

WAVE MAKERS NEWS

KEEP FLORIDA FLOWING

Florida's Nature Coast is one of the last frontiers of beautiful, old Florida, and our free-flowing waters are central to its continued survival. Millions of gallons of water flow through the limestone layers beneath our feet, supporting human needs for drinking water and recreation. Its wetlands, rivers, and coastal ecosystems nurture juvenile fish, manatees, osprey, eagles, turtles, and many other species that call the Gulf of Mexico home. The Nature Coast is not only an ecological treasure; it's the front line in the fight to protect the Gulf Coast of Florida.

Over the next two years, regional and state agencies may decide to reduce water levels in springs, rivers and streams. Lower water levels will have a major impact on the future of the Nature Coast and Florida's environment. The Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) and Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) will



Citizens at October 30th meeting on flows in the Chassahowitzka and Homosassa River systems.

play a leading role in the statewide effort to "codify" legislative initiatives that will reduce environmental protections and expedite development at the expense of the natural resources of the Nature Coast.

Continued on page 2

MAKING SURE RESTORATION IS THE PRIORITY

Since the RESTORE Act passed this summer, Mississippi and the other Gulf states have been scrambling to figure out a plan for using their share of the billions of dollars in BP Clean Water Act fines that will eventually flow to the Gulf.

On August 22, 2012, Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant announced the creation of Go Coast 2020, a commission comprised of over a hundred members – primarily coastal legislators and business leaders – tasked with drafting a plan for RESTORE Act funds in Mississippi by January. These members were in turn split into 8 subcommittees such as Eco Restoration, Seafood, and Infrastructure. Later, responding to concerns raised by GRN and our allies, the Governor added several additional members representing community, conservation, and social justice

organizations. Since then, Go Coast 2020 held a first round of public hearings along the Coast, and is already well on the way to developing a draft report.

It's great to see the state prioritize this effort, but we're also concerned that the rate at which this plan is being developed limits the public's ability to really study it and provide meaningful input. Public scrutiny can help ensure that the main priority for RESTORE Act dollars is ecosystem restoration that provides long-term benefits to the coast and its communities – not one-off economic development schemes that further degrade the health of Mississippi's coastal environment.

One of our suggestions to the committee is to

Continued on page 4

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

P2

A Closer Look at Gulf Surgeon

P3

Isaac Came, but our Roots Held

P4

Louisiana's Attempt to Weaken Pollution Protections

A CLOSER LOOK AT GULF STURGEON

Gulf Restoration Network and allies like the Steps Coalition have been raising questions for years about the proposed Port of Gulfport expansion. How will it and associated projects impact nearby communities? The coastal and marine environment? In comments submitted nearly two years ago, GRN requested that the Mississippi State Port Authority at Gulfport (Port Authority) and United States Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) investigate the effects of channel deepening on Gulf sturgeon habitat. At a recent community meeting organized by the Steps Port Campaign Coalition, Port Authority President Lenny Sawyer announced a two year Gulf sturgeon survey by the Corps and University of Southern Mississippi research biologists. It is good to see our comments heeded.

Gulf sturgeon, a threatened species, can grow up to eight feet in length and their bony plates and hard, extended snout give them a prehistoric look.

The Gulf sturgeon populations of the Pascagoula and Pearl River systems are well studied, and fish movements have been followed through the use of electronic tags in several research efforts over the last 15 years. Sturgeons spawn in the river systems. Eggs hatch in fresh water and larvae develop there into juveniles. Young sturgeon from the Pascagoula and Pearl leave the rivers and move into the Mississippi Sound where



Gulf sturgeon caught on Pearl River near Jackson before construction of the Ross Barnett Dam. Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science Library.

they range widely and feed mainly on bottom-dwelling invertebrates. The Corps study will involve tracking sturgeon through the use of sonic tags and a network of receiver buoys as they move through the Mississippi Sound and the island passes.

This study should yield data that can help ensure the continued protection of this fascinating, ancient species that makes its home in our Gulf and rivers. 📍

KEEP FLORIDA FLOWING (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

To fight this threat Gulf Restoration Network is organizing the Springs Coast Task Force, a ground force of concerned citizens and organizations to speak out at meetings and public events throughout the region and put pressure on policymakers to protect and restore Florida's waters. Working in coalition with the Nature Coast Coalition and Sierra Club, as well as other organizations and citizens' groups, we'll be fighting to ensure that Florida's free-flowing waters are protected.

In particular, the Springs Coast Task Force will be advocating that minimum flows and levels (MFLs) in our rivers and streams are not set below current levels, and for the implementation of prevention and restoration strategies for key springsheds and river systems.

On October 30th, the SWFWMD Governing Board met to hear recommendations to set MFLs for the Chassahowitzka and Homosassa River systems in Citrus County. The proposal would have allowed flow reductions of up to 9% in the Chassahowitzka and up

to 3% in the Homosassa, based on a 2005 baseline. This calculation fails to accurately account for the major degradation from drought, overpumping, and nitrogen and phosphorus pollution that took place prior to 2005.

Facing public calls to save these river systems, the District Governing Board limited the degradation of these waterways to 3% of the 2005 baseline, and voted to create a Water Use Caution Area (WUCA) for Citrus and Hernando counties. WUCAs impose restrictions on water users and permit applicants to prevent or remedy water and other related impacts. This was only a [partial victory](#), but we will continue to push SWFWMD and FDEP to maintain and restore the flows needed to sustain the Nature Coast. For more information or to join the Florida Flow campaign, please contact Cathy Harrelson, GRN's Florida Organizer, at cathy@healthygulf.org or 727-415-8805. Florida's Nature Coast is simply too important to Florida - and to the entire Gulf of Mexico - to let this threat go unanswered. 📍

ISAAC CAME, BUT OUR ROOTS HELD

Hurricane Isaac's surge devastated many coastal communities and knocked neglected industry facilities. Now some of the same communities struggling with the aftermath of flood waters also have to deal with polluters who would drown them in toxic waste.

Isaac churned up BP's oil that was hidden just below the surface in northern Barataria Bay. In Bay Batiste, we've seen a resurgence of liquid oil in the marsh, and tar balls and tar mats on barrier beaches from Gulfport to Fourchon. The northern Barataria Rim marshes are targeted for restoration in the Louisiana Coastal Master Plan, but BP's oil has compromised these critical storm defenses. Marshes are resilient, and can handle surge or some oil, but not both. After two years of dawdling, BP needs to clean up northern Barataria now.



The Bayou Dupont restoration shows minimal damage after Isaac.

Isaac, however, has not knocked down existing coastal restoration projects. It's too early for a complete assessment, but every restoration project we've passed, if it was well-rooted with marsh grasses or trees, stayed put and defended us against Isaac's surge. The Bayou Dupont restoration shows minimal damage, even though the storm wrack upon the marsh shows that it was hit directly. This restoration could have been the difference that kept expected flood water out of Gheens, Kraemer,



Cypress trees in the Birdfoot Delta still standing.

and other outlying towns of upper Barataria.

In Venice, "inside the punch" of Isaac, cypress trees stand in West Bay and Grand Pass. In Bohemia, where the river and the tides of Breton sound flow freely, the coastal wetlands are more green.

Flying over the Chandeleur Islands, we saw that the sand berms built during the BP disaster, as expected, have been mixed into subaerial overwash deltas. In plain English, the sand is still there, it just doesn't peek above the surface. To be honest, we expected Isaac to be the last of the Chandeleurs. The last stands of mangroves and marshes persist, as meager as they are, in a quiet, wonderful beauty. Many of Isaac's cuts in the islands will fill in; many of Katrina's channels never did.

Mississippi's Ship Islands are an example of what happens when restoration is all sand and no roots. The NOAA photo below shows how the unplanted, newer portions of West Ship rolled over much farther than the portions with plants.

Our roots hold, but where we have no roots, our defenses wash away in the storm tide. ☐



On West Ship Island, sand on the unplanted, east side of the island appears to have shifted farther in reaction to the storm than the planted areas. Photo courtesy of NOAA.

MAKING SURE RESTORATION IS THE PRIORITY (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

prioritize ecosystem restoration projects included in the Mississippi Coastal Improvement Program, an underfunded United States Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) plan developed in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Funding these projects could help employ local workers in the restoration economy, restore coastal ecosystems that support healthy wildlife and fish populations, and protect communities from storm surge and flooding. The Corps estimates that one such project, the Admiral Island Ecosystem Restoration in Hancock County, would reduce local flooding by restoring 123 acres of wetlands and aquatic vegetation, while generating approximately 301 jobs and almost \$50 million in economic activity.

Mississippi has a major opportunity to build a healthier coast and economy for the future, and we'll be working hard to make sure state leaders grab this opportunity. You can help by [clicking here](#) and [telling the Governor](#)



Citizens stand with the Gulf at a Hands Across the Sand event in Biloxi this summer.

and members of Go Coast 2020 that restoration should be their central priority. ▣

LOUISIANA'S ATTEMPT TO WEAKEN POLLUTION PROTECTIONS

October 2012 was the 40th anniversary of the Clean Water Act, one of the most important environmental laws ever passed. Under the Act, waters of each state must have water quality criteria that do three things: designate how water bodies will be utilized (swimming, fishing, drinking, etc.), set limits on the pollution allowed in each of these waters, and ensure that clean



The Bogue Falaya River, one of Louisiana's Outstanding waters threatened by LDEQ's rule change. Photo courtesy of Mary Davis, LPBF.

waters remain clean. This last requirement is referred to as "antidegradation." In 2009, GRN released a report entitled *Clean Up Your Act* which gave Louisiana a "D" for their water quality standards, in large part due to their poor antidegradation rules. Regretfully, Louisiana is attempting to further weaken these rules for keeping our clean waters clean.

In September of this year, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality announced "minor" revisions that would remove some of their few antidegradation rules. These revisions would change definitions and regulations and leave some of Louisiana's most pristine waters, Outstanding Natural Resource Waters, less protected. These changes threaten the health of all of the rivers in Louisiana, including gems such as the Tchefuncte and Bogue Falaya Rivers. GRN, our conservation partners, and our members joined together to send in hundreds of comments to LDEQ to tell them that instead of weakening existing rules, they should be enhancing them in order to protect Louisiana's wildlife and communities. ▣