

WAVE MAKERS NEWS

ONLY BEGINNING TO LEARN BP'S IMPACTS

Last month, hundreds of research results related to the BP drilling disaster were presented at the Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative conference. There was plenty of new information to digest about what happened in 2010, and many lessons can already be applied to lagging restoration efforts. Yet, it's still unclear what the long term impacts of the BP drilling disaster will be.

Samira Daneshgar Asl of Ian MacDonald's lab at Florida State University presented the Gulf Monitoring Consortium's [report](#) that oil platforms underreport their water pollution. The Gulf Monitoring Consortium, which GRN recently joined as a member, is a rapid response alliance that works to investigate and expose oil pollution incidents in the Gulf of Mexico. We're glad to see that the general negligence of the industry is getting more scientific attention.

The coolest talk had to be [John Hildebrand's](#)



Sperm whales in the Northern Gulf, August 2011.

[lecture](#) on tracking sperm whales during the oil disaster. Having tracked the whales with gyroscopic sensors, he found that 1) the sperm whales seemed to avoid a deepwater "donut hole" around the plume of oil and 2) the sperm whales had a high amount of rapid movements around

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COAL TERMINALS EXPANDING IN THE DIRTY SOUTH

If you pay attention to environmental and global warming news, you very well might have heard about the proposed coal export terminals in the Northwest. Coal use in the United States has gone down, so now some of the dirtiest companies in the country are looking to export this carbon that should be staying in the ground.



Coal and petroleum coke pollution in the Mississippi River. Photo courtesy of Dubinsky Photography for [LeanWeb.org](#) and [LMRK.org](#). Flight courtesy of [Southwings.org](#).

Activists in the Northwest have been putting up a great fight, and have up to this point been very successful in stopping these exports; so now Big Coal is eyeing the Gulf Coast to get their coal to international markets. The Gulf Coast has often been treated as America's Energy Sacrifice Zone, and it looks like Big Coal wants us to take another hit.

So why should we be concerned? The reasons are many:

- Burning this coal overseas will cause health problems in nearby areas, but also exacerbate global warming throughout the world, leading to a rising sea and more intense storms.
- New and expanding terminals along the

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MISSISSIPPI RELEASES PLAN FOR BP FINES

In January, Governor Phil Bryant released the GoCoast 2020 Final Report, a blueprint for how Mississippi will spend its share of RESTORE Act fines from the BP disaster. GRN has been working with our partners in Mississippi to, among other things, ensure that this report reflects the needs of the low-income and minority communities most impacted by the BP disaster, and prioritizes ecosystem restoration over pork-barrel projects.

The report is largely lacking in specifics, instead focusing on big-picture concepts, principles, and criteria for choosing future projects. It's broken down into eight sections, including Eco-Restoration, Economic Development, Seafood, and Workforce.

The Eco-restoration portion of the report does a good initial job of surveying restoration needs on the Coast, and existing programs, like the Mississippi Coastal Improvement Program, that could help drive restoration. However, ecosystem restoration must be central to all the GoCoast 2020 goals, and many sections of the report fail in that respect. In the long run, restoring our environment restores our economy.

For example, the Workforce section completely ignores the Mississippi Jobs First Act and barely mentions emerging opportunities for local workers in coastal and marine restoration. The Jobs Act is designed to



The release of the Go Coast Report by Governor Bryant (pictured) is one step in the long road ahead. Images courtesy of the state of Mississippi and USDA.

give local workers a leg-up in finding employment from work financed through BP fines and other disasters, and clearly needs to be incorporated into the Workforce section.

Above and beyond the content of the report, it's essential that the Governor and other leaders make a commitment to transparency and public involvement in the disbursement of RESTORE Act funds. We hope state leaders will work with the public to improve the GoCoast 2020 blueprint. There's still a long road to travel together to ultimately build a healthier and more resilient coastal ecosystem that supports a vibrant economy for generations to come. ■

ONLY BEGINNING TO LEARN BP'S IMPACTS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

the edge of the "donut hole," which he interpreted as mass feeding events of whatever prey creatures were weakened by and fleeing the deepwater oil plume.

But what does this mean for restoration? There aren't a lot of marine restoration projects proposed to the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council, so GRN advocates that other human pressures be taken off the existing marine populations. If we can't make more whales, we must protect those that are left, and give them more space to thrive. In the case of sperm whales, fewer seismic blasts from deepwater oil and gas exploration while whales are around will help ensure that whales aren't drowning in noise.

Scott Walker presented a pelican tracking [study](#) that demonstrates how much we have to learn about even familiar species. Scott thought that his Mobile Bay nesting population of pelicans could serve as a control of largely uncontaminated pelicans to compare to

those more directly impacted by the BP disaster for an exposure study, but his tracking devices showed that even resident populations of Brown Pelican regularly migrated across the Gulf Coast, and into Louisiana islands that were contaminated.

Unlike the sperm whales, which seem to have fled the oil in the dark depths, more pelicans flew into and fed from oiled areas than expected – which gives more urgency to restoration of pelican rookeries. Louisiana has several barrier island restoration projects proposed for "early" restoration, but two years after agreeing to an early restoration framework, BP has failed to follow up on its restoration commitment.

While BP drags its feet on its promises, we continue to learn more than we ever wanted to know about the consequences of chemically altering the entire Gulf of Mexico. Everything we learn tells us that restoration needed to begin some time ago. [Tell BP to own up.](#) ■

WETLANDS UNDER SIEGE IN NORTH GULFPORT

Cities need their wetlands as natural defenses against flooding and there is no better example of this than in North Gulfport. Roughly 1,000 acres of land, mostly flat, pine wetlands are situated in Gulfport between Canal Road and U.S. Hwy 49, south of Interstate 10. This area is owned by “Butch” Ward who has already developed part of the wetlands as an outlet mall. He has now also submitted an application to the Corps of Engineers to fill 383 more wetland acres to build a mixed commercial industrial and warehouse park.

According to the applicant’s environmental assessment, in the geologic past, this area was sea bottom and beach. Underlying the pine trees, grasses and scrub of the wet savanna are eroded sand dunes that run east-west. In any of the bogs or wet forests that have developed on top of these sand deposits, you just need to look at the crayfish burrows to tell what lies beneath – the chimneys the crayfish build there are mostly sand, mixed with brown organic bog detritus.

The urbanizing edge of Gulfport is encroaching more each year on these pine savanna wetlands. They are perceived as valuable only if they can be filled and developed, but they also have value in flood control. The underlying sand layers store and conduct a great volume of water. The bogs north of I-10, and the wet pine savannas along Turkey Creek south of I-10 act as sponges to store water and gradually feed nearby streams with shallow ground water. Turkey Creek runs southeast through the Ward property.

The fate of these spongy wetlands matters a great deal to the residents of nearby subdivisions and communities in the Turkey Creek flood plain. Wetlands absorb and store water every time it rains, from summer showers to driving hurricane squalls. Their value in a place with very flat topography, like North Gulfport, is hard to over-estimate. One acre of wetlands can store 1 to 1.5 million gallons of floodwater, according to the EPA. If



Crayfish burrow with mix of sand and bog detritus. Photo courtesy of R.L. Jones, Joelle Carney, and the Mississippi Natural Heritage Program.

Ward is allowed to fill 383 acres of wetlands with 2 feet of impermeable clay, the water that ordinarily would soak into the ground will become surface runoff. The residents of the nearby neighborhoods know where the excess water will go. Turkey Creek can only take so much water before it overflows its banks and North Gulfport already has flooding problems. The water will be in people’s homes, and will cover their roads.

This wetland fill permit, if granted would be exceeded in acreage only by the wetland losses caused by the construction of the Gulfport Airport farther downstream on Turkey Creek. Gulf Restoration Network and others have submitted [comments](#) to the US Army Corps of Engineers Mobile District opposing this permit and asking for, among other things, a full Environmental Impact Statement, an analysis of alternatives (the permit offered none), and for the Corps to hold public meetings in the affected communities. We’ll keep you up to date as the fight to protect North Gulfport from flooding continues. ☐

COAL TERMINALS EXPANDING IN THE DIRTY SOUTH (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Mississippi River will be discharging coal dust and runoff, polluting neighboring communities, wetlands, and the Mississippi.

- One proposed export facility will be right next to a proposed Louisiana coastal restoration project, the Myrtle Grove sediment diversion. This new facility could impact the placement of the project, change the dynamics of the river, and pollute the water and

sediment that would be used to restore Louisiana’s coastal wetlands.

Due to the impacts to the land, water, wetlands, air, and communities, we should not allow this expansion of coal export facilities in the Gulf. GRN is working with our partners to make sure that the Gulf doesn’t become a victim, once again, to polluting energy profiteers. ☐

WE ARE ALL CONNECTED BY WATER

Florida springs and rivers need protection – protection they are not getting from water management districts, the state, or the federal government. On February 1st, the Center for Earth Jurisprudence hosted Rights of Springs – a conference on protecting our waters featuring scientists, filmmakers, and legal minds from Florida and across the country.

One of the main topics at the conference was the challenge of keeping our waters flowing at healthy levels. Scientists, agencies, and citizens have warned of falling water flows and levels for years. Forty years ago, Florida passed a law to establish minimum flows and levels for our waters, but the law has been poorly enforced and weakened over the years. In fact, no minimum flows and levels have been set at all for larger, “magnitude 1” springs. So much of Florida’s water is already allocated to consumptive use permits for industrial and municipal users that fixing the problem under current and proposed water policy could prove quite challenging and expensive.

Our water budget is like our personal financial budget. We must live within our means. Right now, Florida’s water credit card is maxed out, the checkbook is overdrawn, and we’re about to lose our job. What to do?

In addition to existing state and federal regulations, many local communities around the country are working to provide greater environmental protection to their citizens. According to one speaker, Mari Margil from the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, three dozen cities around the U.S. have passed environmental Bills of Rights to protect their communities from threats like the destruction of ecosystems from fracking, water pollution, industrial agriculture, and the draining of aquifers. Barnstead, New Hampshire was the first community in the nation to ban the corporatization of water withdrawals. However, these rights still face an uphill battle, particularly here in Florida. In recent years, Governor Rick Scott and his allies have worked to wrest environmental oversight from local governments by limiting their ability to regulate nitrogen and phosphorus pollution, interfering with the regional



Wakulla Springs State Park. Photo courtesy of [Bev Norton](#).

governing boards that oversee water use in the state, and moving to prevent local governments from inspecting septic systems.

It’s time for us to find our voice...to stand up and say no. According to Rob Williams, attorney for CEJ, current policy has it backwards, asking only “what is the least amount of water we can keep to maintain the environment? And what is the most amount of pollution we can allow and still have water health?” Rather, we should be asking what it will take to restore and sustain the health and beauty of Florida for all Floridians. We have the right to protect what is ours – the lands and waters we were granted under the Florida Constitution. Ultimately, we must learn how to share – because we are all connected by water. ■