

## **Gulf of Mexico Alliance Building on a Successful State-Federal Partnership**

**August 25, 2007  
Biloxi, Mississippi**

### **MEETING HIGHLIGHTS**

Governor Barbour began the meeting by welcoming everyone to Biloxi and thanked them for the commitment of their time to discuss the future of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance. He introduced Governors Blanco and Riley, Senator Lott, and the federal agency representatives, and invited everyone to watch a short video on the Alliance and its significant accomplishments.

After the video, Governor Barbour emphasized the importance of the five Gulf States acting together as a region to confront the many complex challenges they all share, including energy development and security, conserving fragile ecosystems, and ensuring the long-term vitality of the Gulf's fisheries resources. All five states need to act in a unified fashion on behalf of the entire Gulf region if such challenges are to be addressed effectively. He also reminded everyone that although the Alliance and its federal partners have accomplished much in the 18 months since the release of the *Governors Action Plan for the Gulf of Mexico*, that those accomplishments represent the beginning of the long-term effort necessary to ensure the health of the Gulf for its people and the country.

Governor Blanco said that the Gulf is a resource critical to the future of the nation and is finally getting the national attention it has long deserved. She described work that Louisiana is doing with regard to the conservation and restoration of coastal wetlands and the complete integration of those efforts with the long term goal of protection from hurricanes. She said that with a unified regional focus, the Alliance will be better positioned to better conserve coastal wetlands, barrier islands, and other critical coastal habitats. Doing so will better protect homes, businesses, critical infrastructure, and the people of the Gulf from future storms. She also highlighted the importance of the America's Energy Coast Initiative to addressing sustainable energy production in the Gulf.

Governor Riley began his remarks by noting that the United States would not be as strong as it is without the Gulf States. The Gulf region provides the nation with a tremendous portion of its energy resources, and that conserving the Gulf's resources comes at a price. However, he also expressed his desire to see the dialogue turn from "protecting" the environment to "enhancing" the environment. Improving estuaries, rebuilding oyster stocks, and similar challenges will require a change of philosophy and will require all of the Gulf States to stand up for the nation to continue to rely on the Gulf and for the Gulf to lead the nation in a way it has never done before.

Senator Lott began his remarks by acknowledging that the citizens of the Gulf region have committed to coming back stronger and better after the 2005 hurricane season, making an historic opportunity out of a national tragedy. He said that the Alliance's work is essentially about ensuring a certain quality of life for Gulf residents. To reach the Alliance's goals, the states and their elected officials in Washington, DC need to have a shared vision for pursuing funding and specific actions that will enhance the region. Everyone will need to think regionally, not as individual states, and to

work together in a balanced and fair manner in order to protect the coast and the people who make their life and living along it. Senator Lott ended his comments by describing how key provisions of the Water Resources Development Act and the Federal Water Pollution Control Act address the Gulf's challenges, and he urged the Governors to work with the Washington delegations to ensure that the Gulf and its importance to the nation are recognized in federal legislation.

Trudi Fisher of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality thanked the Governors and Senator Lott for their clear support of a regional approach to managing the Gulf's resources. She said that the next step is to continue the momentum created by the Alliance by designing a blueprint for moving forward, identifying specific needs and tools, and bringing new partners to the table. She said that the Alliance's work on nutrient pollution is just one example of how regional collaboration has elevated the states' collective understanding of shared issues and impacts. By working together the states have developed innovative nutrient management initiatives associated with rebuilding and protecting critical infrastructure. The Alliance has allowed each state to do more with public dollars than it could do alone.

Robert Ballard of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection expressed Governor Crist's regrets for being unable to attend the meeting, as he is a strong supporter of the Alliance. All Floridians live within 60 miles of the coast, and over \$400 billion of the state's economy comes from ocean and coastal activities. Mr. Ballard reported that Governor Crist recently convened a climate change summit in Florida to understand the potential impacts of climate change on the state and that the Governor looks forward to working with the Florida's Washington delegation to support the region.

Bruce Moulton of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality said that his state shares all of the sentiment expressed by others. He thanked the Alliance's federal partners for bringing a variety of tools and information to bear on the Alliance's work, particularly the coastal habitat identification work for which Texas is the lead state. He said that he looked forward to continued implementation of the Governors' action plan and to exploring new ways to enhance the Gulf.

Jim Connaughton, Chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, made remarks on behalf of the Alliance's 13 federal agency partners. He said the Alliance and the state-federal collaboration it represents are quickly becoming recognized as a leader in leveraging the resources of individual states and federal agencies to address shared priorities in a practical, meaningful way. He noted that the President's budget request for fiscal year 2008 includes \$145 million for oceans, including \$5 million for NOAA support of the Alliance. He also said that the voices of the states would be critical to passage of energy legislation and the conservation title of the Farm Bill, provisions of which call for new resources to support issues important to the Alliance. He concluded by congratulating the Governors and their state agencies for accomplishing so much in such a short amount of time and expressed his desire to see the federal partners continue to support the states' work in the future.

Governor Barbour recognized Paul Kelly, member of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative's Task Force and President of the Gulf of Mexico Foundation. Mr. Kelly said that one of the Joint Initiative's most important priorities is working to promote regional ocean governance, and the Alliance is

setting an excellent example for the rest of the country. All of the Commissioners are watching what is happening in the Gulf and look forward to supporting the next phase of the Alliance's works in any way it can.

NOAA Administrator Vice Admiral Conrad Lautenbacher, U.S. EPA Assistant Administrator for Water Ben Grumbles, and Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary for Water and Science Kameran Onley made remarks as well. Vice Admiral Lautenbacher stressed the importance of working with the Gulf States to ensure that Congress and the Administration understand how advancing the Alliance's goals also advance federal agency goals. Mr. Grumbles complemented the state agency staff for showing leadership and initiative that can serve as a model for the nation. Ms. Onley said that she is looking forward to entering into a dialogue with the Alliance about furthering collaboration with Interior's various bureaus.

Representatives from environmental organizations and the Gulf's business community expressed their support and their appreciation at being a partner at the table in the Alliance's work. A representative from NASA announced a new initiative at the Stennis Space Center to support the Alliance. Many other organizations expressed their thanks to the Alliance and their federal partners and pledged to support the Alliance's work in the future.

Governor Barbour concluded the meeting by reminding everyone that the Alliance is about action, and it must stay that way to succeed. He said that everyone—states, federal agencies, Congressional delegations, and NGO and private sector partners—need to act with a sense of urgency to secure needed resources, develop a plan for the future, and work together to see it to fruition. A strong and united front will be necessary to secure the vitality and resilience of the Gulf's coastal communities and ecosystems. He urged everyone to work together to seize the opportunity that has emerged from the 2005 storms and to bring national attention to critical role of the Gulf and the Gulf region to the entire nation.