



UNITED FOR A HEALTHY GULF

STRATEGIC PLAN: 2007-2012

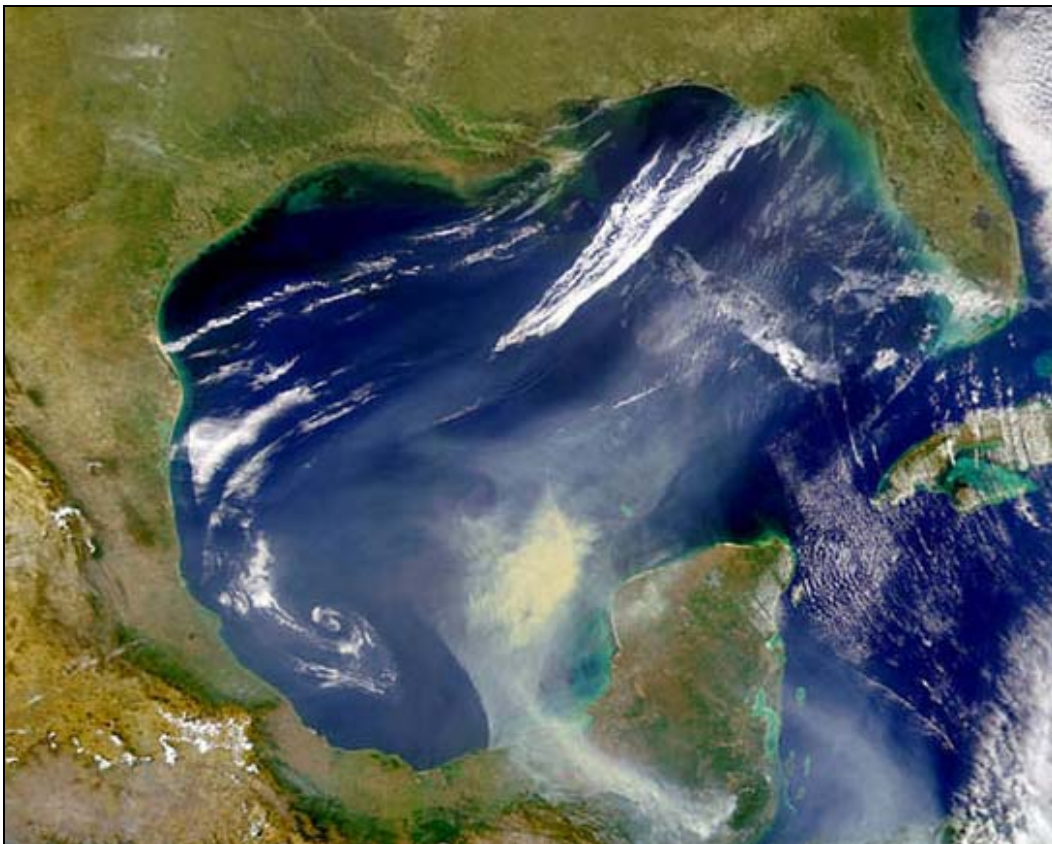


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PREFACE

The Board and staff of the Gulf Restoration Network (GRN) have always recognized that the first step in strengthening the ability of the GRN to face the internal organizational challenges that accompany rapid growth is planning. In 2000, the GRN Board and staff completed a strategic plan to guide the organization's advocacy. The useful life of that strategic plan came to an end in 2006. Accordingly, in 2006 board and staff set about developing a new strategic plan to guide the organization's work from 2007 to 2012. Key elements of existing GRN campaigns were reaffirmed if appropriate, revised to reflect current conditions, or dropped if felt to be no longer effective or relevant. New issues, goals, and strategies were added to our advocacy efforts, as needed, to reflect the network's evolving understanding of the issues facing the Gulf and the political climate in which we operate.

The decisions reached during the strategic planning process are incorporated in the strategic plan that follows. This final strategic plan has been reviewed and unanimously approved by the GRN Board.



GRN Workshop on State Lists of Polluted Waters

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Advocacy efforts of the GRN will be implemented by the staff within the framework of yearly staff retreats wherein yearly goals, timelines, and commitments will be determined and incorporated into Action Plans. The Action Plans will be used as management tools for organizational development and implementation of each of the GRN's advocacy campaigns. Additionally, staff work plans will include specific actions aimed at contributing to the GRN's organizational development objectives. GRN advocacy efforts will be implemented in a fashion that ensures the identification and assessment of emerging environmental issues. To meet this objective, each project will incorporate into work plans, forward-looking research aimed at analyzing issues that may require future attention.

THE VISION AND MISSION OF THE GULF RESTORATION NETWORK

OUR VISION FOR THE GULF

The Gulf of Mexico will continue to be a natural, economic, and recreational resource that is central to the culture and heritage of five states and several nations. The people of the region will be stewards of this vital but imperiled treasure, and assume the responsibility of returning the Gulf to its previous splendor.



Manchac Swamp, LA

OUR MISSION

The GRN is committed to uniting and empowering people to protect and restore the natural resources of the Gulf Region for future generations.

THE FOCUS FOR OUR ADVOCACY EFFORTS

The GRN's capability to advocate on the myriad of issues that threaten the health of the Gulf of Mexico is limited. Thus, within this strategic plan we sought to take a deliberate and disciplined approach to our advocacy work over the next five (5) years, remaining ever mindful of the efforts of other groups working within the region and the unique capabilities of the network. We sought to give highest priority to those issues that:

- ❖ Pose a significant and long-term threat to the Gulf;
- ❖ Are regional in scope, rather than local in nature, or threaten to set an important regional or national precedent;
- ❖ Are not being handled thoroughly by another organization;
- ❖ Are issues on which we believe the GRN can make a difference; and
- ❖ Complement existing GRN campaigns or issue focii

STRATEGIC GOALS AND DIRECTION FOR GRN ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS

To help realize this vision, the GRN will pursue the following strategic directions in its advocacy from 2007 through 2012.

A. *HEALTHY WATERS*

The Threat:

Runoff from industrial facilities, wastewater treatment plants, power plants, septic tanks, agriculture, confined animal feedlots, silviculture, stormwater runoff, and other sources of pollution flow into coastal water bodies and the Gulf of Mexico from the five Gulf states, as well as the over 40 states that drain into the Gulf of Mexico.

Our Challenge:

Increasing development in coastal communities is resulting in degradation of water quality in coastal rivers and streams that flow into the Gulf. Current Clean Water Act protections intended to reduce the impacts of development are under attack. Enforcement of remaining protections by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and state environmental protection agencies are lax.



Faulty Mitigation Efforts Threaten Water Quality, Covington LA

Our Response:



Lafitte Bayou, LA

The GRN will continue to address the growing issue of water quality degradation in Gulf states. We are currently implementing campaigns in Louisiana and Mississippi. In the coming years, we will assess issues and opportunities for GRN efforts in other Gulf states. The major elements of our campaigns will focus on education and mobilization of the public to advocate for state action to address point and non-point sources of pollution and other water quality impairments.

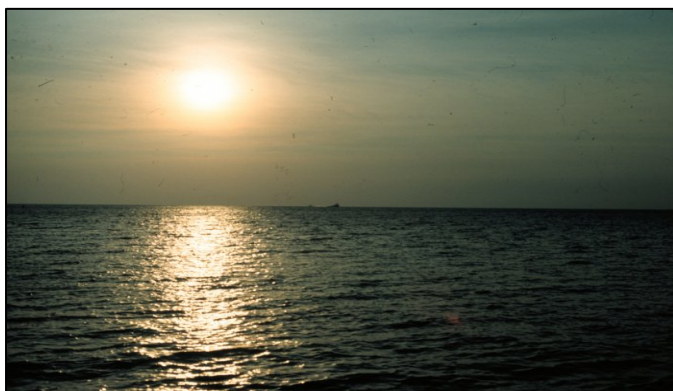
Goal #1: To ensure the health of clean water bodies and improve the quality in impaired water bodies in Louisiana and Mississippi, with the intent of reducing the amount of dead zone-causing nutrients reaching the Gulf of Mexico

Our **objective** is to force state implementation of plans and programs to clean up polluted water bodies that flow into the Gulf and contribute to coastal water pollution. We will achieve this

objective by working to empower communities in Gulf states to effectively advocate for clean water. In Louisiana and Mississippi, we will continue to watchdog listing and delisting of impaired waters, monitor the implementation of watershed cleanup plans, advocate for more stringent permit limits imposed by cleanup plans, push for state review and development of water quality standards that will benefit Gulf waters, and, when necessary or appropriate, take legal action to enforce environmental laws. We will also monitor U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flood control, navigation, and restoration projects that may affect nutrient levels entering the Gulf and work within the Mississippi River Water Quality Collaborative to achieve reductions in nitrogen loading to the Mississippi River, Atchafalaya River, and ultimately the Gulf of Mexico.

Goal #2: To ensure the continued health of clean water bodies and improve water quality in impaired waters in Alabama, Florida and Texas

Our **objective** is to expand the focus of our water quality work to include protecting and improving the health of water bodies in Alabama, Florida, and Texas. We will achieve this objective initially by surveying the five Gulf states to determine the focus of groups working on Clean Water Act issues and water quality problems not being addressed by other environmental or community groups. We intend to complete the initial survey by end of 2007 and will then assess effective strategies for addressing water quality problems in those states with the intent of beginning program work in Florida by 2008, Texas by 2010, and Alabama by 2012. In the interim, we will strategically look for opportunities to provide support or assistance on “hot issues” in these states as we move towards a more complete array of campaigns.



A Coastal View of Florida's Marine Waters

Goal #3: To address water quality issues associated with activities in coastal and marine waters of the Gulf

Our **objective** is to ensure that activities in the marine and coastal waters of the Gulf such as development of artificial reefs, dumping of wastes, and the like, do not degrade water quality. We will achieve this objective by monitoring activities in the coastal and marine waters of the Gulf and interceding when necessary to advocate for increased protection of water quality.

Goal #4 *To ensure that sufficient in-flow of water to estuaries is maintained*

Our **objective** is to ensure that activities upriver do not result in reduction of in-flows to Gulf estuaries, which is critical to the health of those estuaries. We will achieve this objective by monitoring water withdrawals, proposed inter-basin transfers, and interceding when needed to advocate for protection of existing in-flows.

B. *HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE COASTAL HABITAT*

The Threat:

Rich aquatic resources define the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem. The vast expanses of beach, teeming coastal marshes, bottomland hardwood wetlands, numerous riverine systems, and the oceanic waters off the coast shelter and feed thousands of terrestrial and aquatic species. These habitats also act as important storm barriers for coastal communities, reducing storm surge, and flood heights.

Tragically, these habitats are at risk. Coastal habitats (coastal wetlands, beaches, barrier islands, coral reefs) needed to support an incredible diversity of plants and animals are rapidly disappearing. Despite federal laws such as the Clean Water Act and Coastal Zone Management Act which were intended to promote sustainable development and avoidance of habitat destruction, coastal habitats continue to be destroyed at an alarming rate, and with them the natural storm barriers that coastal communities have relied on for centuries.



Development in wetlands in Gulfport, MS threatens Turkey Creek residents.

Our Challenge:

Growth continues in the coastal area, particularly in Florida, at an astronomical rate. At the current rate of growth we are quickly losing important coastal habitats. Governments' response – the construction of seawalls and levees and beach renourishment -- too often merely worsen the problems by fostering development which destroys additional habitat or disturbs natural systems.

Similarly, the construction of levees, navigation channels, and other projects by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) in coastal areas, particularly Louisiana, frequently accelerates the loss of important habitats. Although often well-intended, even activities taken in the name of restoration (e.g. artificial reef development) too often have unintended negative consequences, such as the discharge of pollutants or the destruction of other equally important habitats.

Over the next few years, at least in Louisiana and Mississippi, there will be a large influx of money, and with it there will be an opportunity to push for effective restoration and protection of important habitat. However, there is reluctance on the part of local, state, and federal agencies to make decisions regarding permits that are needed. Also, there is a counter push by local

governments, particularly in Mississippi, to do whatever is needed to generate tax revenue – meaning let them build wherever they want.

Our Response:

Goal #1: *To prevent degradation of existing important coastal habitats by unwise development or federal flood control and navigation projects*

Our **objective** is to prevent the destruction of important coastal habitats due to poorly planned development. Mount two-three strategic campaigns over the next five years that set precedents that can be used to slow development in coastal areas or ensure effective restoration of targeted habitats. We will accomplish this objective by identifying habitats needed to protect coastal communities or needed by species at risk, and monitoring and opposing developments that destroy or degrade these habitats. We will identify one-two strategic campaign opportunities, with potential Gulf-wide significance and value as precedent, and use those campaigns to advocate for a balance between the need for human development and the need for long-term habitat protection.



Logging in Louisiana's Cypress Forests

Goal #2: *Protect habitat by advocating for state and federal acquisition, management, and preservation of public lands where development or public land sales threaten important habitat*

Our **objective** is to ensure that important coastal habitat areas that potentially face development are purchased by state and federal agencies and that lands currently in government control are effectively managed and retained in public ownership to prevent destruction of those habitats through development. We will achieve this objective by working with groups throughout the Gulf to advocate for state and federal funding for the purchase of important habitat areas, effective long-term management of habitat in state and federal management, and to prevent the sale of those lands by state and federal agencies.

Goal #3: *Prevent the degradation of coastal and marine habitats in the name of habitat creation or restoration*

Our **objective** is to stop, or cause the modification of, state or federal habitat restoration activities that pose a threat to the Gulf’s natural resources. To achieve our objective we will monitor state and federal “restoration” activities, particularly artificial reef creation. When activities are identified that negatively impact habitat (e.g. the use of naval vessels for artificial reef) important to fish or wildlife and have Gulf-wide importance, we will develop and implement strategic campaigns around those identified activities that: strategically targets the decision-making agency, educates the public on the problem, and increases the constituency advocating for habitat protection.

C. SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES

The Threats:

In the Gulf of Mexico waters, six of the seven reef fish of which we know the status are depleted. Included are red grouper, greater amberjack, vermillion snapper, and red snapper -- all popular sport and commercial fish. In addition, many of the Gulf’s grouper species (gag, goliath, Nassau, Warsaw, marbled, yellowedge, snowy, black and speckled hind) have been identified by the American Fisheries Society as "at risk of extinction." Additionally, forage fish, such as menhaden, are being caught at enormous levels, with fishing methods that could be affecting shark recovery efforts. These species also serve a critical role in the food web of the ocean, serving as the food needed to sustain healthy populations of larger Gulf fish.

Sadly, the poor state of these fish populations is not surprising. Far too many species lack comprehensive management plans needed to reduce bycatch and end overfishing as required by law. Bycatch is the take, or accidental catch, of any wildlife that is not the intended or targeted catch. If the amount of bycatch in a fishery is added to the amount of targeted fish landed annually, the actual total catch is often more than doubled. Such a significantly higher take of fish than planned for can have serious unexpected environmental impacts: more rapid depletion species, insufficient food for predators, and resulting ecological imbalances.



Red Grouper

The Challenge:

State and federal fisheries managers have failed to address overfishing and bycatch in these fisheries. As a result, many fish, including red grouper, greater amberjack, vermillion snapper, red snapper, and bluefin tuna are overfished and/or are experiencing overfishing. It is clear that unless all sources of mortality are considered by managers in setting total allowable catches, overfishing will not be ended and fisheries throughout the Gulf will remain depleted. Moreover,

unless overfishing and bycatch of forage fish, such as menhaden is addressed, the health of fish populations higher in the food web cannot be sustained even if rebuilt. Without efforts led by engaged conservation advocates, needed measures to rebuild fish populations may never be adopted.



Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Meeting.

Despite the decline in the western stock of bluefin tuna, federal fisheries managers have allowed the fishing mortality rate to reach its highest level since 1970. Recognizing the dire state of this population, NOAA Fisheries has prohibited direct fishing for bluefin and implemented regulations to reduce bycatch of this species in other fisheries. However, the regulations have not been sufficient to protect bluefin. It is suspected that long-line fishers in the Gulf, due to the absence of observers, continue to take dead and dying bluefin tuna as bycatch. The only possible means of eliminating this mortality is closure of spawning areas in the Gulf to long-line fishing.

Goal #1: *To preserve the vibrant diversity of Gulf fisheries and the ecosystems needed to ensure sustainable communities around the Gulf of Mexico*

Our **objective** is to obtain implementation of satisfactory federal monitoring and regulatory programs needed to protect and restore threatened Gulf fisheries. We will achieve our objective by advocating for effective rebuilding plans for the six federally managed overfished species in the Gulf, a standardized reporting methodology to assess the amount and type of bycatch, and education and empowerment of GRN members to effectively advocate sustainable catch of fish populations in the Gulf of Mexico. We will also seek to finally end the 17-year legacy of overfishing of Gulf red snapper. Additionally, we will investigate the development of a new campaign aimed at protecting spawning areas and reduction in bycatch of pelagic species' in the Gulf of Mexico to long-line fishing.



Greater Amberjack

Goal #2: *To ensure healthy and sustainable levels of forage/prey fish needed to maintain the Gulf's marine food web*

Our **objective** is to ensure effective management of forage fish, particularly menhaden, in the Gulf of Mexico to ensure a sufficient food source to sustain populations of fish and marine mammals higher in the food web. We will achieve our goal by developing a campaign focused on reducing direct take and bycatch of these fish.

D. SPECIES AT RISK

The Threat:

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) is a safety net for fish, plants, and wildlife on the brink of extinction. After more than 30 years, a number of species are still with us today because of the Act's protections. However, numerous species of plants, animals, birds, fish, and mammals are still at risk. In fact, over four hundred species of plants and animals found in the Gulf states are considered either threatened or endangered under the ESA (134 in Alabama, 112 in Florida, 31 in Louisiana, 42 in Mississippi, and 94 in Texas). These include the Kemp's ridley and green sea turtles, the Piping plover, the brown pelican, the Louisiana black bear, sperm whales, and the Florida panther. The continuing destruction of coastal forests, marshes, and swamps threaten the continued health, and even survival, of these species.



Piping Plover (Endangered)

Our Challenge:

The ESA is currently under attack from special interests and politicians supported by those interests. They seek to eliminate habitat protection, abandon the commitment to recovering species on the brink of extinction, and politicize the scientific decision-making process. The Act is likely to remain under attack for the foreseeable future. Without increasing support from an informed constituency for the ESA, we could see a repeal of important provisions of the Act.

Rapid development in coastal states, as previously discussed, is quickly destroying habitat needed by species protected under the ESA. Yet, agencies in Gulf states, feeling the heat from opponents of the ESA, are hesitant to make decisions that would stop or even affect development. As a result, agencies are doing little to stop the loss of important habitats and possible extinction of the species dependent upon them. Few groups in the Gulf focus on ESA issues, particularly coastal and marine species. Without some oversight, it is unlikely that agencies will make the difficult decisions needed to minimize destruction or injury to threatened and endangered species, and the habitats upon which they depend.



The remaining Alabama Beach Mouse population is imperiled by condo developments

Our Response:

Goal #1: *To develop an active and concerned constituency, as reflected in an active GRN membership, for preserving and effectively implementing the ESA in the Gulf's coastal/marine environment*

Our **objective** is to develop a targeted campaign focused on outreach to traditional and non-traditional allies (dive clubs, birders, recreational and commercial fishers, and others) to build an informed and active constituency for protection of the species at risk and the habitats upon which they depend. To achieve this objective we will work with partners, such as the Endangered Species Coalition, to identify opportunities for mobilization of our constituency on national ESA protection efforts.



The Endangered Florida Panther

Goal #2: *To ensure that federal and state agencies in Gulf coast states, in considering development proposals, balance development with the need to protect and restore habitat for threatened and endangered species (as well as storm protection for existing coastal communities)*

Our **objective** is to protect and preserve coastal, threatened, or endangered species, or the habitats important to those species, that have Gulf-wide implications or otherwise meet GRN habitat or fisheries goals. (e.g. cypress forests). To achieve this objective we will monitor agency activities, such as the issuance of “take permits” and the development of habitat restoration state habitat action plans, to ensure that selected species or habitats important to them are protected and/or restored; develop materials (website content, fact sheets, and similar outreach materials) highlighting the selected species and the threats to coastal habitats important to those species in each Gulf state; mount campaigns focused on three-to-five coastal threatened or endangered species or habitats important to those species; advocate before the agencies to reduce impacts to the identified habitats and/or species; and when necessary challenge agency actions through litigation to ensure full enforcement.

Goal #3: *To ensure that all of the GRN's campaigns consider, and where possible incorporate, protection of threatened and endangered coastal species and their habitat*

Our **objective** is to incorporate the protection of threatened and endangered species into all existing and future priority issue campaigns. To achieve this objective we will, in developing campaign plans in all issue areas (water resources, fisheries, etc), consider potential ESA issues; and when an ESA issue is identified as germane, the staff will develop strategies for building the ESA issue into the campaign.

E. SAFE AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE ENERGY

The Threat:

The central Gulf of Mexico has long been the nation's energy sacrifice zone. While the East Coast and the West Coast have maintained drilling moratoria off their state's shores, the Third Coast (the Gulf) has shouldered the burden of providing the nation with energy. That energy has come at a significant environmental price-- destruction of wetlands caused by well development, canals, and pipelines that have shredded the coasts of Louisiana and Texas and the discharge of pollution into coastal waters.

Our Challenge:

Katrina and Rita proved that the energy infrastructure that dots the Gulf Coast is incapable of withstanding category 4 and 5 storms. The evidence came in the form of over 11 million gallons of oil that spilled from every sector of the energy industry: production, transportation, storage and refining—a total just larger than the Exxon Valdez spill. These impacts again underscore a need for accountability and responsible planning and behavior from the energy industry.



A whale dives near an oil & gas platform in the Gulf

Oil and gas development in the eastern Gulf, the erosion of Florida's moratorium, and OCS revenue sharing threaten to entice the rest of the Gulf to allow even more oil and gas exploration. Another challenge is ensuring the call for increased revenue sharing by coastal oil producing states, intended to fix well-recognized environmental impacts of oil and gas development, does not obscure the need to hold energy companies accountable for the effects of their actions. The desire for offshore economic development around oil and gas infrastructure is equally challenging. For example, some well meaning advocates for programs such as rigs-to-reefs and rigs-to-fish farms are allowing oil companies to walk away from liabilities and leave their garbage in the Gulf.

As the ongoing research and educational outreach around global warming impacts reach an international tipping-point, Gulf coast impacts such as sea-level rise, increased storm intensity, and ocean acidification may begin to feature more prominently in Gulf Coast citizen's awareness, and provide an opportunity for more energy industry accountability.

Goal #1: *Assure that energy development in the Gulf does not result in significant environmental damage to Gulf fisheries*

Our **objective** is to hold the line on off-shore, open-loop LNG development in the Gulf, maintaining Governors' vetoes on further terminals, while challenging development of permitted facilities, such as the Shell terminal and operation of the Excellerate terminal. To achieve this objective we will generate public opposition to any open-loop LNG in the Gulf through tabling, internet, media, and coalition outreach focusing on fishing constituencies, including the use of contract organizers; and watchdog LNG terminal development and operations for additional opportunities to comment officially through Clean Water Act permits, Deep Water Port Act permits, or 404 Wetland permits.



A fisherman's children participate in rally to reduce environmental damage associated with open-loop LNG

Goal #2: *Ensure that existing environmental impacts from energy production and development are addressed without increasing the incentive for development in, and environmental risk to, other states*

Our **objective** is to increase oil and gas revenues to environmentally impacted oil and gas producing Gulf states, particularly Louisiana, without creating incentives for opening other states to the environmental threats associated with oil and gas development. We will achieve this objective by continuing to tell the tale of oil and gas impacts on coastal Louisiana's wetlands and other natural resources in the Gulf; using this information to frame the need for a more significant and fair share of OCS drilling revenue for states environmentally affected due to historical development while challenging the myth of danger-free development in other Gulf states.

Goal #3: *Obtain action at the state level that ensures a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the consequences of the resulting Global Warming in Gulf States*

Our **objective** is to facilitate the creation of a Gulf-wide collaboration around Global Warming that works to obtain: (1) a regional agreement setting targets for greenhouse gas reductions; and (2) commitments from Gulf Governors to tackle the issue through development of state specific global warming pollution reductions plans. We will achieve this objective by seeking funding for a Gulf-wide meeting of regional organizations involved in energy and global warming issues. Working with these groups we will develop a Gulf-wide initiative (based on the model

established by the GRN in its LNG campaign). The GRN will outreach to obtain financial resources for implementation of the initiative; facilitate implementation of the initiative (again modeling implementation upon the GRN's LNG campaign); and implement an outreach campaign, using our website, Gulf Waves, and our quarterly newsletter. We will draw on the shared experiences of Gulf coast residents who survived the over-active 2005 hurricane season to communicate the real-world impacts of sea level rise, the correlation between warming seas and increased intensity of storms, and other ramifications of climate change.

Goal #4: *Secure efficiency in energy use and the development of environmentally sensitive renewable energy in the Gulf*

Our **objective** is to ensure that efficiency is a part of any energy plan, and that renewable sources of energy, such as wind power, are developed in the coastal and marine waters of the Gulf in a manner that does not substantially degrade natural resources. To achieve this objective the GRN will support the development of clean, environmentally sound, renewable energy development in the Gulf. We will support member group advocacy for energy efficiency (such as auto standards) and renewable energy sources by (1) disseminating action alerts and news items through Gulf Waves, our quarterly newsletter, and our website; (2) building expertise and contacts through attending relevant conferences and hearings; and (3) out-reaching to the funding community to gain support for the development of a Gulf-wide initiative and our engagement as facilitator of this initiative.

E. EMERGING ISSUES



GRN acted quickly to respond to issues emerging after the 2005 hurricanes.

The Threat: Threats to the natural resource of the Gulf that cannot be predicted in advance continue to arise. For example, in 2003 proposals for liquefied natural gas facilities came to the attention of the GRN. After some investigation, it was determined that as many as 28 facilities were planned in the Gulf and that many intended to use open loop systems that threaten the health of Gulf fisheries. The GRN had to move quickly to develop a campaign and obtain funding to fight this Gulf-wide threat. It is inevitable that issues or proposals that pose an equal threat to the Gulf's resources and that have Gulf-wide significance will continue to arise.

The Challenge:

History has proven that simply focusing the organization's attention on pre-planned issue campaigns is not sufficient, as we run the risk of ignoring important threats to the Gulf that arise unexpectedly. Many of these issues that arise are Gulf-wide in import and are not the focus, or

do not fall within the expertise, of any national or state group. We simply cannot predict or plan for all of the possible threats that man can throw at the Gulf in this strategic plan.

At same time we must acknowledge that the GRN's capability to advocate on the myriad of issues that threaten the health of the Gulf is limited. Thus, we must be deliberate and disciplined in our approach to issues that arise, remaining ever mindful of the efforts of other groups working within the region and the unique capabilities of the GRN.

POSSIBLE GOALS/STRATEGIES

Goal: *To ensure that the GRN effectively addresses emerging threats to the Gulf's natural resources*

Our **objective** is to identify and assess emerging issues that threaten the natural resources of the Gulf of Mexico. We will accomplish this objective by monitoring state and federal agency public notices and other publications, communication with members and attendance at forums, in part, with the intent of identifying projects or proposals that pose a threat to Gulf resources and are of regional importance; incorporate into forward-looking research into staff work-plans aimed at analyzing projects or proposals that may require future attention; and when a project or proposal is identified, promptly develop a campaign and identify funding needed to address the identified threat to the Gulf's resources.



Whooping Cranes in their natural habitat in Texas