friendly practices for boaters:

- Know the waters where you plan to boat.
- Use current nautical charts of the area.
- Use marked channels where they exist and stay in deep water.

- When in doubt about the depth, slow down and idle. Make sure the bow of the boat is down and the motor is trimmed or tilted up.
- Know the tides. The greatest range of tides occurs during a full-moon and new-moon. Use extra caution when boating on a low tide.
- If you do run into a seagrass flat, stop immediately and tilt your engine.

For more information on Florida's seagrasses, visit www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/habitats/seagrass/. To view the Governor's proclamation for Seagrass Awareness Month, visit http://www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/habitats/seagrass/awareness/Gov_2008_Seagrass_Proc.pdf.

Florida Celebrates April as Water Conservation Month

--State encourages water use efficiency to help protect and preserve Florida's water—

TALLAHASSEE – Governor Charlie Crist and the Florida Cabinet today recognized April as Water Conservation Month. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), together with the Florida Section of the American Water Works Association, endorsed the proclamation, reaffirming the state's commitment to increasing water use efficiency.

“Recognizing April as Water Conservation Month helps promote the importance of water conservation, encouraging Floridians to become environmental stewards at home and in their communities,” said DEP Secretary Michael W. Sole. “By using water efficiently, we reduce the unnecessary waste of a precious resource, we extend supplies of water for our growing population, and we protect the state's natural resources.”

Conservation is not about “doing without.” Floridians can conserve water just by adopting efficient habits that reduce water waste:

- Watering lawns can account for more than 50 percent of water use at many Florida homes or businesses. Irrigate your landscaping only when it actually needs it. Many homes with irrigation systems apply far more water than is necessary.
- Choose landscaping suited to your location to reduce the need for irrigation. Learn about beautiful Florida Friendly plants at www.floridayards.org. There you can view and select the right plants for your home or business.
- Replace old toilets that use up to five gallons of water per flush with high performance water-efficient toilets certified by the Environmental Protection Agency's WaterSense program <http://www.epa.gov/WaterSense/>.
- Showering is one of the top uses of residential water in the United States, representing approximately 17 percent of indoor water use. Replace old showerheads with new low-flow models that work just as well, but use less water.
- Faucets account for more than 15 percent of indoor household water use. Replace old faucets with WaterSense approved faucets or aerators.
- Fix water leaks. Homeowners lose an average of 25 gallons of water a day through leaky water devices.
- Run your washing machine and dishwasher only when full and you could save 1,000 gallons a month. Consider buying a clothes washer that has a water factor of 6.0 or less by going to www.ceel.org.
- If washing dishes by hand, don't leave the water running. You can save 200 to 500 gallons a month.

- Repair dripping faucets. If your faucet is dripping at a rate of one drop per second, you can waste 2,700 gallons per year.

For more information about Florida's water, visit www.dep.state.fl.us/water. For more green tips, visit www.dep.state.fl.us/green/tips/.

Florida Celebrates Oceans Day

-Partners gather at the Capitol to promote protection for coastal and marine resources-

TALLAHASSEE – The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) today joined public and private partners to celebrate Florida Oceans Day at the Capitol. The annual event recognizes those dedicated to making our oceans and coasts cleaner, healthier and more productive. The theme of this year's celebration is "Ocean Technology: Protecting Florida's Oceans/Sustaining Florida's Economy."

"Clean water and responsible management are the heart of Florida's quality of life and ocean-based economy," said DEP Secretary Michael W. Sole. "Florida is taking strides to lead the nation in environmental stewardship, protecting the ocean and coastal resources that provide us national treasures, food and recreational and economic opportunities."



As part of this year's Florida Oceans Day celebration, DEP hosted exhibits from DEP's Coastal Management Program, Greenways and Trails, the Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas and the Florida Oceans and Coastal Council. Content from the exhibits included a mobile aquarium, boats and educational displays. In addition, DEP Secretary Sole was honored by the Florida Ocean Alliance as a "Steward of the Sea," recognizing his commitment to protecting and enhancing Florida's coastal and ocean resources. DEP Secretary Sole is the first person to ever be named a "Steward of the Sea" by the Florida Ocean Alliance.

Furthering the state's commitment to protecting our oceans, the Florida Oceans and Coastal Council was created by the Florida Legislature in 2005 to develop priorities for ocean and coastal research and establish a statewide ocean research plan each year. A diverse group of individuals, the Council is made up of fifteen voting members and three non-voting members. The Council also coordinates public and private ocean research from across the state for more effective coastal management. Included in this year's plan is the beginning stages of an advanced state-of-the-art coastal observation system that will automatically monitor and report the condition of coastal and ocean waters.

With the longest coastline in the contiguous United States, Florida is home to 41 aquatic preserves, three of the nation's National Estuarine Research Reserves, the Coral Reef Conservation Program and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, one of the largest underwater protected areas in the world. Managed by DEP's Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas, these protected areas comprise more than 4 million acres of the most valuable submerged lands and select coastal uplands in Florida. For more information about Florida's coastal resources, visit <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/>.

MSU Extension Service to Offer Master Naturalist Program

A Mississippi State Extension Service program will allow nature enthusiasts the opportunity to learn more about natural resources and management tools and bring that knowledge into communities. The Mississippi Master Naturalist Program will help participants expand their knowledge of our local habitats and help identify ways to protect land and water resources. Master Naturalists receive 40 hours of training in natural resource and wildlife management. They also must complete 40 hours of volunteer service to meet certification requirements.

The classes and field trips will include information about archaeology, native plants, habitats, insects, watershed management, forestry, fisheries, soils and birds. “The program is for people to learn about the environment and help promote the environment and its natural history,” said Chris Boyd, an environmental ecologist for Mississippi State University and the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium.

The seven week program runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Thursdays from May 8 to June 26 at the Mississippi State University Coastal Research and Extension Center on Popps Ferry Road in Biloxi. The class fee is \$50. For more information or to register, call Chris Boyd at (228) 546-1025 or cboyd@ext.msstate.edu.

Fishermen and MS DMR Recover 1,259 Derelict Crab Traps

BILOXI, Miss. –The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR) and Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (GCRL) contracted with resident commercial crab fishermen to remove derelict traps in the three coastal counties March 17-21, 2008. To be eligible for the program, crab fishermen had to be licensed commercially for the license years 2004-2005 or 2005-2006, hold a current crab license and show proof of Mississippi residency.



In Pascagoula, DMR Shrimp and Crab Bureau Director Traci Floyd, right, and Rick Burris, DMR Fisheries scientist, prepare derelict crab traps recovered by commercial fishermen for recycling.

Mississippi’s season for crab traps closed 6 a.m. March 9 and reopened 6 a.m. March 22. Licensed crab fishermen were allowed to remove their traps from the water during the first seven days of the closure. After March 15, any trap remaining in public water was considered derelict and subject to removal.

Three drop-off sites were set up to receive the derelict traps: Bayou Caddy Marina in Bay St. Louis, Ocean Springs Harbor and the Point in Pascagoula. DMR and GCRL staff manned the sites, collected data cards and loaded the traps into dumpsters. The dumpsters were then taken to David Motor & Scrap, where the traps were melted down and recycled. Thirty-four (34) commercial crabbers participated,

removing 1,097 traps from coastal Mississippi. Also, the Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (GNERR) and DMR staff removed 162 derelict traps from the bio-reserve.

“Mississippi’s commercial fishermen have done an excellent job cleaning up Mississippi’s coastal waters. The industry has removed over 12,000 derelict traps since Hurricane Katrina rendered most Mississippi crab traps lost,” said Shrimp and Crab Bureau Director Traci Floyd. Since the Mississippi Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program’s inception in 2001, more than 17,000 traps have been recycled.

A joint effort by the DMR and GCRL, the cleanup was funded by NOAA’s Emergency Disaster Recovery Program Phase II and administered by Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. One of the primary objectives of the grant is to work cooperatively with the fishing industry to restore the marine environment in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

“The DMR would like to thank all of Mississippi’s commercial crab fishermen, GCRL, GBNERR, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and NOAA for making this effort a great success,” Floyd said.

The DMR 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.

MS DMR Commercial Fisheries Recovery Programs Update

BILOXI, Miss. – The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR) Fisheries Office will receive \$25 million over the next five years to assist in the recovery of Mississippi’s marine resources. Congress appropriated these funds to NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service as part of the Emergency Disaster Recovery Program II. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission in Ocean Springs is administering the program. A portion of these funds have been approved for cooperative programs with fishermen. Eligible fishermen (Mississippi resident commercial license holders in either or both 2004-2005 and/or 2005-2006) are needed to assist the DMR in recovery and monitoring of Mississippi’s Gulf Fisheries.

“It is very important to DMR that eligible commercial fishermen get word of these beneficial programs. We are relying on their cooperation for achieving grant deadlines and attending required workshops,” says DMR Marine Fisheries Office Director Dale Diaz.

Grand Bay Reserve Conducts Plant Identification Class

The Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Mississippi conducted a four-day workshop this week, March 11-14, on plant identification in wetlands and transitional zones to help a variety of coastal zone managers identify key indicator species. The class, taught by renowned botanist Robert Mohlenbrock, included visits to numerous Mississippi coastal habitats, where participants learned to identify the key species in each habitat using visual characteristics. More than 25 attended the workshop, including natural resource managers, mitigation bank managers, ecotourism operators, staff from non-profit associations, federal and state regulators and wetland professionals and consultants.

MS DMR Sponsors Golf Tournament to Benefit Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain

BILOXI, Miss.—The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR) Comprehensive Resource Management Plan (CRMP) and CDM are hosting a golf tournament May 7 at Gulf Hills Golf Club in Ocean Springs. All proceeds from the tournament will be donated to the Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain. The tournament is being held in conjunction with the ninth annual Coastal Development Strategies Conference, which is set for May 5-6 at the Saenger Theatre in Biloxi.

“The Land Trust has enjoyed its partnership with CRMP for some time and will use funding from the golf tournament to support pending projects designed to make Land Trust properties more accessible for public use,” said Judy Steckler, the Land Trust director.

Golf tournament registration fee is \$125 per person or \$500 per team for the 4-Man Scramble Best Ball. Hole sponsorship is \$500. Registration starts at 9 a.m. Shotgun start is at 10 a.m. Prizes will be awarded for lowest gross, lowest net, worst team, longest drive, closest to pin, and hole-in-one. The hole-in-one prize will be a Sea Chaser 220 Bay Runner powered by a 150 Yamaha 4-stroke, sponsored by Atlantic Marine Brokers in Waveland. To register or for more information about the golf tournament, call (228) 822-3900.

CDM is a global consulting, engineering, construction and operations firm committed to improving the environment and infrastructure. The mission of the Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain is to conserve, promote and protect the open spaces and green places of ecological, cultural or scenic significance in the counties of the Mississippi Coastal Plain. These investments in new urban greenways provide numerous public benefits including cleaner air, stormwater storage, carbon sequestration, improved public health and opportunities for learning about native species, habitats and watersheds of the Mississippi Coastal Plain.

Louisiana Invests \$19 Million in Fisheries Infrastructure

BATON ROUGE, La. (March 19, 2008) - The state will invest \$19 million in 15 infrastructure improvement projects to repair the heavily damaged fisheries industry across South Louisiana, the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) and the Office of Community Development (OCD) Disaster Recovery Unit announced today.

"This is the first real substantial investment that has gone directly to rebuild the vital fisheries infrastructure that was devastated by the storms of 2005," said LRA Executive Director Paul Rainwater. "One of Louisiana's most important rural economic sectors is the multi-billion dollar commercial and recreational fishing industry; it's not just a hobby to these people but a way of life."

It is estimated that Hurricanes Katrina and Rita destroyed more than \$528 million in fisheries infrastructure in Louisiana's fishing communities with millions more in losses to supporting industries. In an effort to address some of those losses, the LRA and OCD developed a \$19 million Fisheries Infrastructure program. The program uses Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to provide grants for building projects that improve the viability and long-term sustainability of the commercial and recreational fisheries of coastal Louisiana.

"Making a living from the sea has been part of south Louisiana's culture for centuries," Representative Charlie Melancon (D-LA) said. "The devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita threatened that way of life, but today we are making a firm commitment to the future of commercial and recreational fishing in our coastal communities. By rebuilding what was lost, we are not just supporting a major industry that provides jobs to thousands of people in our state; we are also preserving an integral part of our Cajun heritage for future generations of south Louisianians."

The LRA and OCD conducted four informational sessions across coastal Louisiana to walk potential participants through program requirements. Proposals for projects were solicited in October 2007; 59 proposals requesting nearly \$114 million were submitted to the LRA.

"While this program focuses on an often ignored recovery sector, there still remains a great need for more resources to help the communities that rely heavily on fisheries for their livelihood," said LRA Board Member David Richard. "Boats and nets are of no use without the docks, wharfs, marinas and other fisheries infrastructure that are essential to this industry."

Last month experts from around the country traveled to Louisiana to discuss, review and weigh the merits of each proposal. These experts recommended projects to a state team that made the final allocation of awards for proposals in the eastern and western areas of the coast. Proposals were evaluated to determine whether they:

- Enhanced and ensured continued access to the state's coastal waters for commercial and recreational fishing, eco-tourism, and development of "working waterfronts;"
- Created/maintained employment in the commercial and recreational fishing industry;
- Preserved the commercial and recreational fishing culture of coastal Louisiana;
- Improved the economic efficiency of the fishing industry; and
- Created storm harbors that provide vessels with temporary refuge during future storm events.

For more information on proposals, visit <http://lra.louisiana.gov/pr031908FishInfrastructure.html>.

LA DNR Presents 2007 Coastal Projects Review Booklet

The Louisiana Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) Office of Coastal Restoration and Management has just published and distributed the [2007 Coastal Restoration Annual Project Reviews](#). The booklet is a review of the state's coastal restoration projects under programs administered by DNR.

The 123-page report gives an overview and status of coastal efforts to protect, conserve, restore, and improve the state's coastal wetlands. The Barrier Island Status Report is included in the document along with a status of all Breaux Act projects constructed in the state since its inception. The report is also subdivided into the five CPRA (Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority) planning units providing detailed information from all federal and state agencies involved in coastal restoration. The location of projects, maps, acreage, costs, and funding sources are also identified in the review booklet.

The DNR Coastal Restoration Technology section completed the report and has made it available online at dnr.louisiana.gov/crm in downloadable format. For inquiries and copies, contact david.lindquist@la.gov.

Louisiana Collaboration Keeps Oyster Harvest Safe

March 19, 2008

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) worked cooperatively with the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (LDHH) to replace boats and laboratory equipment damaged by the hurricanes of 2005. LDHH's Molluscan Shellfish Program uses this equipment to monitor water quality in approximately 800 coastal locations to ensure that water quality is safe for shellfish harvesting.

"We are very pleased that we could assist LDHH with the important work that they do with respect to the monitoring of water quality for oyster harvest," said LDWF Secretary Robert Barham. "Our agencies work hand-in-hand in oyster management, so it made sense to provide funds that would facilitate renewed shellfish harvest in closed areas."

The funding for replacement equipment came from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which supplied approximately \$203,000 in federal hurricane disaster funds. The NOAA disaster funds, passed to LDWF through the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, allowed LDHH to quickly replace and repair necessary equipment so that monitoring of coastal waters would not be interrupted.

Four 20-foot vessels and necessary laboratory equipment were purchased with grant funds, allowing LDHH to maintain monitoring at full capacity following the storms. Funds were also used to update LDHH's mapping technology to produce more accurate seasonal classification maps of open (safe) and closed (unhealthy) shellfish growing waters. These needs were identified by the Louisiana Oyster Task Force in their Louisiana Oyster Recovery Plan published in December 2005.

Without this necessary equipment, extended closures of oyster harvesting areas would have resulted. Because oyster harvest from open areas of Louisiana accounted for approximately \$36 million in dockside sales in 2006, these extended closures would have been devastating to the state economy.

"The disaster funds were critical to the recovery of this vital public health program and consumer confidence in the Louisiana oyster," said LDHH Secretary Alan Levine. "Without the ability to continue our classification of oyster growing areas, necessary closures would have greatly impacted the economic viability of the industry."

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance Diversity Project: Enhancing Local Capacity to Reach Underserved and Underrepresented Populations

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance has identified the need to improve environmental education opportunities for underserved and underrepresented populations in the five states bordering the Gulf of Mexico. Hosted by the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, the GOMA Diversity Project aims to establish a network of support for organizations within this region to strengthen their capacity to serve these populations and to encourage innovation and interaction among these groups and their members. The project topics will target water quality, eutrophication, gulf habitats, and coastal and wetland restoration.

These goals will be accomplished by:

- An introductory workgroup session to bring together a core group of leaders from communities and environmental organizations to participate in workshops and forums designed to identify and analyze examples of both successful and unsuccessful education and outreach programs, discuss challenges and opportunities, and plan specific activities for the coming year

- An eight-month mini-grant program to provide matching funds to help at least five groups who attend the introductory workgroup session to implement their plans
- A project website and discussion group through which participants can share their experiences, ask for help, and offer advice to others
- A follow-up symposium to share results of the funded projects and programs, identify and analyze what worked and what did not, and plan follow-up activities for the next year; this symposium will be open to the core workgroup plus a larger audience who is interested in learning from the core group's experiences

Timeline: The first meeting of the working group is May 7-8, 2008, with the follow-up symposium in February 2009. The mini-grants will be issued between the two symposia to encourage project development.

Who will make up this network? Two types of organizations will be targeted: (1) those currently serving the targeted populations that do not presently provide environmental education opportunities and (2) those doing environmental education that do not presently serve underserved and underrepresented populations. For more information contact Shelley Sparks at BTNEP at shelley@btnep.org or 1-800-259-0869 or Gigi Owen and Diane Austin at goma.diversity@yahoo.com.

America's WETLAND Foundation Encourages Students to Help Save Louisiana's Coastal Wetlands

Open for any Louisiana student in grades 4-12, the "Keep Your Eye on the Prize" Student Art, Photo, and Essay Contest was created to emphasize the importance of Louisiana's coastal wetlands, known as America's WETLAND. The contest will remind youth that saving and restoring Louisiana's wetlands is not only critical to their well being -- whether they live on the coast or inland -- but it is also critical to the entire nation's environment and the economy.

The "prize" for every participant is making a contribution to building a sustainable coast with healthy wetlands, which protect humans, their homes, and the hundreds of species that inhabit America's WETLAND. And nine winners, one in each category, will receive \$500 for a restoration event at their schools and recognition on the America's WETLAND website. To learn more about the Keep Your Eye on the Prize Student Art, Photo, and Essay Contest, please visit www.americaswetland.com/contest

Louisiana Launches Campaign Aimed at Removing Hurricane Debris from Waterways

BATON ROUGE, La (March 6, 2008) - If you see debris in a Louisiana public waterway, "Report It!" That is the message of a coalition of federal and state agencies behind the Louisiana Marine Debris program, which was created to identify, document and remove marine debris caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita that continues to litter the state's waterways.

"Two and a half years after the storms, Louisiana still suffers from the blight and safety issues caused by debris in our public waterways," said Garrett Broussard, Marine Debris Coordinator for the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the lead agency managing the Marine Debris program. "The

ultimate goal of this program is to ensure that dangerous debris is removed in a timely, comprehensive, cost-effective and responsible manner."

The Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) and the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP) called upon the federal government last summer to reactivate marine debris removal in Louisiana's waterways. After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) worked with the United States Coast Guard (USCG) to remove large pieces of marine debris from navigable commercial waterways. However, much debris - including homes, boats and appliances - remained, posing a safety risk to many recreational and commercial boats.

As a result of the efforts of the LRA and GOHSEP, FEMA and the USCG have agreed to reactivate the Louisiana Marine Debris program. FEMA has assured the state initial funding for an estimated \$400 to \$500 million marine debris removal program to be run by DNR.

"By working with our state and federal partners we are finally able to clear the fishing boats, 18-wheelers, refrigerators and even displaced homes that have remained in Louisiana's waterways since the storms of 2005," said LRA Board Member and Chair of the Environmental Task Force Tom Henning. "I encourage all those who have seen the hazardous debris in our waterways to 'report it.' The participation of locals is vital to the success of this program and the recovery of our state."

The Louisiana Marine Debris program relies heavily on local residents who use Louisiana's waterways for commercial and recreational purposes to report dangerous debris. Debris that is not reported will not be considered for removal by the USCG.

Debris that is reported is not automatically eligible for removal. In order to be eligible, the debris must create an economic, environmental or safety issue and have been caused by either Hurricane Katrina or Rita. This program focuses primarily on the parishes south of the I-10/I-12 corridor. Currently, a team of state officials is conducting parish-by-parish meetings to explain the program and convey the essential roles parish governments will play in this program. Once debris points are documented each parish will have an opportunity to meet with FEMA and the USCG to ensure their concerns are addressed and to determine the eligibility of identified debris.

"We are enlisting the help of government organizations, marinas, commercial charter companies, boat dealers and other private businesses to help get the word out by posting and distributing flyers and other information," said Leo Richardson, State Marine Debris Coordinator, GOHSEP. "The message is simple - if you see, hit, snag or even hear about marine debris, tell us where it is."

To report debris visit the Louisiana Marine Debris Web site at www.LouisianaMarineDebris.com or call toll free at, 866.579.4DNR (866.579.4367). The call center will be manned from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Callers can leave messages 24 hours a day, seven days a week. To help spread the word about the Louisiana Marine Debris program in your area, [click here](#) for a copy of the flyer that is being distributed throughout South Louisiana.

FEMA Releases New Coastal Flood Maps for Louisiana

Citizens throughout Iberia Parish and Vermilion Parish now have new tools they can use to better protect themselves from the effects of future flooding. Those tools are new-and-improved Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps (DFIRMS) that utilize the latest in technology and information to identify flood-hazard areas throughout the parish.

"We finally have the best data to help residents of Louisiana live safer, stronger and smarter than ever before," said Louisiana Recovery Authority Executive Director Paul Rainwater. "Thanks to our federal partners, citizens of Iberia Parish now have up-to-date information to assess their flood risk and make better informed decisions about those risks." Preliminary versions of the flood maps were delivered by FEMA last week to floodplain managers and code officials in communities throughout the parishes as the first step in a process that is ultimately designed to lead to formal adoption and implementation on a local level.

Communities in Iberia receiving the maps are Delcambre, Jeanerette, Loreauville and New Iberia. Communities in Vermilion receiving the maps are Abbeville, Delcambre, Erath, Gueydan, Kaplan and Maurice. A map covering unincorporated areas of both parishes was also provided.

The maps will become effective following a series of steps that include a public-comment period, resolution of any appeals or protests, a Letter of Final Determination from FEMA and adoption by the community. For unincorporated areas, adoption would be on a parish level.

While adoption is voluntary, it is a requirement for the community to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Individuals and governmental entities cannot purchase flood insurance unless their property is within a community that participates in the NFIP. FEMA has already released updated DFIRMS for Lafayette, Livingston and Tangipahoa parishes and, in the upcoming months, will release maps for up to 12 other coastal Louisiana parishes.

The new flood maps are part of a nationwide effort to map or update existing flood maps to better reflect current flood hazards. In prior years, the maps have only been available in paper form. The digital versions now make it easier for citizens to access flood risk information and provide for greater map detail. To learn about flood maps or elevations to use during rebuilding, residents should contact their local floodplain administrator. Extensive information about Louisiana's coastal flood maps also is available online through the Louisiana Mapping Project at www.lamappingproject.com.

26 Cleanup Sites Along the Texas Coast

AUSTIN _ The 22nd annual Adopt-A-Beach Spring Cleanup will take place Saturday, April 26th at 26 sites along the Texas coast. The all-volunteer event is coordinated through the Adopt-A-Beach Program of the Texas General Land Office.

"Join us for a great day at the beach with thousands of other Texans who care enough to show it through their actions," Patterson said. Volunteers can register at any of 26 check-in sites between 8:30 a.m. and 9 a.m. on April 26th. Volunteers must pre-register for the St. Jo Island location in advance, as reservations are required due to limited access. Volunteers for St. Jo Island will check in on April 26th at 8 a.m. at Fisherman's Wharf, 900 Tarpon St., in Port Aransas.

Texans who are not able to attend the cleanup can help keep their beaches clean by making a tax-deductible donation online at www.texasadoptabeach.org. There are several different Adopt-A-Beach sponsorship levels ranging from \$25 to \$25,000, allowing both individuals and corporations to contribute to this major cleanup effort.

Each volunteer will be given data cards, gloves, pencils and trash bags. All volunteers are advised to wear closed-toe shoes and bring sunscreen and plenty of drinking water. The all-volunteer event is coordinated through the Texas General Land Office Adopt-A-Beach Program. Statewide coastal cleanups are held every spring and fall.

Texas beaches receive large amounts of marine debris due to a convergence of currents in the Gulf of Mexico. Since 1986, more than 365,000 Texas Adopt-A-Beach volunteers have picked up more than 6,900 tons of trash along the Texas coast. 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.

Statewide sponsors for the Adopt-A-Beach Spring Cleanup are National Oilwell Varco, Royal Caribbean, ExxonMobil, Stormwater Solutions, Halliburton and Starbucks. In-kind donations will be provided by Keep Texas Beautiful. The General Land Office Adopt-A-Beach Cleanups are held rain or shine! For a complete listing of cleanup sites for the upcoming Spring Cleanup, to learn how you can participate, or for additional information on the Adopt-A-Beach Program, please visit www.texasadoptabeach.org.

Other News

U.S. EPA Gulf Program Seeks Entries for 2008 Gulf Guardian Awards

STENNIS SPACE CENTER, MS. – The Gulf of Mexico Program is currently soliciting entries for the 2008 Gulf Guardian Awards Program. The entry forms for the award are available online at <http://www.epa.gov/gmpo/gulfguard.html>. The deadline for applications is May 1, 2008.

The Gulf of Mexico Program partnership developed the Gulf Guardian Awards in 2000 as a way to recognize and honor the businesses, community groups, individuals, and agencies that are taking positive steps to keep the Gulf healthy, beautiful and productive. The Gulf Guardian Award exemplifies what the Gulf of Mexico Program stands for; innovative solutions that occur when we pool resources and look for creative ways to tackle the region's complex coastal environmental challenges in ways that also positively impact our quality of life and economic well being. The Gulf Program recognizes annually a first, second, and third winner in each of the seven categories: 1) Business, 2) Government, 3) Civic/Nonprofit Organizations, 4) Youth/Education, 5) Partnerships, 6) Individual and 7) Binational, which jointly honors U.S./Mexico Partnership programs and projects.

The Gulf of Mexico Program began in 1988 to protect, restore, and maintain the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem in economically sustainable ways. The Program is sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is a non-regulatory, inclusive consortium of state and federal government agencies and representatives of the business and agricultural community, fishing industry, scientists, environmentalist, and community leaders from all five Gulf States. The Gulf Program seeks to improve the environmental health of the Gulf in concert with economic development.

The Gulf of Mexico Program encourages you to apply for this prestigious award. To apply, go to the web address above and click on the “2008 Gulf Guardian Application” link. The application is available in English and Spanish. Please email your completed application to gulf.guardian@epa.gov. For more information, please call Diane Altsman at 228-688-7015 or LaKeshia Robertson at 228-688-1712.

EPA Announces Release of Estuaries Indicator Development Manual

The Indicator Development for Estuaries manual is designed to improve measuring progress in the National Estuary Program estuaries and other estuaries. It is organized to provide the user with a logical, stepwise process for developing and implementing indicators for the estuarine environment. Indicators can provide cost-effective information on the status and trends of a system, the effectiveness of management actions and allow for mid-course corrections. Indicators also provide information to inform diverse audiences including environmental managers, scientists, resource managers and the public on the status and progress of restoration efforts. The manual is available at <http://www.epa.gov/owow/estuaries/>.

May is American Wetlands Month - Start Planning!

EPA will once again celebrate American Wetlands Month in May with federal, state, tribal, local, non-profit, and private sector organization partners. This annual celebration is a time to recognize and highlight the wonderful ways that wetlands enrich the environment and human society. In anticipation of this year's celebration, EPA encourages individuals and groups to plan activities and events that raise awareness of the critical role wetlands play in our environment and build support for their protection and restoration. Some ideas for celebratory activities and events that could be planned in conjunction with American Wetlands Month include:

- Participate in a wetland walk, canoe trip, bird watch, or other outdoor activity
- Plan a wetland or stream clean-up
- Sponsor a talk or presentation about wetlands
- Start or participate in a volunteer wetland monitoring or restoration group

Individuals or groups that are planning local, regional, or national events are strongly encouraged to share event information by visiting the following event form submittal site:

<http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/awm/contact.html>. For general American Wetlands Month information, please visit: <http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/awm>. To learn more about EPA's wetlands and aquatic resources programs, please visit <http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands> or call the Wetlands Helpline at 1-800-832-7828.

New Online Environmental Education Clearinghouse

The U.S. Geological Survey, National Wetlands Research Center in Lafayette, recently completed the Gulf of Mexico Alliance Environmental Education Network [Clearinghouse](#). This online library will be in continual development and refinement, making changes, adding materials and issues as they become available. If you have a resource you would like included please email librarian Linda Broussard lbroussard@usgs.gov. You can also provide a link to this resource on your own organization's website with the URL provided above. The site is hosted through the National Biological Information Infrastructure.

Grant Opportunities

Funding available through NOAA's Bay Watershed Education and Training Program

NOAA B-WET provides grants in support of locally relevant experiential learning through meaningful watershed educational experiences in the K-12 environment. The NOAA B-WET program has been highly successful in the three regions where it currently operates (Chesapeake Bay, California, and Hawaii) and may be expanding in 2008 to three new regions: Northeast, Gulf of Mexico, and the Pacific Northwest. Funded projects will involve meaningful watershed educational experiences addressing regional priorities. Annual project funding ranges from \$50,000-\$100,000. Proposals must be received by **5 p.m. on April 16, 2008**. See the Federal Funding Opportunity (FFO) for details. The FFO is available from <http://www.grants.gov> (Funding Opportunity Number SEC-OED-2008-2001368).

For more information on B-WET and examples of funded projects, please see current program websites:
Chesapeake Bay: <http://chesapeakebay.noaa.gov/formaleducation.aspx>
California: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/news/bwet/welcome.html>
Hawaii: <http://www.csc.noaa.gov/psc/bwet.html>
National: <http://www.oesd.noaa.gov/BWET/>

Marine Debris Research and Technology Grants

The NOAA Marine Debris Program, in partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, has posted an RFP for their Marine Debris Research and Technology Grants Program. This program supports projects to improve our understanding of the impacts of marine debris on our marine and coastal resources, and to reduce and prevent debris in our marine environment. The programmatic focus areas are: ports, marinas and fishing communities; gears technology; and marine debris research and assessment. Priority geographic areas include: Alaska, the Hawaiian Islands, Puget Sound, the Gulf of Mexico, Chesapeake Bay, Southeast Florida (Atlantic) and NOAA's National Marine Sanctuaries.

Pre-proposal applications will be accepted until **May 5, 2008**. For more information, visit the [Marine Debris Grant Program website](#).

National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program

The National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program was established by Title III of P.L. 101-646, [Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act](#) of 1990. Under the Program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provides matching grants to States for acquisition, restoration, management or enhancement of coastal wetlands. The Act also establishes a role for the Fish and Wildlife Service in interagency wetlands restoration and conservation planning in [Louisiana](#).

To date, about \$183 million in grant monies have been awarded to 25 coastal States and one U.S. Territory and to acquire, protect or restore over 250,000 acres of coastal wetland ecosystems. Typically, between \$13 million and \$17 million in grants are awarded annually through a nationwide competitive process. Funding for the program comes from excise taxes on fishing equipment and motorboat and small engine fuels.

Hard copy applications are due to the Regional Fish and Wildlife Service WSFR Office by June 27, 2008, 4:00 pm local time at the Regional Office. Electronic applications submitted through Grants.gov will be accepted up until June 27, 2008, 4:00 pm Eastern Daylight Time. However, it is recommended that electronic applications be submitted through Grants.gov by June 25, 2008, 4:00 pm Eastern Daylight Time to allow for any unforeseen technical complications. For more information: http://ecos.fws.gov/coastal_grants/.

Training and Conferences

Lights! Cameras! Action!

Production of Environmental Education Video Shorts

What: A one-day, hands-on course that will instruct you on the basics of designing, filming and editing short, digital videos for websites, podcasts and other educational uses

For: Non-Formal Educators in the Gulf of Mexico Region

When: Tuesday, April 29th from 8:30 AM –4:30PM

Where: Estuarine Learning Center Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College Jackson County Campus, Gautier, MS

Instructors: Videographers including Brandon Howe and Kyle Carothers and trainer Ann Weaver, NOAA

Sponsored by: NOAA Special Projects Office, NOAA Gulf Coast Services Center, MDMR/Grand Bay NERR, Gulf of Mexico Alliance Environmental Education Network, MGCCC Estuarine Learning Center

For More Information or to Pre-Register Contact: Jennifer Buchanan, Education Coordinator GBNERR at jen.buchanan@dmr.ms.gov or 228.475.7047.

Lt. Gov. Phil Bryant, National Author Douglas Brinkley to Speak at Smart Growth Conference May 5-6

BILOXI, Miss.– Mississippi Lt. Gov. Phil Bryant and national author and historian Douglas Brinkley will speak at the Coastal Development Strategies Conference on May 5-6 at the Saenger Theatre in Biloxi. Brinkley will open the conference with the keynote address on the first day, and Lt. Gov. Bryant will be featured as the luncheon speaker on the second day.

The conference is hosted by the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR), Office of Coastal Management and Planning Comprehensive Resource Management Plan (CRMP) and conference partner, the Mississippi Gulf Coast Chamber of Commerce. CRMP is a program within the DMR. CRMP's mission is to develop a plan to sustain Mississippi's coastal resources while providing a healthy economy in the region.

Lt. Gov. Bryant was elected Mississippi's Lieutenant Governor in November 2007 with 59 percent of the vote. He previously served three terms as State Auditor and five years as a member of the Mississippi House of Representatives. In 2004, he was presented with the Statesman of the Year award presented by the American Family Radio. Lt. Gov. Bryant has worked with various charitable groups and was a member of the Governor's Commission on Recovery and Renewal following Hurricane Katrina.

Douglas Brinkley, Ph.D., currently is a Professor of History at Rice University and a Fellow at the James Baker III Institute of Public Policy. He completed his bachelor's degree at Ohio State University and received his doctorate in U.S. Diplomatic History from Georgetown University in 1989. He then spent a year at the U.S. Naval Academy and Princeton University teaching history. His book, *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast* (2006), has been one of five of his books selected as New York Times "Notable Books of the Year."

The Mississippi Real Estate Commission and the Mississippi Real Estate Appraiser Licensing and Certification Board have approved this conference as an elective Real Estate Course for 10 continuing education hours. 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 25, 2008 and is \$125 per person (\$80 for students). After April 25, the registration fee will be \$155 (until May 4) and on-site registration is \$175. Conference fees include two breakfasts, refreshment breaks, two lunches and conference materials. Lunches and all exhibits will be housed in the Nativity Sacred Heart Center across the street from the Saenger. 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 or the Coast Chamber at www.mscoastchamber.com.

1st Annual Gulf of Mexico Monitoring Forum

3-6 June 2008

St. Petersburg, FL

The annual Monitoring Forum is an opportunity for those involved in Gulf of Mexico monitoring to exchange ideas and to update each other on monitoring efforts and technology. The forum will focus on coastal and estuarine monitoring, data comparability, harmful algal blooms, microbial source tracking, and nutrient criteria for coastal waters and estuaries.

REGISTRATION DEADLINES: Registration by May 16, 2008, is required for attendance. Submission of abstracts for poster and oral presentations are due May 2. Submit both forms to Linda Sedlacek (Linda.Sedlacek@dep.state.fl.us). Limit your abstracts to 250 words or less. There is no registration fee. Registration documents and additional information are available at the Gulf Alliance website: www2.nos.noaa.gov/gomex/.

HOTEL INFORMATION: Hilton St. Petersburg Bayfront, 333 1st Street South; St. Petersburg, FL 33701-4342. Room rates are \$98 per night plus \$10 for internet per day and \$10 for parking per day. A room block has been reserved. To make reservations at this rate, call (727) 894-5000 after March 31 and ask for the Gulf of Mexico Alliance block. Reservations must be made by April 30th 2008.

Southeast Regional Quality Growth Conference

Development, water availability, climate change, resource protection – how do we help our communities address these issues? Attend the first Southeast Regional Quality Growth Conference: Building Sustainable Communities for the 21st Century, August 12-14, 2008, at the Doubletree Guest Suites in Charleston, SC. Brought to you by the Southeast Watershed Forum and the NOAA Coastal Services Center, this conference will encourage and examine new ways of building environmentally and economically sustainable communities. This year's program includes an evening reception, two luncheons, presentations from several national and regional experts, and three concurrent tracks of sessions where participants can learn about other communities and their innovative case studies and projects. A selection of pre-conference workshops and field trips will be offered on Tuesday, August 12, with the regular conference program beginning on Wednesday, August 13. There is an early registration rate of only \$160 (through July 18) and a conference room rate at the Doubletree Guest Suites of \$109/night (until July 25). For more information, visit www.sustainablecommunitiesconference.org.

NOAA to Host Regional Extension, Outreach and Education Workshop

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Gulf of Mexico Regional Team will host a Gulf of Mexico Extension, Outreach and Education (EOE) Workshop on Aug. 12-13, 2008, at Riverview Plaza Hotel in Mobile, Ala. Leaders of NOAA extension, outreach and education efforts are invited to attend. The workshop will focus on improving constituent engagement and will include these topics: NOAA's Science Advisory Board's EOE recommendations; participation in NOAA's Engagement Test; how to use Joint Fact Finding to improve engagement; best practices on the integration of research, extension, outreach and education; and best practices on Gulf of Mexico EOE.

For more information, contact LaDon Swann, director of the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, at swannld@auburn.edu or go to <http://masgc.org/eoeworkshop>.

Coastal Cities Summit on Climate Change and Sustainability

The International Ocean Institute-USA and the city of St. Petersburg, FL, are hosting a Coastal Cities Summit on November 17-20, 2008, to address the complex challenges that coastal city leaders face as populations increase, resources are depleted, and the impacts of climate change are felt. The Coastal Cities Summit intends to bring together coastal city leaders, managers and academics to discuss environmental, social, economic, and public policy challenges and viable solutions.

Full details are available at www.coastalcities.org.

The 3 ½ day conference will focus on three themes: Climate Change, Risk and Vulnerability, and Sustainable Development. The planners are soliciting speakers on four areas that are particularly relevant to coastal cities: freshwater, pollution, energy, and port security. All sessions are intended to give a long-needed voice to those taking leadership on climate change, providing the implementation and response plans for the city's security, and continuing to focus on protecting citizens from possible extreme events and human-induced degradation.

Abstracts are invited for individual paper proposals, panel proposals, and round table proposals that address either I) Coastal City Challenges, II) Coastal City Practices, or III) Coastal City Solutions in one of the theme.

IMPORTANT DATES

May 15, 2008: Deadline for Abstract Submission

July 1, 2008: Authors will be informed on selection by e-mail

October 15, 2008: Deadline for Final Submissions

July 31, 2008: Deadline for early registration

The [International Ocean Institute](#) (IOI) has 26 operational centers around the world. IOI-USA is the newest center, established in St. Petersburg, FL in 2006 by agreement between IOI headquarters in Malta and the University of South Florida (USF). The mission of IOI-USA is to provide an international center of excellence in education, training, development, and capacity building, with particular interest in coastal and marine areas. The University of South Florida (USF), established in 1956 as a public university, is a comprehensive multi-campus research university serving more than 42,000 students. It is home to the Dr. Kiran C. Patel Center for Global Solutions, a center dedicated to promoting sustainable healthy communities around the world, and one of the co-organizers of the event. The resources and expertise of USF allow IOI-USA to offer an outstanding conference program that will attract attendees from around the world.

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