

Gulf of Mexico News



NOAA Ocean Service, Office of Ocean & Coastal Resource Management

April 2008

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NOAA Gulf of Mexico News

NOAA Seeks Public Comment on Navy's Request for Marine Mammal Permit During New Ship Test

April 10, 2008

NOAA's Fisheries Service is seeking comment on its proposal to minimize the U.S. Navy's disturbance to marine mammals as a new class of ship is tested for structural integrity and crew survivability in naval training waters off the east coast of Florida sometime between May and September. The U.S. Navy has requested what's known under the Marine Mammal Protection Act as an incidental take authorization. The proposed authorization outlines measures the Navy should take to protect marine life as it detonates explosives to battle test the ship. The Navy says it plans to detonate explosives in areas where there are the least number of whales and dolphins determined by trained spotters in aircraft surveying the training waters. In addition, the Navy will monitor the area after each test to locate any injured animals. Injuries and deaths, while not expected, will be reported to NOAA's Fisheries Service.

NOAA's Fisheries Service has preliminarily determined that the tests will not result in more than incidental harassment of marine mammals, and would have no more than a negligible impact on the species or stocks in the area.

The Navy plans to detonate up to four 10,000-pound explosives at a rate of one per week to assess the survivability during battle of new transport dock ship, the USS Mesa Verde. The Navy uses the information gathered during shock trials to help reduce the risk of injury to the crew and damage or loss of the ship during battle. NOAA's Fisheries Service will accept comments on the application and proposed rule through Mon., May 12, 2008. The proposed rule is available online. Electronic comments need to be submitted via the federal e-rulemaking portal.

Comments should be addressed to:

Mr. P. Michael Payne, Chief, Permits
Conservation and Education Division
Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries
NOAA's Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3225

NOAA Accepting Public Comments on Hurricane Forecast Improvement Project

NOAA is accepting public comments on the Hurricane Forecast Improvement Project (HFIP). HFIP is an endeavor with our partners to: 1) provide the basis for NOAA and other agencies to work towards a national effort to coordinate national hurricane research needed to significantly improve guidance for hurricane track, intensity, and storm surge forecasts, and 2) engage and align the inter-agency and larger scientific community efforts towards addressing the challenges posed to improve hurricane forecasts.

The goals of the HFIP are:

- to improve the accuracy and reliability of hurricane forecasts;
- extend lead time for hurricane forecasts with increased certainty;
- to increase confidence in hurricane forecasts.

These efforts will require major investments in enhanced observational strategies, improved data assimilation, numerical model systems, and expanded forecast applications based on the high resolution and ensemble based numerical prediction systems.

The Proposed Framework for Addressing the National Hurricane Research and Forecast Improvement Initiatives is available here: [NOAA’s Hurricane Forecast Improvement Project](#) (pdf). Details of the process for public comment can be found in the [HFIP Federal Register Notice](#) (pdf).

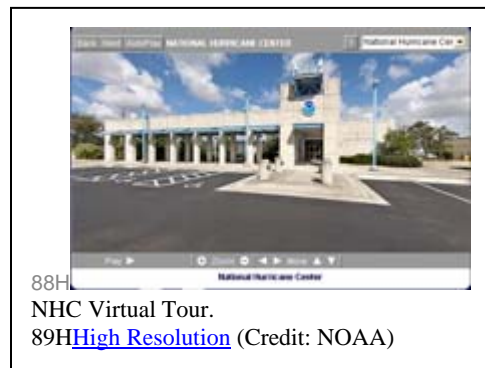
How to Respond

The public is encouraged to submit comments electronically to noaa.review.hfip_plan@noaa.gov. For individuals who do not have access to the internet, comments may be submitted by mail to:

NOAA Research, c/o Mr. Roger Pierce
Silver Spring Metro Center Bldg. 3, Room 11412, R/PPE
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
Phone: 301-734-1062
Fax: 301-713-0158

**Take a Virtual Tour of the National Hurricane Center
New Web Site Brings You Behind the Scenes**

A tour of the [NOAA National Hurricane Center](#) is now as close as your computer with the inauguration of a new virtual online tour of the famous forecast center. The Web site, <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/nhctour.shtml>, provides panoramic views of different areas of the facility, accompanied by audio and text descriptions.



“This is an especially useful tool for students who are learning about tropical cyclones and weather forecasting,” said [Bill Read](#), director of NOAA’s National Hurricane Center. “It also shows how the different branches of our facility work together for the best possible forecasts.” Included in the virtual tour are the National Hurricane Center operations, the [Tropical Analysis Forecast Branch](#) operations, the [Chief Aerial Reconnaissance Coordination - All Hurricanes](#), the Federal Emergency Management Agency liaison, Media & Seminar, [NOAA Miami Regional Library](#), and the [Miami National Weather Service forecast office](#).

The state-of-the-art tour permits the visitor to move around each room in a circle, stop, back up, and zoom in. The audio feature describes the function of each room with a text window available for the hearing-impaired. “The center is busiest during the hurricane season, but is staffed every day around the clock during the off season as well.” said Chris Burr, director of the Tropical Analysis Forecast branch. “Visitors to the site will learn why this is so important, especially for marine interests.”

Alabama Is Site of Kickoff for Second Governors' Action Plan

Representatives from the five Gulf Coast States met in Spanish Fort, Alabama to continue work on regional collaboration efforts that will culminate in a healthier Gulf of Mexico ecosystem and economy. The meeting kicked off efforts for the second Gulf of Mexico Alliance Governors' Action Plan, which will incorporate lessons learned, build on actions from the first plan released in 2006, initiate new actions based on issues in the region, and expand Alliance partnerships to include industry and nongovernmental organizations. Personnel from NOAA's Special Projects Office, Coastal Services Center, Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, National Marine Fisheries Service, and National Coastal Data Development Center attended to support the governors' efforts in the Gulf Coast region. For more information, contact [Ann Weaver](#) or [Laurie Rounds](#).

National Weather Service Tampa Bay Forecast Office (WFO) Attends Annual Banquet of the West Central Florida Chapter of the American Meteorological Society (AMS)

On Tuesday evening, April 22, 2008, the West Central Florida Local AMS Chapter held its 2008 Annual Banquet and Awards Ceremony at the Tampa Yacht Club in Tampa, FL. Chapter President Andy Johnson, Fox13 News Meteorologist emceed the event and welcomed AMS members and invited guests. NWS Tampa Bay Area's Meteorologist-in-Charge, Brian LaMarre, was invited as the guest speaker and provided a presentation on the future of local NWS services and collaboration. The event was an excellent opportunity to interact with AMS members, students and local media. In addition to WTVT Fox 13's Andy Johnson, WFLA's NBC 8 Chief Meteorologist Steve Jerve, and Tampa's Bay News 9.

Chief Meteorologist Mike Clay joined attendees at the banquet and made for an exciting evening. For the latest information on the event, please visit the West Central Florida AMS Local Chapter website at the following: <http://www.wcflams.org/index.php>.



Brian LaMarre discusses the future of local services at the 2008 Annual Banquet at the Tampa Yacht Club. (Photograph by AMS Chapter).

NWS Provides Critical Support to the Corps of Engineers

The NWS provided critical support to the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) during the major flooding that occurred on the Mississippi River starting in March. Flooding is still ongoing on the lower reach of the Mississippi River in Louisiana. On April 11, the USACE opened the Bonnet Carre` Spillway to reduce flows in the Mississippi River at New Orleans. The spillway, located about 20 miles upstream of New Orleans, is one of the flood control structures in the Mississippi River drainage the USACE may operate during major flood events. The spillway is opened when the discharge on the Mississippi River at New Orleans is expected to exceed 1.25 million cubic feet per second. Prior to the April 11 opening of the spillway, the NWS River Forecast Centers (RFC) which provide river forecast services in the Mississippi River Drainage, participated in daily conference calls to support the USACE decision-makers.

The Hydrometeorological Prediction Center (HPC) provided forecasts of rainfall used in river forecast models. The Missouri Basin RFC (MBRFC), Ohio Basin RFC (OHRFC), North Central RFC (NCRFC), and Arkansas Basin RFC (ABRFC) provided projected flows from the upper tributaries. The Lower Mississippi RFC (LMRFC), responsible for forecasting the lower Mississippi River, used these projected flows to predict stage levels and river flows for the area near the Bonnet Carre` Spillway.

Numerous contingencies were provided by the five RFCs. Opening the Spillway has significant impacts to Lake Pontchartrain and is a major event in Southern Louisiana. This is the 9th time the spillway has been opened since construction in the early 1930's. The last opening of the spillway was during the flood event of 1997. For more information on the Bonnet Carre` Spillway, please see <http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/pao/bcarre/bcarre.htm>. Forecasts from the LMRFC are available at <http://www.srh.noaa.gov/orn/> and http://www.srh.noaa.gov/orn/forecast/tributaries/status_miss.shtml.

NOAA's Fisheries Service Outlines Measures to Prevent Overfishing of Sandbar and Other Sharks

NOAA's Fisheries Service has outlined new measures to prevent overfishing and rebuild the number of sandbar and other shark species. The public may comment on the final environmental impact statement (FEIS) until May 19. The measures in the FEIS include revised quotas and a ban on cutting fins off before landing a shark. A final rule is expected to be published in June and implemented 30 days later.

The number of sandbar sharks is between 20 and 38 percent of the population in the early 20th century before fishing began on sharks. Recent stock assessments indicate that sandbar, porbeagle, and dusky sharks are severely overfished and therefore drastic measures need to be taken to begin rebuilding. It has been illegal to catch dusky sharks since 2000, but these sharks are taken incidentally when fishermen seek other species. Sandbar sharks are one of the most valuable shark species caught commercially in the Atlantic Ocean. They make up the majority of the current commercial shark landings and are prized for their fins, which are the main ingredient in dishes such as shark fin soup. "Sandbar sharks, like other sharks, mature late, grow slowly and produce few young, making them particularly vulnerable to fishing pressure," said Jim Balsiger, acting assistant administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "This outlines strong measures to stop overfishing on sandbar and other coastal sharks to allow these species to rebuild."

The final environmental impact statement issued this week isolates the management of the sandbar shark from other species managed in the large coastal shark complex. The FEIS will cut the sandbar shark quota from 1,017 metric tons to 87.9 metric tons, an 85 percent reduction, per year from 2008 to 2012 and cuts the quota for porbeagle sharks. NOAA is also modifying the list of shark species that recreational fishermen can retain. These measures will have an impact on current shark fisheries, but are necessary to rebuild the various stocks. In addition, all fishing for sandbar sharks will take place as part of a research fishery with approximately 10 commercial fishing vessels participating per year. The sandbar research will be designed to gain more information on shark life history, techniques to reduce bycatch, and to ensure sufficient data for future stock assessments. The final environmental impact statement would still allow fishing for other large coastal sharks with reduced limits on numbers of sharks taken per trip consistent with recent stock assessments.

Another important measure in the final environmental impact statement would require that all sharks be landed at the dock with their fins still naturally attached. This regulation is designed to improve enforcement against shark finning, where fishermen remove the highly valuable fins from sharks at sea and discard the rest of the shark overboard. The regulation would also assist with identification of the species and improve species-specific data collection for future stock assessments. The commercial quota

for porbeagle sharks, another depleted species, will be reduced from 92 metric tons a year to 1.7 metric tons per year. Recreational anglers would also be allowed to land porbeagle sharks, and porbeagle sharks could be landed in tournaments.

The final environmental impact statement contains other regulations designed to prevent overfishing of several shark species and can be found at the Highly Migratory Species Management Division's Web site, <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/>. A final rule is expected to be published in June. Comments can be e-mailed to shark.finalEIS@noaa.gov (please include in subject line the following identifier: Amendment 2 FEIS), or faxed to 301-713-1917. Any comments on the FEIS may be submitted to:

Michael Clark, Highly Migratory Species Management Division
NOAA's Fisheries Service - F/SF1
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring MD 20910.

Evaluating Gulf of Mexico Tidal Creeks as Sentinel Habitats for Ecosystem Health

As part of a long term agreement between the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science and the National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERRS), scientists from Hollings Marine Laboratory (HML) conducted an initial sampling reconnaissance on March 24-27. The sampling was for the integrated project, "Evaluating Tidal Creek Ecosystems as Early Warning Systems for the Impacts of Coastal Population Growth and Associated Land Use Changes on Coastal Ecosystem and Human Well-being in the Gulf of Mexico." The primary objective of this work is to clearly define the relationships between coastal development, land use changes, non-point source pollution loading, and the ecological and ecosystem health status of tidal creek ecosystems. The project uses the NERRS as reference sites. This year, the sentinel habitats group will be sampling creeks in the Grand Bay NERR (MS) and Weeks Bay NERR (AL). As the project develops there may be opportunities for cooperative work between HML and the Center for Coastal Environmental Health and Biomolecular Research. For more information, contact Fred Holland at Fred.Holland@noaa.gov or Susan White at Susan.White@noaa.gov.

Investigation of Red Tides Provides New Perspective on Toxin Accumulation and Impacts on Cetaceans

National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science research on two *Karenia brevis* (red tide) blooms in Florida waters in 2007 showed that associated cetacean mortalities did not have the high concentrations and prevalence of brevetoxin detected in similar mortality events in Florida in 2000 and 2004. The large differences in brevetoxin loads associated with cetacean strandings at multiple locations during various red tides suggest a complex interaction between biotic and abiotic factors that have not yet been fully investigated. These results provide new impetus for incorporating ecology, habitat use, and physical and biological oceanographic components into future studies on brevetoxin exposure in these marine systems. For more information, contact Spencer Fire at Spencer.Fire@noaa.gov.

Event Response Program to Assist Texas Response to Unusual Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB)

The National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science Center for Sponsored Coastal Ocean Research (CSCOR) HAB Event Response Program is providing assistance to a team of researchers and managers coordinated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department responding to an ongoing toxic algal bloom of the species *Dinophysis*. This species produces the toxin okadaic acid, which can accumulate in shellfish and when consumed can cause Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning. The bloom and toxin levels measured in oyster samples prompted the State of Texas to close impacted bays and issue a recall of oysters, clams and mussels. No reports of illness have yet been reported. CSCOR event response funding will support regular sampling and analysis by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Department of State Health Services, University of Texas Marine Institute, and Texas A&M University. This monitoring will enable the state to determine when it is safe to reopen shellfish beds. For more information, contact Marc Suddleson at Marc.Suddleson@noaa.gov. Current status on this bloom can be found at (<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/water/environconcerns/hab/>).

Models Based on Remote Sensing of Water Quality Can Help Management of Apalachicola Bay Resources

Scientists from NOAA's Environmental Cooperative Sciences Center (ECSC) developed regression models using satellite reflectance that establish a relationship between chlorophyll-*a* and total suspended solids (TSS) in Apalachicola Bay. The satellite-derived maps revealed large spatial and temporal variations in chlorophyll-*a* concentration and TSS across the bay. With these maps, resource managers can identify sensitive and vulnerable areas of the bay for detailed study, management, or restoration to improve the growth and health of eastern oysters (*Crassostrea virginica*) and other important species. The models were derived from data captured by the Moderate-Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (better known as MODIS) on the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Terra satellite, and this research was supported by grants from NOAA and the Environmental Protection Agency's Science to Achieve Results (STAR) program. For more information, contact Hongqing Wang (University of Louisiana at Lafayette) at hqw7894@louisiana.edu, or Larry Robinson at Larry.Robinson@famu.edu.

Topographic Data of 12 Florida Counties Now Available

Topographic LIDAR data sets of 12 Florida counties are now available via the [LIDAR Data Retrieval Tool](#), a product of the NOAA Coastal Services Center. The Florida Water Management District collected the data from 2004 to 2006 in the following counties: Charlotte, Citrus, De Soto, Hardee, Hernando, Highlands, Hillsborough, Pasco, Polk, Manatee, Sarasota, and Sumter. The data sets provide high-resolution topographic information helpful for projects related to land management and acquisition, planning, engineering, regulations, and habitat restoration. For more information, contact [Brian Hadley](#).

NCCOS Mapping Tool Provides Access to Chemical and Biological Assessment Data to Facilitate Coastal Management

The National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) and Special Projects Office (SPO) recently completed a data mapping and download tool for the National Status and Trends (NS&T) Bioeffects Program that allows users to query, visualize, and download sediment chemistry, toxicity, and biodiversity data from 17 estuaries studied using consistent field and laboratory methods to assess estuary condition. These studies represent approximately 50% of the Bioeffects Studies conducted since the program began in 1986. In addition, a suite of map layers is provided to assist users in visualizing data in the context of management and ecosystem boundaries, including National Estuarine Research Reserves, National Marine Sanctuaries, National Parks, NOAA Fisheries Management Zones, National Wildlife Refuges, and USGS 8-digit watershed boundaries. Four additional estuary studies are scheduled to be uploaded by the end of FY2008, and historical studies will follow in 2009. The tool can be accessed at: <http://egisws01.nos.noaa.gov/website/nsandt/ba>. For more information, contact Ed Johnson at Ed.Johnson@noaa.gov, or Percy Pacheco at Percy.Pacheco@noaa.gov.

Other NOAA News

NOAA Begins Ocean Data Integration Effort

April 30, 2008

NOAA has launched a major initiative to link together a wealth of ocean observation data from a wide variety of federal and non-federal sources. The project will make ocean temperature, salinity, water level, current, wind and wave data gathered by NOAA and other organizations easier to access and use than ever before. "NOAA is proud to lead this national effort to link ocean observations in an easy-to-use, standard format that provides accurate and timely information so people can make informed business and recreational decisions," said Zdenka Willis, director of the [NOAA Integrated Ocean Observing Program](#). "NOAA and our partner organizations will use the integrated data to improve forecasts of severe weather and natural hazards, enhance pollution tracking models, and create a more complete picture of our ocean planet."

NOAA will begin the effort by linking online databases maintained by the [NOAA National Data Buoy Center](#), [NOAA Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services](#), and the [NOAA CoastWatch Program](#) using Web services and standards developed by Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC), Inc. "We are pleased to support NOAA in its effort to improve access, integration and use of important ocean observations collected and managed by many organizations," said OGC President and CEO Mark Reichardt. "The use of interoperable standards to study the ocean ecosystem will help to yield a range of environmental, social and economic benefits." OGC is comprised of more than 350 companies, government agencies, research organizations, and universities participating in a process to develop interoperable web-based specifications and make them publicly available.

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

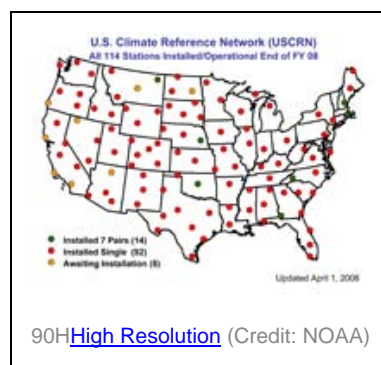
Earth Observation System of Systems ([GEOSS](#)), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

NOAA Employing New Tools to Accurately Measure Climate Change

April 24, 2008

NOAA today announced it will install the last nine of the 114 stations as part of its new, high-tech climate monitoring network. The stations track national average changes in temperature and precipitation trends. The U.S. Climate Reference Network (CRN) is on schedule to activate these final stations by the end of the summer.

NOAA also is modernizing 1,000 stations in the Historical Climatology Network (HCN), a regional system of ground-based observing sites that collect climate, weather and water measurements. NOAA's goal is to have both networks work in tandem to feed consistently accurate, high-quality data to scientists studying climate trends.



Climate Reference Network - Making a Difference

The CRN is helping to pinpoint the shifts in America's changing, often unpredictable, climate. "We're entering a new age of understanding climate change, by adding more sound, reliable data about what's really happening in the atmosphere and on the ground," said Dr. Tom Karl, director of [NOAA's National Climatic Data Center](#) in Asheville, N.C. Karl, one of the world's leading experts on climate change, helped spearhead the new climate network's development.



CRN station in Baker, Nev.
91H High Resolution (Credit: NOAA)

"Very high accuracy in the data collected is the key to getting a feel for the national trend. That's what the Climate Reference Network is doing."

Karl said the placement of each CRN station is crucial to obtaining accurate information on current — and likely future — conditions. "All the stations are strategically placed in rural environments away from the influences of nearby urban areas that would confound the interpretation of any changes observed," he said.

Each CRN station logs real-time measurements of surface temperature, precipitation, wind speed and solar radiation.

NOAA's geostationary satellites relay the data from these ground-based stations to NCDC, which posts the [observations](#) online.

Historical Climatology Network - Modernization Underway

The modernization of the HCN's aging equipment will enhance the extent of America's premiere data source for tracking regional climate variations and trends. The modernization, which began November 2006, will follow a "climate-region" approach, starting with a pilot project in the Southwest, where 140

sites will be revamped. HCN sites will be equipped with a new temperature and precipitation sensor that will complement the CRN, with precise regional climate data.

Data gathered by those existing HCN stations that were located in less-than-ideal areas have been statistically corrected in the analysis of climate trends routinely reported by NOAA. Though some individual stations were placed in less-than-ideal areas, these data anomalies did not significantly alter overall climate measurements. The modernization will relocate these stations in areas that are closer to ideal. In one critical example, this dense, spatial coverage will provide more timely and accurate regional data to support the National Integrated Drought Information System, a collaboration among federal agencies and several state governments geared to provide a dynamic and accessible drought-risk information system.

“Monitoring and understanding climate is a long-term endeavor. We need to have updated systems, such as the Historical Climatology Network, in place for the long haul,” said David Caldwell, director of the [Office of Climate, Water and Weather Services](#) at [NOAA’s National Weather Service](#) in Silver Spring, Md. Caldwell added that a modernized HCN will give NOAA scientists more information to “help explain what’s happening with the climate at the regional and local level and serve as a baseline for evaluating other meteorological data.”

Environmental Technology Development Project Reports Available

The UNH/NOAA Cooperative Institute for Coastal and Estuarine Environmental Technology (CICEET) has posted spring 2008 progress reports for its environmental technology development projects online. These projects are dedicated to developing tools that help coastal communities be more resilient in the face of increasing development and climate change. The focus areas include improved tools for land use planning, habitat restoration and protection, and water quality monitoring. These reports, submitted by the projects’ investigators, detail their progress in gathering data, meeting research objectives, reaching out to coastal management, and engaging the intended users of the tools they are developing. Browse projects in your area at http://ciceet.unh.edu/news/releases/spring08_progress_reports/index.html.

Resource Managers Equipped with Pollution Solutions at Marine Debris Forum

Coastal managers from around the country learned about reducing submerged and floating debris to protect coastal waters during NOAA’s first Marine Debris Information Forum held April 1-3 in Bethesda, MD. National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) researchers gave oral and poster presentations that led to discussions about identifying, removing, and preventing debris, such as plastic items, cans, Styrofoam, and fishing equipment. The poster summarized results from a collaborative study with the Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission of submerged debris in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. Results revealed that spiny lobster and stone crab traps account for over half of all debris in benthic habitats of the reserve. The oral presentation described an assessment of occurrence, accumulation, and potential impacts of marine debris in submerged and intertidal habitats of coastal North Carolina, including the Rachel Carson National Research Reserve. For more information, contact Shay Viehman at Shay.Viehman@noaa.gov or Amy V. Uhrin at Amy.Uhrin@noaa.gov.

In the Gulf States

Estuarium at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab Changes Name to The George F. Crozier Estuarium

In a resolution by the Dauphin Island Sea Lab's Board of Directors, chaired by University of South Alabama's President V. Gordon Moulton, the Estuarium has changed its name to the George F. Crozier Estuarium at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab. A name changing ceremony took place on Saturday, April 19, 2008.

IN RECOGNITION OF GEORGE F. CROZIER

WHEREAS, Dr. George F. Crozier, a leader in the study and advancement of marine sciences in the State of Alabama since 1968, served as Executive Director of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab from 1977 until his retirement in December, 2007; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Crozier initiated the first high school marine science program in 1971, and

WHEREAS, Dr. Crozier was instrumental in establishing the first public awareness campaign for Mobile Bay through Bay Watch and the Estuarium, a public aquarium; and

WHEREAS, he has dedicated his life to the promotion of marine science education and research.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Directors for the Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium, by this resolution, in honor and recognition for his outstanding efforts do hereby name the Dauphin Island Estuarium.

Mobile Manatees- Report Your Manatee Sightings

This year, the Mobile Manatees program, based at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab (DISL), received its first manatee sighting on March 3 in Fowl River, earlier than expected. A manatee sighting also was reported from Mississippi waters. The DISL research team looks forward to more reports as the weather warms. It will continue regular visits to areas frequented by manatees and will conduct aerial surveys in June.

As bay waters are warming up, we expect to see more manatees moving into Mobile Bay and up into the rivers and delta. Our primary goal this time of year is to remind people that these animals are here and that the Mobile Manatees Sighting Network is active, states DISL Senior Marine Scientist Dr. Ruth Carmichael.

Based on early sightings, we expect this season to be very busy. We encourage everyone to please report sightings as soon as possible and contact us or visit our website for more information," she concluded. This vital research depends on community participation. Please contact Mobile Manatees to report sightings or for more information.

What you can do to assist our research and help protect manatees in Mobile Bay:

- Report any manatee sightings to Mobile Manatees via our website <http://manatee.disl.org> or toll free number, 1-866-493-5803

- Spread the word. Tell your friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues to report manatee sightings to Mobile Manatees.
- Give manatees space. Do not do anything to alter manatees' natural behavior. Do not entice, chase, feed, or touch them. The best rule of thumb is to stay at least 100 feet from manatees. According to federal law any activity that changes manatees' natural behavior is harassment and is illegal.
- Boat with caution. Boat strikes are the leading cause of human-related mortality among manatees.
- Purchase a Manatee-shirt. Contact the DISL Estuarium gift shop to buy a Mobile Manatees T-shirt. All proceeds go to support Mobile Manatees outreach program.

The Mobile Manatees program has focused on defining where manatees live and what they eat while visiting Mobile Bay and adjacent waters. The program also is dedicated to sharing data with other researchers, managers, and the public.

In 2007, DISL and Wildlife Trust (WT) in Florida started the Mobile Manatees Sighting Network, the first formal network to receive and track manatee sightings in AL waters. The program successfully processed more than 100 sightings in 2007 (in contrast, only 156 sightings were recorded for the area in the entire 20 years prior). The program serendipitously served as a contact for sightings from other regions such as MS, FL, NC, and GA. In less than one year, Mobile Manatees was featured in 4 regional TV news broadcasts, 14 newspaper articles throughout AL, and newspapers in WI and OH. Data provided by this program also was responsible for the AL Natural Heritage Program's recent decision to reclassify manatees in AL waters from accidental (SA) to priority (SI).

Mobile Manatee's partners include Wildlife Trust, USFWS, USGS, NMFS, AL Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, Baldwin County Soil and Water Conservation District, NOAA's National Data Development Center (NCDDC), MS-AL Sea Grant, community members, and media.

Florida Celebrates International Year of the Reef 2008

--DEP's Coral Reef Conservation Program helps educate and raise awareness of Southeast Florida's coral reefs--

MIAMI – Leading up to the International Coral Reef Symposium this summer, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Coral Reef Conservation Program is encouraging public awareness of coral reefs and their impact on Florida's marine environment, the commercial and recreational fishing industry and the economy. Recognizing the importance of the state's reef ecosystem, Florida is the site of the 11th International Coral Reef Symposium, July 7-11, 2008, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

An extensive, beautiful coral reef ecosystem stretches more than 100 miles along the Southeast Florida coast, from Miami-Dade to Martin County. These reefs are part of the third longest reef system in the world and are one of the greatest natural resources in Florida and the United States. Coral reefs are specialized habitats that provide shelter, food and breeding sites for numerous plants and animals. Reefs form a breakwater for the adjacent coast, providing natural storm protection.

Taking place during the International Year of the Reef 2008, the International Coral Reef Symposium convenes every four years as a major scientific conference to provide the latest knowledge about coral reefs worldwide. Natural scientists, resource managers and users, conservationists, economists, and educators meet together to advance coral reef science, management and conservation. Sponsored in part by the Symposium as well as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the International

Coral Reef Initiative, the International Year of the Reef is a worldwide campaign to raise awareness about the value and importance of coral reefs and threats to their sustainability.

“Coral reefs are diverse habitats that draw scuba divers and fishermen that boost our economy and they protect our beaches and homes from storm surge,” said DEP Director of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas Stephanie Bailenson. “DEP is proud to be a co-sponsor of the 11th International Coral Reef Symposium and join the world in celebrating International Year of the Reef 2008. We appreciate the commitment of all of our partners to ensuring the health and vitality of these precious treasures.”

DEP’s Coral Reef Conservation Program is raising public awareness by sponsoring two 30-second Public Service Announcements (PSAs) about coral reefs. Airing in both English and Spanish, the PSAs will run throughout 2008 on local television and radio stations in Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and Martin counties. The program has also produced a video on coral reef protection for area visitors as well as educational DVDs for teachers that provide more than 150 activities for students. In addition, an advanced coral reef training workshop will be held in 2008, as a follow-up course for teachers who participated in previous workshops.

Furthermore, the Coral Reef Conservation Program provides monthly identification classes on corals, fishing and marine invertebrates as well as coral reef protection tips on their Web site.

Tips include:

- Use navigational charts to locate coral reefs.
- Anchor to mooring buoys or in sand.
- Stash your trash - do not dispose of trash, bilge washings, or other debris on or near reefs.
- Don't touch coral. Coral is made of a hard skeleton, but coral polyps are fragile.
- Avoid trolling for fish above a reef.
- Be a smart consumer. Look for the Marine Aquarium Council (MAC) stamp of approval on marine products before purchasing.

“The Coral Reef Conservation Program is dedicated to providing these useful activities so the public will take action and commit to providing for the health and future of coral reefs,” said Chantal Collier, manager of DEP’s Coral Reef Conservation Program.

The State of Florida also manages coral reefs in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association. This partnership has helped monitor and protect this fragile coral ecosystem for 30 years. The Sanctuary Advisory Council supports public involvement in the management process.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s Coral Reef Conservation Program heads the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative, a coalition of more than 70 state, local and federal partners working to protect Florida’s coral reefs. The Initiative is a local action strategy to identify and implement priority actions needed to reduce threats to coral reef resources, including research, monitoring, education and best management practices. For more information on DEP’s Coral Reef Conservation Program and the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative, visit www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/programs/coral and www.southeastfloridareefs.net.

Governor Crist Announces 2008 Climate Change Summit

~ Investing in Florida's green technology to be focus ~

TALLAHASSEE – Florida Governor Charlie Crist today announced the 2008 Serve to Preserve Florida Summit on Global Climate Change. The conference will be held June 25-26, 2008, at the Intercontinental Miami. Building on the foundation for Florida's energy future began at last year's summit, the 2008 summit will focus on stimulating economic development in clean technologies as well as "greening" Florida's business community.

"Florida's businesses continue to demonstrate that there is gold in green, and climate-friendly energy sources – like ethanol and solar energy – are bringing new prospects for our state," said Governor Charlie Crist. "Encouraging companies to do business the green way as well as building a strong market in renewable energy technologies in the Sunshine State will strengthen our energy and economic future and protect our natural environment for generations to come."

Building on the policy framework of the executive orders signed at the 2007 summit, this year's summit focuses on developing Florida's renewable and alternative energy industries. By encouraging companies to invest in our state's energy future, Florida will transform its energy marketplace to enhance fuel diversity, lessen dependence on foreign sources of oil and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The 2008 summit will bring together industry leaders, policy makers, academics, scientists, environmentalists and the business community to explore opportunities for expanding Florida's renewable and alternative energy marketplace and greening our business community.

Since last year's summit, Florida's "green" economy has grown significantly. Progress Energy along with Biomass Gas & Electric of Atlanta recently announced a partnership to build in North Florida the largest waste-wood biomass plant in the nation, converting waste wood to electricity. FPL Group, one of the largest utilities in the country, has a number of solar and wind energy projects across Florida, including a \$2.4 billion investment in a 300 megawatt solar facility. Also, during the Governor's trade mission to Brazil last year, a \$183 million agreement was signed between Renewable Fuels of Tallahassee LLC and Controlsud International Group to build a system that converts trash into energy in Tallahassee.

Additionally, other companies are expanding conservation efforts and investing in upgrades at existing facilities to increase energy efficiency and save money while stimulating our economy. Finally, in November, Florida was home to the first carbon-neutral college football game between Florida State University and the University of Florida in Gainesville.

On July 13, 2007, Governor Charlie Crist signed a suite of executive orders to reduce Florida's greenhouse gases emissions, increase energy efficiency, and remove market barriers for renewable energy technologies such as solar and wind energy. Since the executive orders were signed, Florida has stepped onto the world stage as a major marketplace for advanced energy technologies. In addition, the Governor's Action Team on Energy and Climate Change Phase II Report, due October 1, 2008, will provide additional recommendations for strategic investments and public-private partnerships to spur climate-friendly economic development opportunities. For more information on the 2008 Serve to Preserve Florida Summit on Global Climate Change, or to register for the conference, visit www.myfloridaclimate.com or www.myflorida.com.



Florida DEP's LIFE Program Engages Students in Protecting Coastal Environment

-- Franklin County School District receives prestigious education award--

APALACHICOLA – The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is recognizing Franklin County schools for their involvement in DEP's award-winning Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE) program. Today's presentation to the Franklin District School Board acknowledges the contributions of the local partners that helped the LIFE program secure the 2007 Coastal America Partnership Award.



“Franklin County was instrumental in establishing the first LIFE site which has led to an expansion in several other school districts in the state,” said Erik Lovestrand, DEP's Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve's Education Coordinator. “The LIFE program involves hands-on, in the field science instruction for Franklin County's 7th graders that teaches them science research concepts and will help them towards becoming better stewards of the local environment.”

In November 2007, DEP's LIFE program received a 2007 Coastal America Partnership Award from the federal government recognizing the partnership between DEP and local schools to restore, protect and educate the public on the coastal environment. As a partner to the LIFE program, the Franklin County School District is a co-recipient of the 2007 Coastal America Partnership Award. During today's presentation, Franklin County School District Superintendent Jo Ann Gander will be presented with a 2007 Coastal America Partnership plaque acknowledging the contribution from teachers, school district administrators and students.

DEP's Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve will host the entire seventh grade as part of the LIFE program this school year. Each student will participate in a series of outdoor environmental science labs throughout the school year.

The Coastal America Partnership was established in 1992 to protect, preserve and restore coastal watersheds by integrating federal actions with state and local government and non-governmental efforts. Federal partners include the Departments of Agriculture, Air Force, Army, Commerce, Defense, Energy, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Navy, State and Transportation, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency and the Executive Office of the President. To recognize outstanding partnership efforts, Coastal America created a national awards program in 1997.

Since 2004, nearly 3,500 future scientists and stewards have participated in the LIFE program. The LIFE initiative seeks to establish a series of field-based, environmental-science education programs around the state. Each of the nine existing programs is a partnership between the DEP and a local school district. The goal of each LIFE program is increased student achievement and teacher professional development in science, with the content and delivery varying from site to site. For more information about the LIFE program, visit www.dep.state.fl.us/secretary/ed.

Florida DEP Encourages Eco-Friendly Maritime Practices with Boating Tips & a New Clean Marina Web Site

TALLAHASSEE – The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) today unveiled its newly remodeled Clean Marina Web site encouraging marinas, boaters and marine retailers to help keep Florida’s waterways clean by adopting environmentally friendly practices. The remodeled Web site allows users to access resources which simplify the Florida Clean Marina Program application process, offer educational tools and tips, and lists all designated marinas, boatyards and retailers as well as the members of the Clean Boating Partnership.

“Using the internet to educate Florida’s citizens of the importance of adopting sustainable, eco-friendly practices both on land and in water is a huge stride towards protecting the state’s delicate water resources,” said DEP’s Director of Sustainable Initiatives Deas Bohn. “With the new site, boaters can now locate Florida Clean Marina Program designated facilities in their area and learn how to implement clean boating practices, marine retailers can download an action plan for adopting best management practices, and marinas can save resources by applying online to become a Clean Marina.”

The new Web site allows browsers to apply for Clean Marina, Clean Boatyard and Clean Marine Retailer–Clean Boating Partnership programs, and receive instructional materials online rather than processing paper applications through the mail. The remodeled site also offers a listing of all Clean Marina designated facilities by region with a picture, press release and link to the facility’s Web site. “More than 18,000 wet slips, or 30 percent of the state’s wet slips, and more than 12,500 dry storage slips now fly the Clean Marina flag, making Florida the leader among states with Clean Marina programs,” said Clean Boating Partnership Chair John Naybor. “With the launch of the new Clean Marina Web site and eco-friendly boating tips we hope to better educate boaters, marinas, boatyards and marine retailers about clean boating practices.”

The Clean Boating Partnership is a consortium of industry leaders who contribute time and input to the Clean Marina, Clean Boatyard, Clean Marine Retailer and Clean Boater programs, which DEP administers, to protect Florida’s waterways. The partnership includes DEP, Marine Industries Association of Florida, Florida Sea Grant Program, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the United States Coast Guard and Coast Guard Auxiliary. To date, the Florida Clean Marina Program together with the Clean Boating Partnership has designated 162 Clean Marinas, 29 Clean Boatyards, four Clean Marine Retailers, and 18,903 boaters have signed the clean boating pledge. To view the new Clean Marina Web site and learn more about the Florida Clean Marina Program and Clean Boating Partnership, visit www.dep.state.fl.us/cleanmarina.

CPRA Discusses Host of Restoration Projects and Morganza-to-the-Gulf Review Panel at Monthly Meeting

BATON ROUGE - The Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority announced the construction of a shoreline protection project for St. Charles Parish and the formation and members of a technical review panel to evaluate the current alignment of a planned hurricane protection system for the Houma area at its monthly meeting Wednesday at the Department of Natural Resources Building.

The CPRA and St. Charles Parish signed a Memorandum of Understanding that allows the state to advance \$2.3 million from the Coastal Protection and Restoration Fund to the parish’s Coastal Impact

Assistance Program (CIAP) fund. The advance will allow the parish and the Department of Natural Resources to combine efforts and begin construction of a shoreline protection project in Lake Salvador. Because of the advance, DNR will be able to begin processing the construction bid package as early as the end of this month instead of having to wait until December 2008 or early 2009.

"This kind of cooperation between the CPRA and the parishes represents the kind of innovative thinking it's going to take on our part to advance the restoration and protection of our coast as quickly as possible," said CPRA Chairman Garret Graves.

CIAP is a program established by the Department of the Interior that will allot \$510 million to the state over the next four years to offset the impacts of offshore oil and gas production. The state will receive 65 percent of the funds while the 19 coastal parishes receive 35 percent. St. Charles Parish is expecting to receive \$1.5 million from CIAP this year and will return the \$2.3 million to the CPRA fund when additional CIAP funds are released in 2009.

The CPRA then discussed the formation of a technical review panel to evaluate Morganza-to-the Gulf, a 72-mile system of levees, locks and flood protection gates designed to provide hurricane protection to Terrebonne Parish and lower Lafourche Parish. The technical review panel will determine if the current alignment will provide the best protection possible to coastal infrastructure while minimizing impacts to wildlife and fishery habitats. Eight scientists with expertise in wetland ecosystems and hydrology from Louisiana and Texas have been selected and will begin meeting in June. Recommendations about the Morganza system are anticipated to be brought to the CPRA approximately six months after the first meeting.

Graves said the state will move forward with developing the system and continue working with the Army Corps of Engineers to advance its construction while the review panel evaluates the project. The system has been authorized by Congress since 1992 but construction has been delayed numerous times. "This review panel is not designed to slow the building of Morganza-to-the-Gulf," he said. "The panel will work to make sure the protection provided is the best possible. The state is committed to moving forward on this project."

The authority also discussed the potential that several levee systems in South Louisiana, including those in Lafourche Parish, will not be certified to provide 100-year protection when new federal flood maps are issued later this spring. Windell Curole, director of the South Lafourche Levee District and CPRA member said the parishes have a year after new flood elevation maps are presented by FEMA to evaluate and vote to accept or reject the new maps. If the maps are not accepted by the parishes, federal flood insurance would be unavailable for new structures built behind uncertified levees and in areas deemed flood prone by the maps.

Graves said the state is asking the federal agencies for leniency and time for the various levee districts to work to improve and raise levee systems before new structures and possible existing structures lose eligibility for federal flood insurance. "These levees are being deemed uncertifiable because the standards from the federal government have changed, not because the structures themselves are in bad shape or aren't working," Graves said. "The governor is asking there be an interim period between the issuing of the new flood maps and the loss of flood insurance to allow the state to work with FEMA and the Corps of Engineers to provide the necessary protection to avoid all of the issues with mortgages and the loss of economic development in those areas."

In other business, Kirk Rhinehart, administrator of the Department of Natural Resource's Coastal Restoration Division explained the current state of the Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) and how the state is moving forward with efforts to build

small-scale restoration projects through the CWPPRA program.

"We're trying to take the CWPPRA Program, that has historically addressed smaller scale projects, and use it and the projects built as a model for the larger restoration projects that we are designing and how we can maximize the efforts among the various restoration programs," Rhinehart said. "We've learned a lot from CWPPRA and it has engaged a lot of people in the effort to restore the coast."

CWPPRA funds have been used to build or develop 142 projects since 1991 with 81 projects already built at a cost of \$417.76 million, 14 projects under construction or approved and another five projects waiting for funding. Four projects have been nominated for development this year with \$76 million in federal funds anticipated to be available to build the projects with a 15 percent match from state funds.

The CPRA also received an update from the Corps of Engineers about current flood levels and flow rates in the Mississippi River and the amount of water being directed through the Old River Control Structure and the Bonnet Carre Spillway. CPRA officials announced the formation of a science workshop to examine the various effects opening the Bonnet Carre Spillway has on Lake Pontchartrain and how that information can be used to build freshwater and sediment diversion projects on the Mississippi River.

For more information about Wednesday's meeting or the CPRA's efforts to restore and protect Coastal Louisiana, please contact Chris Macaluso at 225-342-3968 or by email at chris.macaluso@la.gov.

Louisiana Senate Natural Resources Committee Advances CPRA's 2009 Annual Plan

BATON ROUGE -- The Louisiana Senate Natural Resources Committee voted unanimously to advance the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority's Fiscal Year 2009 Annual Plan Thursday at the State Capitol. CPRA Chairman Garret Graves delivered a short presentation outlining the array of coastal restoration and hurricane protection projects in the plan and the estimated costs for each. In all, more than \$224 million in projects are identified in the plan to be funded during the 2009 fiscal year.

Members of the House Transportation Committee were present as well but Legislative rules prohibited them from voting to advance the plan, listed as SCR-24, until the next scheduled committee meeting which will be held next Monday.

By statute, the Fiscal Year Annual Plan must be approved by both the Senate and House Committees on Natural Resources and Transportation before advancing to the full House and Senate for approval. Entitled "Fiscal Year 2009 Annual Plan: Ecosystem Restoration and Hurricane Protection in Coastal Louisiana," the State Legislature can vote to adopt or reject the plan in its entirety but cannot amend the plan. The Fiscal Year 2009 Annual Plan can be read by going to:

http://www.lacpra.org/assets/docs/FY09_Annual_Plan%2003-26-2008-1.pdf

An annual plan will be presented to the public and the State Legislature for every year during which projects within the State's Comprehensive Coastal Restoration and Hurricane Protection Master Plan will be built. The annual plan identifies individual projects that are ready to be designed or constructed during the coming fiscal year and the projected cost for each. For more information about the Fiscal Year 2009 Annual Plan and Louisiana's Comprehensive Master Plan for Coastal Restoration and Hurricane protection, please contact Chris Macaluso at (225) 342-3968 or by email at chris.macaluso@la.gov.

The Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority's mandate is to develop, implement and enforce a comprehensive coastal protection and restoration master plan. For the first time in Louisiana's history, this single state authority will integrate coastal restoration and hurricane protection by marshalling the expertise and resources of the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Transportation and Development, and other state agencies, to speak with one clear voice for the future of Louisiana's coast. Working with federal, state and local political subdivisions, including levee districts, the CPRA will work to establish a safe and sustainable coast that will protect our communities, the nation's critical energy infrastructure, and our bountiful natural resources for generations to come. The CPRA of Louisiana was established by Act 8 of the 1st Extraordinary Session of 2005.

Louisiana D.W.F. Launches Federally Funded Post-Hurricane Commercial Fisheries Economic Assistance Program

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) will provide \$27.6 million in assistance to the state's commercial fishing industries through a \$41.3 million federal fisheries economic assistance grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration through the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. Louisiana resident commercial fishermen, certain commercial fishing vessel license holders and wholesale/retail seafood dealers with trip ticket recorded sales or purchases of seafood during the 12-month period (Sept. 1, 2004 - Aug. 31, 2005) prior to Hurricane Katrina qualify for some level of personal assistance. LDWF requires trip tickets to collect commercial landings and associated information by trip.

LDWF will administer the distribution of personal assistance payments to qualified commercial resident shrimp, oyster, crab and saltwater finfish fishermen and certain commercial fishing vessel license holders in the shrimp, oyster, saltwater fish and menhaden fisheries and wholesale/retail seafood dealers and freshwater finfish and wild crawfish fishermen who resided in the 27 LDWF defined hurricane impacted parishes using trip ticket report records. Trip tickets dated during the eligible period but submitted after Sept. 1, 2007 will not be considered. More than 8,000 information packets will be mailed during the week of May 12 to individuals and entities that LDWF has been able to identify from pre-storm trip ticket records. LDWF urges everyone who receives a packet to open it immediately, follow the enclosed instructions, and return the required forms using the business-reply envelope provided by the Oct. 31, 2008 deadline.

LDWF Secretary Robert Barham acknowledged that "the task of processing over 8,000 applicants is massive but we are committed to distributing these payments as quickly as possible in order to support the commercial fishing industry which contributes so much to our state's culture, heritage and economy." The South Central Planning and Development Commission (SCPDC) and affiliated planning districts will receive and process all information about this assistance program. Any questions concerning eligibility, requests for information, etc. should be directed to the SCPDC by calling 1-800-630-3791 (toll-free) or 985 655-1051 (local) or mailing SCPDC at P.O. Box 1240, Gray, LA 70359-9902 or visiting the SCPDC Web site at www.scpdc.org/fisheriesassistance.

LDWF will host a series of six public meetings in coastal communities beginning the week of May 19 to present information about the program and review instructions on submitting required forms. Meeting dates, times and places will be announced as soon as this information is available. For more information, contact Jim Hanifen at 225-765-2383 or jhanifen@wlf.louisiana.gov.

MS DMR Shrimp Recovery Program Sign-up Deadline Is May 1, 2008

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 shrimp fishermen.

“Eligible fishermen are still needed to assist the DMR in recovery and monitoring of Mississippi’s Gulf Fisheries,” says DMR Marine Fisheries Office Director Dale Diaz. To be eligible, fishermen must hold a resident commercial license in either or both 2004-2005 and/or 2005-2006. To participate, shrimp fishermen must sign a new contract with DMR by May 1, 2008.

Shrimp Fishery Recovery Program information has been mailed to Mississippi resident fishermen who participated in previous recovery efforts. Eligible commercial fishermen must return completed documentation to the DMR no later than May 1 to contribute to the following programs: BRD/TED Compliance Program and Shrimp Fishery Recovery Monitoring which will coincide with the first three months of the Mississippi Shrimping Season. Contact the DMR Fisheries Office at (228) 374-5000 for more information.

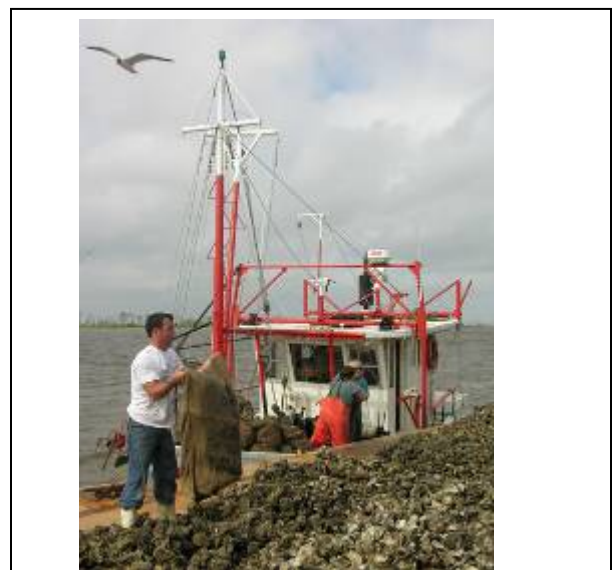
The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources is dedicated to enhancing, protecting and conserving marine interests of the State by managing all marine life, public trust wetlands, adjacent uplands and waterfront areas to provide for the optimal commercial, recreational, educational and economic uses of these resources consistent with environmental concerns and social changes. Visit the DMR online at www.dmr.state.ms.us.

MS DMR, Oyster Harvesters Relay Oysters to Katrina-Damaged Reefs

BILOXI, Miss. – The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR) Shellfish Bureau has been contracting with Mississippi commercial oyster harvesters to relay oysters from Biloxi Bay and Davis Bayou to oyster reefs in the western Mississippi Sound and the White House Reef in Biloxi to replace reef material lost during Hurricane Katrina. The most recent stage of the oyster relay project began in March and is expected to be complete April 9. So far, about 60,000 sacks of oysters have been transferred from Biloxi Bay and Davis Bayou to the Katrina-damaged reefs. More than 130 Mississippi oyster boats have participated in the relay.

“DMR is pleased to have the oyster harvesters participate in this restoration of their resource,” said DMR Shellfish Bureau Director Scott Gordon. “The majority of our local oyster fishermen are proving to be excellent stewards of Mississippi’s oyster resource.”

The oyster relay project is part of a five-year oyster recovery plan funded through the National Oceanic



Oyster fisherman Ben Tillman of Waveland dumps a bag of oysters as Judy and Randy Lesso unload their boat, the Marie Louise, April 8 in Biloxi Bay as part of the DMR’s oyster relay program.

Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Emergency Disaster Recovery Program (EDRP) Phase II.

Previously through Katrina Disaster Grant funds, oyster shells and other suitable reef material were planted along hurricane-damaged reefs to attract larval oysters. Almost a thousand acres of reefs have been planted since Katrina. Since the oyster relay program began last year, about 132,000 sacks of oysters have been relayed to the reefs. Placing live adult oysters adjacent to these areas during the oyster relaying phase will increase the opportunity to produce larvae.

Mississippi Governor Honors FEMA and MEMA Employees

BILOXI, Miss. -- Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour and First Lady Marsha Barbour recently honored numerous employees of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) for their outstanding work in support of the Hurricane Katrina recovery effort in Mississippi.

Arriving to a standing ovation from nearly 1,000 disaster assistance workers of FEMA's Mississippi Transitional Recovery Office (TRO), the governor and first lady joined Jim Stark, FEMA's acting Associate Deputy Administrator for Gulf Coast Recovery and MEMA Director Mike Womack in offering congratulations. The governor expressed appreciation to FEMA and MEMA employees for their commitment to Mississippi's recovery in the face of criticism and challenges.

"Many of you lived here before the storm and even though you were victims too, you joined FEMA and helped in the recovery of your state. The storm didn't create character; it revealed it," said Barbour. "All of you are a testament to the 'pick yourself up by the bootstrap' attitude of Mississippi. Mississippians are very appreciative of the work you've done here." "I would suggest you always look back on this time and say, 'This is a time I am proud of,' because you did so much good for so many people," said Barbour. "Anyone who thinks you can get hit with [Katrina] and have a perfect response just doesn't know what they're talking about," said Barbour. Sid Melton, director of the FEMA Mississippi TRO presented the first family with their own special awards for their unwavering support of the federal staff. "The governor and first lady have stood behind us 110 percent and it's an honor to have them here with us today," said Melton.

For a list of personnel that received a special coin in recognition of outstanding work go to: <http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=43312>. Photo Link: www.photolibrary.fema.gov/photolibrary/photo_details.do?id=35046.

Secretary of the Interior Kempthorne Presents Cooperative Conservation Award to East Bay Wetland and Water Quality Partnership in Texas

WASHINGTON, D.C.—At a ceremony in the nation's capital, Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne recognized the East Bay Wetland and Water Quality Protection Project in Texas as one of 21 recipients nationwide of the Department of the Interior's Cooperative Conservation Award. The project was honored for "exemplary collaborative work sustaining threatened marshland habitat" and providing a "model for efficient and collaborative protection of shorelines in the Galveston Bay system."

The 21 awards recognized the work of more than 700 groups and individuals who achieved excellence in conservation through collaboration and partnerships.

“These outstanding partnerships and cooperative efforts represent a fundamental way in which our Department provides stewardship for America with integrity and excellence,” Secretary Kempthorne said. “They embody a broad spectrum of conservation work from restoring wetlands, rangelands and mine lands to protecting wildlife, conserving water and fighting invasive species to teaching conservation values to the next generation.”

Collaborative efforts of federal and state agencies, nongovernmental organizations and private industry have protected nearly 8,000 acres of diverse coastal habitats along the East Bay from severe erosion and habitat degradation. Project partners placed more than three miles of erosion control structures along the East Bay shoreline of Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. These structures provided critical protection to one of the most remote and pristine areas in the Galveston Bay system. Marsh habitats that were protected and restored provide vital nursery grounds for important aquatic species, such as Gulf menhaden, sea trout, southern flounder, red drum and bay anchovy. They also provide critical wintering habitat for waterfowl and grassland bird species, and valuable stopover habitat for neotropical migratory birds.

The Department of the Interior’s Cooperative Conservation Award recognizes conservation achievements resulting from the cooperation and participation of individual landowners, citizen groups, private sector, nongovernmental organizations, and Federal, State, local, and/or tribal governments.

Habitat for Endangered and Threatened Birds Saved by Shoreline Restoration Project

Houston, Texas – Three priority bird species—the endangered Brown Pelican and threatened Reddish Egret and White-faced Ibis—are conserved thanks to an erosion-protection project on North Deer Island in West Galveston Bay. Project partners protected the highly populated bird nesting habitat by armoring approximately 1.7 miles of shoreline. The most productive bird nesting island on the Texas Coast, North Deer Island has experienced up to 10 feet of erosion per year. This project protects bird nesting habitat for these three and 16 other bird species.

“This island has been extremely important to the recovery of the Brown Pelican in Galveston Bay. Based on a strong and healthy population, our agency has proposed removal of the Brown Pelican from the endangered species list.” said Benjamin Tuggle, Ph.D., Regional Director for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The project is part of the region’s habitat conservation goals established by the Galveston Bay Estuary Program partnership, whose mission is to preserve the bay’s economic and ecologic health. Partners worked for eight years to restore and protect North Deer Island’s rapidly eroding shoreline. Erosion destroyed highly-productive habitat for up to 30,000 nesting pairs using this island as well as nursery areas for commercially and recreationally important finfish and shellfish. The young produced here are likely the birds that everyone sees wading in marshes and bayous throughout the Houston-Galveston area. Partners barged in 24,100 tons from a rock quarry in Missouri—using the Mississippi River and the Intracoastal Waterway as a route—to create 6,450 feet of stone breakwater and armored shoreline. The planning, engineering, and construction costs for the eight-year endeavor were over \$3.2 million dollars.

“These group efforts demonstrate that by working together we can turn good ideas into tangible results” said Jamie Schubert, Project Manager for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. “These habitats are important to our economy. Fish and wildlife resources in Texas contribute over \$8 billion to the economy. These resources are part of our natural heritage and deserve our consideration for their intrinsic

value. By protecting the island, we ensure that these benefits will be there for our children.”

The large and diverse partnership includes, but is not limited to, the following: Audubon Texas, EcoNRG, EPA Gulf of Mexico Program, Houston Audubon Society, Harris & Eliza Kempner Fund, Meadows Foundation, Reliant Energy, Shell Marine – National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Texas Commission of Environmental Quality - Galveston Bay Estuary Program, Texas General Land Office, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. For more information about the Galveston Bay Estuary Program, please call (281) 486-1246 or visit us at: <http://www.gbep.state.tx.us/>.

Nearly 5,400 Volunteers Clean the Texas Coast

Volunteers find Kemp's ridley nests among 98 tons of trash

AUSTIN — Bad weather and high gas prices didn't stop 5,491 Texans from volunteering their time Saturday to haul more than 98 tons of trash off Texas beaches as part of the Texas General Land Office Adopt-A-Beach Spring Cleanup. “That's 196,875 pounds of junk off 153 miles of Texas beaches and that's impressive,” said Jerry Patterson, Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office. “Anyone who loves the beach should be grateful for what this small army of volunteers accomplished.”

Adopt-A-Beach volunteers helped identify and recover two Kemp's ridley turtle nests in Boca Chica. Beachcombers also found an interesting array of odd items including medical waste, yellow police tape, a turtle excluder device, a plastic cowboy, an Ecuadorian cigarette box, a Korean business card, a Bible, a Mexican kitchen doll, an old refrigerator full of old meat, a voodoo doll, a bowling pin, a hog's head, a wig, a male sexual aid, a pregnancy test, a water pipe and a weight bench with a full set of weights.

“What people find on our Adopt-A-Beach cleanups never ceases to amaze me,” Patterson said. Most of the trash consisted of typical items left by beachgoers: cigarette butts, soda cans, beer bottles, beach toys and tires. This mix of trash has changed over the years that Adopt-A-Beach volunteers have walked the beaches. When the program started in 1986, the bulk of trash on Texas beaches washed ashore from international ships that simply dumped it overboard. Since then, data collected by Adopt-A-Beach volunteers has helped to pass an international shipping treaty that bans such sloppy practices and requires all oceangoing vessels to dispose of their trash responsibly while in port.

The Texas General Land Office's Adopt-A-Beach Cleanup is an all-volunteer effort to remove trash from Texas' shores. Coastal cleanups are held three times each year and the program's success is due to the hard work of volunteers, including local coordinators who work many unpaid hours publicizing the cleanups in coastal communities.

Texas beaches continue to receive large amounts of marine debris due to a convergence of currents in the Gulf of Mexico. Since 1986, more than 371,000 Adopt-A-Beach volunteers have picked up more than 7,000 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.

The Adopt-A-Beach Spring Cleanup is one of three all-volunteer seasonal cleanups coordinated through the Adopt-A-Beach Program of the Texas General Land Office. The next coastwide cleanup will be the Fall Adopt-A-Beach effort scheduled for Saturday, September 27, 2008. The success of the Adopt-A-Beach Program is made possible by the generous efforts of dedicated volunteers and the strong support of

community leaders and sponsors across the state. This year the Adopt-A-Beach Program thanks its statewide Spring Cleanup sponsors: National Oilwell Varco, Royal Caribbean, ExxonMobil, Stormwater Solutions, Halliburton, Starbucks and in-kind sponsor Keep Texas Beautiful.

To learn more about items collected at the cleanup, and for information on the health of the Texas coast, visit the Adopt-A-Beach Program Web site at www.texasadoptabeach.org, or contact the Texas General Land Office at 1-877-TXCOAST (1-877-892-6278).

Texas Land Office Seals Deal to Strike Down Zeus

AUSTIN — A derelict jack-up rig threatening to topple into the Freeport Ship Channel will be removed by July, announced Jerry Patterson, Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office. The Land Office will pay Cleveland Wrecking Company \$1.75 million to dismantle the Zeus Mobile Offshore Drilling Unit (MODU) from the mouth of the Freeport Ship Channel, where it has leaked pollutants and threatened to topple over and block access to the port.

Patterson ordered the removal under a new authority granted by the Legislature to remove derelict vessels and structures from state waters. "Removing the Zeus from state waters will help a lot of people who depend on the Freeport Ship Channel to sleep easier," Patterson said. "This has been a long time coming, but I'm proud to say that because of a cooperative effort between the state, Brazoria County and Port Freeport, we're getting it done."

Crews will begin to arrive at the Zeus within the week, and removal operations should commence by mid-April, Patterson said. Patterson said the owner of the Zeus, who bought it for a \$1 in 2004, has been given every opportunity to remove the rig from state waters at his own expense. But once the Zeus began leaking oil in September 2006, it became clear the rig needed to go. The Land Office is now in possession of the rig.

In June 2007, an administrative hearing requested by the owner resulted in a decision by the hearing examiner to assess administrative penalties of \$700 a day, beginning on April 19, 2007, until the rig is removed. In July 2007, Patterson issued an emergency order to remove the Zeus from state waters. Rather than removing the rig, the Zeus' owner then filed a federal lawsuit against the Land Office, seeking a temporary restraining order to block the removal of the derelict rig. The court denied the owner's request.

Biologists Launch Study of Two Texas Tidal Streams

AUSTIN, Texas — In March, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department biologists began a two-year study of two tidal streams on the middle coast, sampling fish, bottom-dwelling organisms, and water quality to measure the quality of aquatic life inhabiting these ecologically important areas. Tidal streams are areas where saltwater from bays mix with freshwater coming down from rivers. They are components of estuaries, a better-known term for areas where freshwater and saltwater converge. Because tidal streams provide a special kind of habitat, they are vital nursery grounds for many types of fish and shellfish, including economically important species like shrimp and game fish.

"Tidal streams are complex ecosystems," said Janet Nelson, a TPWD coastal biologist. "We need to know more about threats to them that could undermine biodiversity in general and our sport and commercial fisheries in particular. There hasn't been enough study of tidal streams to completely understand what drives changes in these systems."

Nelson said tidal stream salinity varies seasonally with rainfall, and this drives changes in fish populations. Other factors that affect habitat and water quality include hydrology (water movement), freshwater inflow, subsidence, land use in the watershed and wastewater discharges.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality has contracted with TPWD to study two tidal streams, the tidal portions of Aransas and Mission rivers connected to Aransas Bay. Field sampling began in late March and will continue until November 2009. Sampling will occur every six weeks during the spring, summer and fall seasons. Water and sediment (bottom) samples will be collected for laboratory analysis. Other parameters that will be measured include dissolved oxygen, pH, temperature salinity, and stream flow.

Fish, shrimp, crabs and other swimming organisms will be collected, identified and measured. Sediment from the bottom of the streams will be collected to see what types of organisms live there. A detailed field study will be done of habitat within the stream and on the banks. Also, a GIS land cover analysis will be done to see how the land surrounding the stream is being used. When the fieldwork is completed, the final report is due to TCEQ in 2010. This gives TPWD scientists about one year to analyze and interpret all the data and write a report on the ecological health of each stream.

Energy

Texas Land Office, Austin Energy to Announce Historic Solar Energy Lease

AUSTIN — Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson and Austin Mayor Will Wynn today announced an agreement that paves the way for the first utility-scale solar array in Texas. “We all know the West Texas sun is powerful. This agreement is the first step in determining how that power can be harnessed,” Patterson said. “I commend Austin Energy for pioneering this new frontier.” Wynn said Austin Energy’s lease of 438 acres of West Texas land belonging to the Permanent School Fund shows the city-owned utility is serious about its commitment to installing 100 megawatts of solar capacity by 2020. “Austin Energy isn’t afraid to run out ahead of the pack when it comes to developing clean, renewable sources of power,” Wynn said. “I think you’ll see others follow our lead.”

The lease agreement announced today allows Austin Energy the right to use 438 acres of Permanent School Fund land in Reeves County, just south of Pecos. Austin Energy will be able to do research and build groundbreaking solar technology at the site. The utility-scale solar array will easily be the largest in Texas, which to date has a total statewide capacity of 6 megawatts of solar energy facilities.

Power from the West Texas solar array may someday help light up homes in Austin. And proceeds from the lease will benefit the Texas Permanent School Fund, which helps pay for the state’s share of public education funding. The partnership between the Renewable Energy Division of the Land Office and Austin Energy signifies an important first step in assessing and developing the solar potential of West Texas state lands. Patterson created the Renewable Energy Division at the Land Office in 2007 to focus on developing renewable energy resources on state lands for the benefit of the state’s Permanent School Fund. Austin Energy’s GreenChoice® program has been the number one utility-sponsored green power program in the nation for sales every year since 2002.

MMS Holds Public Hearings on Draft Supplemental Environmental Statement

New acreage included in Central Gulf Sale Area

NEW ORLEANS — The Minerals Management Service (MMS) has scheduled public hearings to accept comments on a draft supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) on seven proposed oil and gas sales in the Gulf of Mexico through 2012.

The SEIS was prepared as a result of the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act of 2006, which mandated that approximately 5.8 million acres in the southeastern part of the Central Gulf Planning Area be offered for lease. This acreage, which is known as the “181 South Area,” has never been leased before.

As part of the review process, MMS will hold public hearings on the following dates:

- Tuesday, May 13, 2008, Larose Civic Center, Larose Regional Park, Larose, Louisiana, 6:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, May 14, 2008, Center for Energy Studies, 1077 Energy, Coast and Environment Building at the LSU Campus, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1:00 p.m.
- Thursday, May 15, 2008, Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel, 64 South Water Street, Mobile, Alabama, 6:00 p.m.

Once the environmental review is complete on the 181 South Area, MMS will be able to make the decision whether to offer it for lease in March 2009 as part of the proposed Lease Sale 208 and all subsequent Central Gulf Sales.

The Notice of Availability (NOA) of the draft SEIS was published in the April 11, 2008 Federal Register. Copies are available through the MMS Public Information Unit at 1-800-200-GULF, or via the MMS website at www.mms.gov.

Comments on the NOA must be received no later than June 10, 2008 and may be submitted electronically to the MMS e-mail address: environment@mms.gov. Comments may also be enclosed in an envelope labeled “Comments on the Supplemental EIS” and mailed or hand carried to:

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

MMS Takes Major Step Forward on Offshore Alternative Energy

Issues Notice to Determine Competitive Interest in Nominated Areas

WASHINGTON -- The Department of the Interior’s Minerals Management Service today designated five areas on the Outer Continental Shelf as priority areas for alternative energy research in federal waters. The five areas are offshore New Jersey, Delaware, Georgia, Florida and California. The agency is proposing limited, temporary leases in these areas for data collection and technology testing related to wind, wave and ocean current energy development. There will be no commercial energy production activity associated with the proposed leases.

“This is a major step forward in expanding our nation’s energy portfolio,” said MMS Director Randall Luthi during a speech today at the Global Marine Renewable Energy conference in New

York. “The information gained from research in these areas will greatly increase our understanding of the vast renewable energy potential just off our coast,” he said.

The agency received over forty nominations for alternative energy research projects in response to a November 2007 Federal Register notice. Of those, 16 could potentially go forward within the five priority areas. Ten of those proposed projects are related to wind energy and would be located in the areas offshore New Jersey, Delaware and Georgia. Four proposals offshore Florida would be related to ocean current energy, and two off Northern California would be related to wave energy. The remaining nominations are still being considered by MMS, and decisions will be based on the proposed projects’ viability.

Prior to leases actually being issued or consideration of specific project proposals, the agency must first determine if competitive interest exists for research in the five areas. MMS must also U.S. Department of the Interior Minerals Management Service Office of Public Affairs evaluate other information related to those areas such as environmental factors and current commercial activities such as fishing and shipping.

The agency issued a Federal Register notice to be published Friday that provides details about the five areas along with instructions for the public to provide comments. Individuals or organizations with competitive interest will have 30 days to provide comments, and the agency will accept public comments on the proposed lease areas for 60 days. The Federal Register notice can be found at <https://ocsconnect.mms.gov/pcspublic/do/ProjectDetailView?objectId=0b011f808028166f>.

The November notice also established interim guidelines for alternative energy research and testing on the OCS. MMS is preparing final regulations for the OCS Alternative Energy and Alternate Use program in accordance with the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and hopes to publish those regulations by the end of the year. “We are excited to be moving forward and hope to work with interested and affected parties to advance our knowledge of important offshore energy resources,” stated Director Luthi. Comments may be submitted by either of the following methods:

1. Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Under the tab “More Search Options,” click Advanced Docket Search, then select “Minerals Management Service” from the agency drop-down menu, then click “submit.” In the Docket ID column, select MMS-2008-OMM-0020 to submit public comments and to view supporting and related materials available for this rulemaking.
2. Mailing your comments to the following address:
Minerals Management Service
Offshore Minerals Management
Alternative Energy and Alternate Use Team
381 Elden Street
Herndon, Virginia 20170-4817

The Energy Policy Act of 2005 authorized MMS to establish the OCS Alternative Energy and Alternate Use (AEAU) Program. Under this authority, MMS will regulate alternative energy projects and projects that involve the alternate use of existing oil and gas platforms on the OCS. Alternative energy includes, but is not limited to wind, wave, solar, underwater current and generation of hydrogen. Alternate uses of existing facilities may include aquaculture, research, education, recreation, or support for offshore operations and facilities.

MMS Rule Enhances Hurricane Safety of Offshore Platforms

Design and Assessment Criteria Strengthened

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) issued a final rule in today's *Federal Register* to improve the survivability of offshore platforms and increase environmental safety during hurricane events. Today's rule incorporates three API bulletins that contain engineering design principles and good practices for new platforms and assessments of existing platforms by imposing more stringent design and assessment criteria for both new and existing structures in the Gulf of Mexico. The new criteria will increase survivability during hurricane conditions and result in fewer damaged platforms, thereby protecting critical oil and gas resources and making those resources available after hurricane events.

Damage to the oil and gas infrastructure as a result of the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons included the destruction of 123 fixed structures and one floating facility, as well as significant damage to dozens of other fixed and floating structures. Following the hurricanes, MMS, API, and members of the offshore oil and gas industry collaborated to improve the standards by which Outer Continental Shelf structures are designed and assessed to withstand meteorological events involving wind, wave, current and surge.

The bulletins, listed below, impose more stringent design and assessment criteria for both new and existing structures located within particular Gulf of Mexico areas:

- BULLETIN 2INT-MET, *Interim Guidance on Hurricane Conditions in the Gulf of Mexico*
- BULLETIN 2INT-DG, *Interim Guidance for Design of Offshore Structures for Hurricane Conditions*
- BULLETIN 2INT-EX, *Interim Guidance for Assessment of Existing Offshore Structures for Hurricane Conditions*.

The rule came about as a result of a great deal of coordination and study by MMS and API to ensure that the best possible guidance was provided and that all possibilities were considered. This time consuming process allows MMS to make sure that the industry is better prepared for future storms. The final rule, *RIN 1010-AD48 Incorporate American Petroleum Institute Hurricane Bulletins*, becomes effective May 15, 2008.

Other News

EPA Launches Environmental Indicators Gateway

Contact Information: Suzanne Ackerman, (202) 564-4355 / ackerman.suzanne@epa.gov

(4/9/08) EPA today launched the Environmental Indicators Gateway Web site to provide enhanced public access to environmental and health information generated by EPA. Information is presented in the context of "environmental indicators," numerical values that provide insights into the status and trends of environmental and public health conditions over time. The Gateway establishes a single catalog of EPA's indicator work that allows browsing and searching among existing EPA Web sites and indicator materials. The site allows users to browse EPA's environmental indicator reports by geography, topic area, or time period. For each report featured on the site, users can find information on key details of the project including geography, project purpose, contact information, and data quality considerations.

In addition to enhancing public access, the Gateway provides a resource for EPA and other federal agencies and partners to better coordinate their own environmental indicator work. By sharing key information and best practices among existing projects, EPA can improve its ability to generate environmental indicator information in the future. To better accomplish the goals of EPA's Environmental Indicators Initiative, EPA plans further enhancements to the site, which will improve coordination among existing indicator work and provide additional tools for accessing environmental indicators and information across EPA. [New Environmental Indicators Gateway: epa.gov/indicators](http://epa.gov/indicators)

Science and the Storms: USGS Response to the Hurricanes of 2005

The USGS has released a new report "[Science and the Storms](#)" designed to give a view of the immediate response of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to four major hurricanes of 2005: Dennis, Katrina, Rita, and Wilma. Some of this response took place days after the hurricanes; other responses included fieldwork and analysis through the spring. While hurricane science continues within the USGS, this overview of work following these hurricanes reveals how a Department of the Interior bureau quickly brought together a diverse array of its scientists and technologies to assess and analyze many hurricane effects.

The Southeast Watershed Forum Announces New Online Mapping Service

This month the Southeast Watershed Forum launches a new and valuable resource for land and water protection. The [Community Resource Mapper](#) provides a free, user-friendly, on-line mapping service that will help communities integrate natural resource protection into their land use planning efforts.

Visitors to the site can create maps at a county, watershed or state level, that compare impaired streams, impervious surface, protected lands, wetlands, State Wildlife Action Plans and much more. The Mapper is unique in that it blends private data with a variety of public data sources and allows the integration of multiple resource layers for a custom view of your community. Much of this resource data is overlooked in the local comprehensive planning process.



“Now communities have a tool to identify their important natural resources and 'green infrastructure' before growth and development impact land critical to protecting water supplies, water quality and prime habitat,” explains Forum Executive Director, Christine Olsenius. “The Mapper is a planning tool for visualizing the location of resources critical to reducing the cost of community services and maintaining the local quality of life.”

The Community Resource Mapper will help in targeting land conservation efforts, identifying riparian buffers, wetlands and stormwater management areas and can help shape growth and development patterns. For example, the image on the right from Hamilton County, TN overlays three sets of data: land cover, protected lands and impervious surfaces. It can showcase areas where growth and development should be directed and identify partners to help conserve key resource areas.

The Mapper is a cooperative project of the Southeast Watershed Forum, NBII SAIN, the University of Tennessee Chattanooga, the Land Trust Alliance and the Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership. The Land Trust Alliance helped in securing protected lands data and the Aquatic Resources Partnership helped in securing early data for State Wildlife Action Plans. The National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII – part of USGS) has been critical to launching the on-line mapping service. Financial support has also been received from Merck Family Fund, TVA, the World Wildlife Fund and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. For more information about how to use the Community Resource Mapper, go to www.watershed-assistance.net/mapper.

Grant Opportunities

Applications Available for Communities Seeking Assistance with Water Quality Issues

The [Southeastern Regional Water Quality Assistance Network](#) (SERWQAN) is seeking applications from southeastern communities interested in building capacity to address water quality issues.

The Network has received funding from the US Environmental Protection Agency to provide assistance in approximately 10 communities and watersheds to help protect, maintain and restore water quality. The Network combines the services of the Environmental Finance Center, the Southeast Watershed Forum, the NC State University Stream Restoration Institute and Stormwater Engineering Group, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, and US EPA.

SERWQAN will work with community leaders, watershed organizations and other local stakeholders on efforts including:

- Watershed Financial Planning
- Model Codes and Ordinances
- Watershed Planning
- Stormwater Management
- Watershed Restoration
- Watershed Education and Public Involvement

Please [click here](#) to download the application. Applications are due by 05-15-2008 and can be submitted by mail or email to:

Stacey Isaac Berahzer
Environmental Finance Center
P.O. Box 671346
Marietta, GA 30066
Email: isaac@sog.unc.edu
Phone: 770-509-3887

Training and Conferences

Coastal Cities Summit 2008

Call for Papers

The International Ocean Institute, USA; the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg; and the Patel Center for Global Solutions are pleased to announce this preliminary call for papers for the Coastal Cities Summit, to be held **Nov. 17-20, 2008**, in St. Petersburg, FL. The deadline for submission of abstracts is **May 15, 2008**. More information is at <http://www.coastalcities.org/callforpapers.html>.

Download a PDF version - [Call for Papers](#)

One of the most challenging issues facing the ocean today is rapid coastal urbanization whose implications have yet to be assessed. Today, the majority of the world's population lives within sixty kilometers of the coast line and this is steadily increasing. This profound demographic shift has significant implications for the coastal environment, inhabitants and ecosystem stability. These trends provide challenges to the intrinsic values coastal environments offer as well as the values held by the communities located in these areas. Coastal ecosystems are among the most productive on earth. It has been estimated, for example, that over 90% of the planet's living and nonliving resources are found within a few hundred kilometers of the coast. These valuable natural assets are seriously threatened by coastal development pressures, coastal sprawl and coastal pollution. Preserving the natural values we associate with coastal regions will be a significant challenge on a planet whose population is projected to reach 8 billion or more people.

Compounding these challenges are the prospects of the vulnerabilities these regions face. Among these are climate change, sea level rise, new maritime security needs associated with increase transportation by sea, and the ever present danger of extreme events such as tropical storms and tsunamis. Accordingly, it is timely to address these topics in depth as we bring together public officials, nongovernmental organization, citizens and natural and social scientists to consider the values and vulnerabilities of coastal regions around the globe. The Coastal Cities Summit will occur in St. Petersburg, Florida, USA in November 17-20, 2008, and will be organized by the International Ocean Institute - [USA](#).

Gulf of Mexico Alliance: 1st Annual Monitoring Forum - Coastal Nutrient Criteria, Improving Data Comparability

June 3-6, 2006

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.

Location: Hilton St. Petersburg Bayfront, St. Petersburg, FL, USA

Early Registration Deadline: **May 16, 2008**

Contact Information: Email: Linda.Sedlacek@dep.state.fl.us

Home Page URL: http://www2.nos.noaa.gov/gomex/waterquality/monit_geninfo_0608.pdf

Living Shoreline Workshop

June 13, 2008

Gulf Coast Community College, Panama City, Florida

Living shorelines use plants and other natural materials to stabilize the shoreline for the benefit of property owners as well as fish and other wildlife. Panhandle Living Shoreline Initiative partners invite you to learn how to use soft shoreline techniques to protect eroding shorelines. This workshop is designed for public and private land managers, property owners, city and county commissioners, planning staff, environmental regulators, contractors, and others interested in effective and ecologically-sound shoreline protection methods that do not harden the coast.

Workshop Sessions

- What are living shorelines, and where is it appropriate to construct them?
- The permitting process – a panel of state, federal, and county regulators will guide us through a “green tape” approach to moving living shoreline projects through all permitting levels
- Completed living shorelines – a panel discussion of techniques, design considerations, costs, and maintenance for a variety of projects already constructed
- In-the-works living shoreline projects – a panel discussion of projects to come
- Living shoreline resources and funding opportunities

Gulf Coast Community College (GCCC) is located at 5230 West Highway 98, Panama City, Florida, 32401. The workshop will be held in Student Union East – go to http://www.gulfcoast.edu/maps/pc_campus_map.htm for a campus map.

The workshop will start at 9:00 am and end at 4:30 pm on June 13, 2008, with registration open at 8:30 am. There is no charge to attend, but please **register by June 6, 2008**, Call 850-215-5590 for registration questions. For more information, contact Melody Ray-Culp, Florida Panhandle Coastal Program Coordinator U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service at Melody_Ray-Culp@fws.gov.

EnergyOcean 2008

June 24-26, 2008

The 5th Annual EnergyOcean conference is now established as the world's leading event focusing on renewable and sustainable energy from the oceans. The event is supported by the five leading international not for profit ocean energy organizations, including the Ocean Energy Council (OEC), which is a co-organizer of this event.

Location: Galveston, TX, USA

Home Page URL: <http://www.energyocean.com>

Contact Information: Toll-Free: 877-270-7102; E-Mail: info@energyocean.com

Gulf of Mexico Extension, Outreach, and Education Workshop



**August 12-13, 2008
Riverview Plaza Hotel
Mobile, Alabama**

NOAA extension, outreach and education (EOE) leaders from across the Gulf of Mexico are invited to participate in this outreach program to improve constituent engagement.

Workshop topics will include:

- 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
- Best practices on Gulf of Mexico EOE

For more information, contact Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium Director LaDon Swann at swanndl@auburn.edu or (228) 818-8842. This EOE workshop is sponsored by NOAA's Gulf of Mexico Regional Team.

Extension, Outreach and Education Workshop Hotel Information

The Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel is taking reservations for hotel rooms for the NOAA Extension, Outreach and Education Workshop that will be held Aug. 12-13 in Mobile, Ala. The workshop runs from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. on Aug. 12 and from 8 a.m. until noon on Aug. 13. A block of rooms is being held for this event at a rate of \$94 per night for the nights of Aug. 11 and Aug. 12. Based on availability, the reduced rate also will apply three days before and three days after those dates. The cut-off date for making reservations at these rates is July 12. To receive the group rate, call the hotel at the number listed below and tell them you are with the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant EOE Workshop. If you have questions, call Kay Bruening at the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium at (228) 818-8842.

Hotel contact information is:

Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel
64 South Water St.
Mobile, AL 36602bama 36602 USA
Phone: (251) 438-4000 or (800) 922-3298
<http://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/mobrv-renaissance-riverview-plaza-hotel/>

Coastal Research Symposium Set for Oct. 28-29 in Biloxi

The Mississippi-Alabama Bays and Bayous Symposium will be held Oct. 28-29 at the Mississippi Coast Coliseum and Convention Center in Biloxi, Miss. The symposium will provide a forum for the exchange of technical, yet practical, information among scientists, resource managers, elected officials, community leaders, marine industries, community-based organizations and individuals. The two-day event will include oral and poster presentations, keynote speakers and networking opportunities. Bays and Bayous will provide a venue for non-technical individuals interested in coastal ecosystems, education and preservation to learn about the most relevant and contemporary issues facing Mississippi and Alabama. Scientists will present their research findings in language everyone can understand. This year, presentations at the symposium will focus on living marine resources, natural hazards resiliency and the ocean's role in climate, community action and coastal stewardship, water quality and nutrient input, habitat management and restoration, and extension, outreach and education. Discussions related to extension, outreach, education and community action efforts will be new to the symposium. This addition is an opportunity for educators, master naturalists, oyster gardening volunteers and members of other community organizations to share information at the event.

Bays and Bayous is organized by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, the Gulf of Mexico Program, the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, the Environmental Protection Agency Gulf of Mexico, the Northern Gulf Institute, Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Mississippi State University Extension Service, Dauphin Island Sea Lab, and The University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, the Alabama Department of Marine Resources, the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Legal Program, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Alabama Department of Environmental Management, Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center and the GeoResources Institute. For information, go to <http://masgc.org/baysandbayous>.

Gulf Coast Hurricane Preparedness, Response, Recovery and Rebuilding Conference

November 11-14, 2008, Mobile, AL

The Gulf Coast Hurricane Preparedness, Response, Recovery & Rebuilding Conference is being organized by PIANC USA. The objectives of the event are: to learn from recent hurricane experiences and challenges; to develop proactive navigation preparedness, response and recovery plans on regional and watershed scales; to foster interagency learning, coordination and cooperation leading to community and ecosystem resiliency; and to provide technical experience and directions for engineering and environmental challenges.

Abstract/Proposal Submission Deadline: May 15, 2008

Contact Information: abstract submission: pianc@usace.army.mil

Home Page URL: http://www.pianc.iwr.usace.army.mil/2008_gulfcoast_conf.htm

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