

Wave Maker's News

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Historic Floods, Historic Dead Zone

Due to heavy rains and snow melt from North Dakota to Minnesota to New York, we have seen record-setting flood levels throughout the Lower Mississippi River Basin. This flooding has pushed the levee system to its limits, but it seems that the system has done what it is supposed to do. Part of utilizing the Mississippi River Levee system has meant the opening of three floodways: the Bird's Point Floodway in Missouri, the Morganza Floodway in Louisiana, and the Bonnet Carré Spillway, also in Louisiana. The opening of these floodways has inundated farm land and residential property, but relieved the pressure of the floods on some urban centers, including Cairo, IL, Baton Rouge, LA and New Orleans.



Photo Courtesy of NASA

Satellite image of sediment plumes coming from the flooded Mississippi River, taken on May 17, 2011.

Regretfully, the levee system that has protected many communities from Mississippi River flooding will likely exacerbate this year's Dead Zone in the Gulf. Before the levees were built, when the River flooded routinely, it would spill into its floodplains and surrounding wetlands. These floodplains would slow the water down, help filter out pollutants, and store the floodwater. Now with these levees, the channel acts as a syringe, injecting the Mississippi—and the pollutants it contains—straight into the Gulf.

Very simply, more pollution (specifically nitrogen and phosphorus) equals a bigger Dead Zone.

As our readers may know, the Dead Zone is an area in the Gulf at the mouths of the Mississippi and Atchafalaya Rivers that has oxygen levels so low that aquatic life must swim away or suffocate. The nitrogen and phosphorus

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Mississippi Misusing Conservation Funds

Mississippi has a long history of taking federal dollars for something good like environmental restoration or low-income housing and spending it on something environmentally damaging. One of the most dramatic examples is the over \$1 billion in Katrina relief Housing and Urban Development grant money that went to unnecessary port expansions and new utility plants instead of towards directly helping victims

of the disaster. Hence, it was not surprising to hear that Mississippi is going to receive a Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP) grant to expand the harbor at Long Beach. The CIAP program is meant to distribute revenues from offshore oil and gas drilling to coastal states for the conservation and protection of coastal and marine areas. To justify this project, the state's

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Being Floridian – A Tale of Fertilizer

Photo Courtesy of NOAA, PJS Franks

In 2004 to 2005, a devastating Red Tide hit Florida's southwest Gulf coast. *Karenia brevis* was the culprit; the red tide exploded in size, intensity and duration to create our very own Dead Zone the size of Rhode Island. Other harmful algal blooms (HABs) have shown up since then, most notably the *Pyrimodium bahamense* HAB that lingered in upper Tampa Bay in 2009 and 2010.

These blooms are harmful to fish and marine mammals, and often generate airborne toxins that threaten human health. Furthermore, these HABs can have devastating impacts on coastal economies that rely on a healthy Gulf for tourism and recreation. In recent years, cities and counties up and down the Florida Gulf coast have passed residential fertilizer ordinances in an effort to restrict the excess nitrogen that flows into our waterways and contributes to these devastating HABs. In urban areas, fertilizer use is one the major sources of Dead Zone-causing nitrogen pollution.

In 2010, Pinellas County took action to revitalize Florida's Southwest Gulf Coast waterways when it voted to pass the Residential Landscape & Fertilizer Ordinance, including a June through September point of sale ban on Nitrogen fertilizers. The vetting process for the Pinellas ordinance included four stakeholder meetings held by Tampa Bay Estuary Program, two meetings of the county's Environmental Science Forum, two preliminary and one final hearing by the Board of County Commissioners.

Hundreds of stakeholders spent over two years working together through public workshops and forums to create the residential fertilizer and landscape ordinance that was put in



Red tide bloom

place. These folks included the landscaping and fertilizer industries, various city and county governments, scientists, environmental and other community groups and the Tampa Bay Estuary Program Policy Board.

The process was conducted thoughtfully and carefully with the mission to protect our waterways. Along the way we discovered we can protect our wallets with this strategy as well. Every care was taken to avoid a negative impact on those working in the landscaping business.

Since passage of the ordinance, the large box stores in Pinellas have embraced the new regulations as providing a clear path in which to educate consumers and frankly, to sell new products. The manufacturers have already begun providing niche summer product lines for southwest Florida – made by Florida companies. Starting in April, the Be Floridian campaign began in earnest in the Tampa Bay area, sponsored by the Tampa Bay Estuary Program – creator of the original model ordinance.

Unfortunately, the state legislature recently passed a law that would prevent local governments from passing similar ordinances after July 1, 2011.

As this deadline looms, city and county governments, including Manatee County and Tampa, are rushing to protect their waterways before it's too late. Stayed tune for more in the next edition of *Wave Maker's*, or contact Cathy Harrelson, GRN's Florida Organizer, at cathy@healthygulf.org or 727-415-8805 to learn how you can get involved. ■

Historic Flood, Historic Dead Zone (continued from page 1)

pollution that causes the Dead Zone each summer comes from various sources, but the largest contribution comes from runoff from agricultural fields in the Midwest. Combine this runoff with high rainfall, and we see higher loads of this Dead Zone-causing pollution in the swelled Mississippi. This month, scientists have released a prediction on the size of this year's Dead Zone. Their models predict the largest Dead Zone ever—measuring 9,400 square miles, or roughly the size of Lake Erie.

It is past time that the Federal Government and states step up their game in addressing the Dead Zone. Up until now, we have only seen underfunded voluntary programs utilized to address the agricultural nitrogen and phosphorus pollution

issues in the Mississippi, and we have only seen the Dead Zone get bigger. Despite the anti-EPA atmosphere in Washington, D.C., it is imperative that EPA take decisive action. Back in 2008, GRN, along with the Mississippi River Collaborative, formally petitioned EPA to develop numeric limits to the nitrogen and phosphorus pollution in the Mississippi, as well as a concrete plan to reduce this pollution in the River. Almost three years later, EPA has not even responded to our petition, but GRN and the Mississippi River Collaborative will continue to fight for a truly effective solution to the Dead Zone that plagues the Gulf every summer. ■

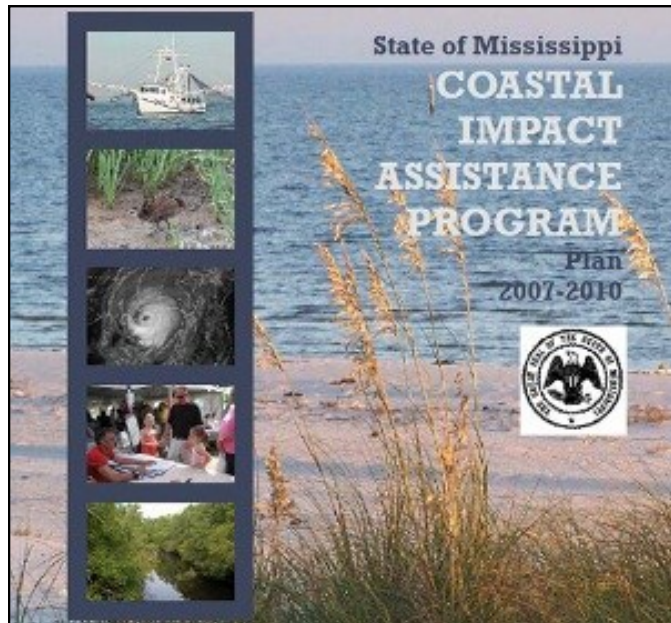
Mississippi Misusing Conservation Funds *(continued from page 1)*

Department of Marine Resources claimed that the harbor expansion is actually “marine conservation,” which is very curious since this project will cause significant harm to the marine environment.

Through various communications with the Bureau on Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (formerly the embattled Minerals Management Service) and Mississippi DMR, GRN has learned some disturbing information about the Long Beach project. Mississippi was repeatedly told by the Minerals Management Service (MMS) that harbor projects would not be approved in a CIAP implementation plan. The state’s congressional delegation put pressure on MMS to approve the harbor projects, but MMS ultimately refused. The state finally removed these projects and submitted a plan that was approved by MMS on December 31, 2008, without the harbor expansions.

Last year, during the BP disaster and the restructuring of MMS into the Bureau on Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE), Mississippi re-submitted the Long Beach project in an amendment to the approved plan. Amid the chaos of the restructuring, the harbor expansion project was approved.

The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources cautioned



the Gulf Restoration Network that the Long Beach project is very political. Nevertheless, the GRN speaks truth to power and we will continue to ask hard questions about how federal conservation dollars are being spent. ■

Aveda “Catwalks for Water”

Aveda salons throughout the south catwalked and rocked for clean water this past April. This year, our Earth Month partnership with Aveda included over 200 salons, many of which planned concerts, fashion shows, cut-a-thons, and walks to raise money for GRN and raise awareness about the threats to our waterways and the Gulf of Mexico!



GRN staff member, Natasha Noordhoff is crowned queen of Waterball 2011, an Earth Month fundraiser held at The Varsity in Baton Rouge.



Photo Courtesy of Constantine Photo

Models pose at the “Catwalk for Water” fashion show at The Pearl in San Antonio.

More than half of all streams and rivers in the United States drain into the Gulf of Mexico. By ensuring that concrete steps are taken to clean up polluted waters, we can sustain the ecologically vibrant resources that support habitat, wildlife, and communities throughout the Gulf region.

GRN thanks all the participating salons and staff for their hard work and dedication to protecting the health of the Gulf for future generations! ■



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UNITED FOR A HEALTHY GULF

For the Oiled, Nothing but Bad Choices Left

From the Gulf floor to the interior marshes, BP's oil remains. BP's criminal negligence has laid 2 inches of degraded oil on the seafloor for twenty six miles around the Macondo wellhead, and decades will pass before we know the full impact of the loss of these deepwater ecosystems upon our coastal waters. But the oil remains even on the coast, and there are no easy methods for removing it. These problems are a testament to our dire need for an oil industry that can drill safely, with accountability.

Recently, GRN traveled to Fourchon beach in coastal Louisiana to meet with representatives of the Edward Wisner Donation and survey the property that this land trust is managing as a Wildlife Management Area. Much oil from the BP disaster remains on Fourchon beach, turning one of Louisiana's treasures into a solid waste disposal site.

Although the island has been losing an average of 46 feet of shoreline a year, the beaten barrier beach continues to protect us. Because of the BP drilling disaster, barrier island restoration projects have been delayed—costing us time and money that we don't have.



A marsh rake removes black, oil-caked stems as well as some marsh roots as collateral damage.

Normally, Wisner does not allow trucks on Fourchon beach because of the erosion, but this rule was loosened for the cleanup and response. In some places, these trucks have caused significant

Job Opportunity: Assistant Director of Science and Water Policy

The Gulf Restoration Network is looking to fill the Assistant Director of Science and Water Policy position.

Our new Assistant Director of Science and Water Policy will oversee the GRN's environmental protection priorities in the state of Mississippi,



At many locations along Fourchon Beach, these "oil geodes" litter the beach every few feet.

erosion - erasing the beach in order to save it. In spots, "geodes" of degraded oil wrapped in sand litter the beach every few feet, and layers of oil lie just under a few centimeters of sand. Yet, BP considers this beach "clean" and has marked it as requiring "No Further Treatment."

Wisner wants the clean up to continue in a way that doesn't destroy the beach. However, they have been denied access to deliberations over clean-up decisions, and have nothing but bad choices.

Cleanup has also been less than clean in Bay Jimmy. Earlier this spring, GRN witnessed a new cleanup technique—a mechanical rake—removing heavily oiled marsh stems, but also the roots of the marsh! After talking with officials at NOAA for over a month, we learned that the rakes were removing marsh to get at pools of oil that remain protected by oil-caked grasses folded above. Last year, NOAA officials gave the green light to this new, potentially destructive marsh rake clean up technique.

While BP is technically liable for these "response" damages, it's up to us to continue to hold them accountable. In the meantime, it's clear that our coastal defenses have been weakened and we have been left with nothing but a suite of bad choices for clean-up in the wake of the BP drilling disaster. ■

represents the GRN for the State of Mississippi on the Mississippi River Collaborative, and coordinates with the Campaign staff on priority issues. This position works within our science and policy team and requires a diverse skill set. For more information and to learn how to apply, visit HealthyGulf.org/who-we-are/jobs/. ■