



GULF CURRENTS

Inside This Issue

Fall 2011

www.healthygulf.org

**Victory for One River
Fish Kill on Another**
page 3

**Gulf Community
Member Spotlight**
pages 4-5

**Florida's Nature Coast
Louisiana's Dead Zone**
page 6

**Sperm Whales
Student Activists**
page 7

The Oil Is Still Here And So Are We



Oil on the beach of East Bay, LA after Tropical Storm Irene. Photo taken by Gulf Restoration Network and On Wings of Care on September 7, 2011.

Photo: GRN / On Wings of Care

On August 19th, GRN's Jonathan Henderson took one of several flights with the nonprofit On Wings of Care over the site of BP's deepwater drilling disaster. We were able to document what appeared to be circular, oily sheen. The spots had a brownish rainbow tint, stretched for miles, and did not appear to be coming from any source on the surface. GRN filed a report with the National Response Center and the Coast Guard and BP immediately denied that BP's killed well was leaking.

Prompted by GRN's work, the *Mobile Press-Register* took a boat out and documented that samples were consistent with BP's crude from last summer. After that report, BP sent an ROV to their wellhead to investigate. With the Coast Guard and representatives from the Department of Interior and three Gulf states observing, it was determined that there was

no ongoing leak. But leaks are not unique to BP. On each of our recent flights we have documented other leaks, far from the location of BP's disaster. Some of them clearly emanate from fixed locations like well-heads or platforms, while others are in open water with no known source.

BP's oil did turn up along the Gulf Coast after tropical systems moved through, with large tarballs and tar mats showing up in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. GRN was particularly interested in reports of further BP cleanup on Fourchon Beach, at an area we visited in May to document BP's inadequately cleaned up oil along that coastal area. BP now has reportedly mobilized over 100 workers to clean up the 8 miles of beach littered with their oil.

BP's remaining oil underscores the need for action to ensure we protect and restore the Gulf. GRN continues to advocate for the creation of a Gulf Regional Citizens Advisory Council to increase transparency and community accountability from the oil industry as they operate in the Gulf. A positive step was taken recently with the passage of the RESTORE Act through committee in the Senate and introduction in the House. This legislation would direct 80% of the fines collected from BP to the restoration of the Gulf's ecosystem and coastal economies. The fines could possibly top \$20 billion, creating a significant opportunity for Gulf recovery. GRN will be turning to our members in the weeks ahead to mobilize a unified voice in support of improving the bill and passing it into a law.



Photo: GRN / On Wings of Care

Oil leaking from a facility in Breton Sound in Louisiana on August 19, 2011.

Creating a healthy and whole Gulf Coast

Cynthia Sarthou
Executive Director

The Gulf Coast is an ecologically unique and beautiful region home to many amazing habitats and species. During recent monitoring trips, members of our staff have seen sperm whales and sting rays swimming in the Gulf and pelicans and other birds congregating in coastal marshes. But the Gulf Coast faces ongoing threats to its environment, coastal communities, and economy. BP's oil and toxic dispersants continue to wreak havoc on the Gulf as is evident from recent flyovers along the Louisiana coast.



Photo: Jeffrey Dubinsky



Group of sting rays in the Gulf of Mexico.

It will take the attention and action of the nation to guide the recovery and restoration of the Gulf Coast and prevent future disasters. Working with our partners, GRN's efforts focus on two critical demands of Congress, federal agencies, and the Obama administration:

1. Direct at least 80% of Clean Water Act fines levied again BP toward ***ecosystem restoration in the Gulf Coast***, and
2. Implement a Regional Citizens' Advisory Council to ***ensure that affected communities are formally involved in the oversight*** of future drilling decisions and oil industry actions.

In this issue, you can also read about the great work that your donations support. From a victory for the Pascagoula River in Mississippi to involving Tulane University students in efforts to save the Gulf, our work spans the region and relies on people like you to push decision-makers to do what's right for the Gulf and the planet.

Today we call on you to join us by making a significant donation to our efforts. Please send your contribution in the envelope enclosed or visit our website: www.healthygulf.org/membership. Only by working together to build a strong coalition of voices and support will we successfully create our vision of a healthy and whole Gulf Coast.



Swamps of southern Louisiana.

I hope we can count on your continuing support!

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Robert Hastings, Chair
Prattville, AL

Hank Caddell, Vice Chair
Mobile, AL

Teresa Carrillo
Corpus Christi, TX

Martina Cartwright
Houston, TX

Allen McReynolds
Houston, TX

Jose Miranda, Treasurer
New Orleans, LA

Cynthia Ramseur
Ocean Springs, MS

Brooke Rosenberg
St. Petersburg, FL

Susan Spicer
New Orleans, LA

STAFF

Cynthia Sarthou, Executive Director

Aaron Viles, Deputy Director

Eir Danielson, Development Director

Irene Dowling, Office Manager

Michelle Erenberg,
Special Projects Coordinator

Scott Eustis, Coastal Wetlands Specialist

Dan Favre, Communications Director

Cathy Harrelson, Florida Organizer

Jonathan Henderson,
Coastal Resiliency Organizer

Raleigh Hoke, Mississippi Organizer

Harry Lowenburg, Development Associate

Natasha Noordhoff, Administrative Assistant

Ayn Pivonka, Campaign Assistant

Matt Rota,
Science and Water Policy Director

Andrew Whitehurst,
Science and Water Policy Assistant Director

Victory for the Pascagoula River

For years, GRN and a broad coalition of citizens and conservation groups have been fighting to halt the Richton salt dome project – an expensive and destructive Department of Energy (DOE) oil storage scheme that would have had significant impacts on the health of the Pascagoula River and the Mississippi Sound. This September, we received word of a big victory! The DOE has cancelled the last ongoing study on the project, effectively killing the project.



Cypress tree in the Pascagoula River marsh.

The plan would have required the withdrawal of 50 million gallons of water a day from the Pascagoula River every single day for 5-6 years in order to dissolve underground salt deposits. The extremely salty, polluted byproduct would have then been dumped off the coast of one of Mississippi's barrier islands, potentially creating a large dead zone where little marine life could survive!

Mississippi's Pascagoula River is one of the last, large free-flowing rivers in the continental United States and Mississippi residents are rightly proud of this amazing natural resource. By coming together as a diverse group of organizations and citizens speaking in one unified voice, we were able to score a big victory for the health of this amazing river and region.



Photo: GRN

Kayaking the Pascagoula River. A pastime that is now protected from the ill-advised Richton Salt Domes project that would have drained the river and created a dead zone in the Mississippi Sound. Thanks to everyone who helped secure this victory for the Pascagoula River.

Paper Mill Kills Thousands of Fish in the Pearl River



Dead fish in the Pearl River from Temple-Inland's pollution discharge, August 19, 2011.

Photo: Copyright - Julie Demersky 2011

A discharge of "black liquor" and other pollutants from the Temple-Inland paper mill in Bogalusa, LA caused a massive fish kill in the Pearl River this August.

death of pretty much everything in the river. Regretfully, Temple-Inland has admitted that this deadly spill was "avoidable." Despite this fact, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality has allowed Temple-Inland to resume operations mere weeks after portions of the river were covered bank to bank with dead fish. The plant is required to perform more intense monitoring for about three months, and then operate under their old permit, with little improvement to the actual treatment of their discharge.

Currently, GRN is working with our conservation partners and local residents to ensure that the Pearl is restored and that the plant installs state-of-the-art technologies that will dramatically reduce the pollution dumped into the Pearl River.



Photo: GRN / Southwings

Waste pond at the Temple-Inland paper mill holding toxic "black liquor" and other dangerous pollution.

The Pearl River is a border river between South Mississippi and Louisiana, a Louisiana Scenic River, and home to several threatened and endangered species, including the Gulf Sturgeon. The Pearl took a massive blow, as the illegal discharge from the paper mill killed hundreds of thousands of fish and mussels, including at least twenty-four Gulf Sturgeon.

Many organizations, including GRN and our partners at Southwings (southwings.org) investigated this spill that caused the

Watching Movies to Defend the Gulf

During this summer's Congressional recess, GRN organized nearly 200 home screenings across the nation. We connected with many new activists and old friends as they hosted our "Defend the Gulf" film in their homes, churches, bars, and community centers. We also received some great feedback from our wonderful hosts, like Karin Davidson in Columbus, OH:

"The fact that all of America's main rivers feed into the Mississippi and on to the Gulf was not known by most of my friends... now that they know how the delta lands were built up and how they've been depleted, they are going out into our community to spread the word... one teacher is taking the DVD to show in her classrooms in order to let the next generation know what is still going on in the Gulf area and what they can think about as far as how their generation needs to respond."



Photos: Karin Davidson

Left: Event attendees gathered in Columbus, OH at the home of Karin Davidson.

Above: Materials provided by GRN on display.

It's not too late to host a movie screening to Defend the Gulf in your neighborhood. With the RESTORE Act moving through Congress, now is the time to take action for the Gulf – and have fun doing it! You can email Ayn, GRN's Campaign Assistant (ayn@healthygulf.org) to register to host a screening.

Join the Healthy Gulf Krewe

To combat the many environmental issues facing the Gulf, GRN is recruiting our best activists to join the Healthy Gulf Krewe. Members of the Krewe will play a key role in helping to build the movement of ordinary citizens from around the country to fight for Louisiana's wetlands and the recovery of the Gulf of Mexico, in the wake of the BP oil disaster.

To consider joining this call to action, check out our Healthy Gulf Krewe page, www.healthygulf.org/healthy-gulf-krewe, or contact Ayn Pivonka at ayn@healthygulf.org or 504-525-1528 ext 212.



Photo: Gulf Restoration Network

Summer Outreach Campaign

GRN's fourth annual summer outreach campaign may have just come to a close, but the ongoing support from those of you who became new members, or renewed your membership this summer will continue to provide critical resources for our priority campaigns throughout the year. Thanks for your support!

Our dedicated Gulf Defenders have been working in New Orleans and throughout the Gulf Coast since April, and in that time they spoke with tens of thousands of individuals and signed up thousands of new members. Their hard work, and the support of folks like you, helps give GRN the resources and unified voice we need to continue to push for a healthy Gulf future.



Photos: Robert Smith for GRN



Photo: GRN



Photos: Robert Smith for GRN

Member Spotlight: Keith Cox

Keith Cox first joined the Gulf Restoration Network in the summer of 2009 when a GRN canvasser came to his door drenched in sweat. "I want my kids and grandkids to enjoy what I had growing up," he explains. "My father worked for Texaco and he would take us fishing at the rigs. We went to Grand Isle, Cocodrie, Shell Beach and to Alabama and Florida beaches on vacation."

Cox works for Martin's Wine Cellar and Wines Unlimited as the inventory manager and he is a retired Marine – Special Forces Search and Rescue. In a way, he continues to defend our country by defending the coast as a Gulf Sustainer. "I contribute \$20 a month. I can do that. I throw \$20 away every week." But \$20 a month adds up to real coastal protection; he has already contributed over \$500!



Photo: GRN

Keith Cox, a Gulf Sustainer since 2009, contributes \$20 per month to GRN to ensure that his kids and grandkids are able to enjoy the natural treasures of the Gulf that he did while growing up. Here he is with a photo of his grandchildren.

Voodoo Music Experience

Gulf Restoration Network is once again the official non-profit partner of the Voodoo Experience. The music festival takes place under the oaks of New Orleans City Park from October 28 - 30, 2011. As in past years, GRN will build a wetlands display and be on hand to educate concert-goers about the importance of our coastal lines of defense for protecting the region and music we all love.

GRN's Coastal Lines of Defense theatre and wetlands exhibit at Voodoo Fest.



Photo: GRN

Welcome New Staff!

Harry Lowenburg, Development Associate

After canvassing with GRN for the last two summers, Harry Lowenburg has now joined GRN's central staff. Harry brings years of organizing experience, proven fundraising ability, and a passionate outrage to make sure that BP's oil drilling disaster is not forgotten.



Andrew Whitehurst, Assistant Director of Science and Water Policy

Andrew works to develop and implement healthy waters campaigns in Mississippi, advancing GRN public policy positions through administrative comment writing, public education, and mobilization. Andrew has a Master's Degree in Wildlife Ecology from Mississippi State University and a J.D. from the Paul M. Hebert Law Center at L.S.U. His experience includes work in coastal fisheries research, law, and conservation outreach.



Photo: GRN

Houston for a Healthy Gulf

Houstonians came out in support of a healthy Gulf at a reception hosted by the Inman Gallery on September 29. Event-goers learned about GRN's response work to the BP oil drilling disaster and campaign for clean water from Executive Director Cynthia Sarthou and viewed paintings of invasive species by artist Kristin Musnug. Lucky raffle winners took home a beautiful scarf from CrOp by David Peck and an Aveda gift certificate. Big thanks to all who attended, our sponsor CrOp by David Peck, and supporters Inman Gallery, Josephine's Day Spa & Salon, and T'afia.



Painting: Kristin Musnug, Giant Salvinia, Caddo Lake 2010, oil on panel, 24 x 30 inches, courtesy of the artist and Inman Gallery, Houston.

Dead Zone Huge, EPA Fails to Take Decisive Action

At the end of July, scientists once again braved the Gulf to measure the size of the Dead Zone. And the news isn't good: while we didn't see a record Dead Zone, it is still pretty darned big—about the size of Connecticut.

The Dead Zone is just what it sounds like: an area in the Gulf that is devoid of life. The Dead Zone forms every summer off the coast of Louisiana and Texas due to nitrogen and phosphorous pollution flowing down the Mississippi River. The pollution fuels algal blooms that use up all the oxygen in the water, leaving none for crabs, fish, and other sealife.

Adding insult to injury this year, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), days after the measurement, denied a petition filed by GRN and the Mississippi River Collaborative which asked for

decisive action to reduce Dead Zone-causing pollution. Instead, EPA has suggested that voluntary programs already in place, with support from EPA, are adequate.

Needless to say, this response is disappointing. Back in the 1990's, EPA told the states to develop numerical standards for nitrogen and phosphorus pollution. As of right now only a handful of Mississippi River states have phosphorus pollution criteria and none have nitrogen criteria.

Now after over a decade, EPA has relegated themselves to a support role for the states in developing these standards. If the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results, maybe EPA should be checking with a doctor.



Dr. Nancy Rabalais, Executive Director of the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium (LUMCON), has measured the Dead Zone every summer for the last 27 years. This year, she received the Heinz Foundation Award which recognizes environmental champions, and she is a very worthy recipient of the prestigious award.

Stopping a Super-Dredge Off Florida's Nature Coast

Developers with Sun West Acquisition Corp are back this year with their latest attempt to receive approval for dredging a ship channel that will destroy pristine seagrass beds and essential fish habitat in Fillman's Bayou on the Nature Coast. In 2009, push-back from the community halted the misguided efforts to dredge a channel for mega-yachts at the cost of the Nature Coast's natural beauty.

Despite re-configuring the original SunWest Harbortowne development concept, the developers proposal will destroy habitat for grouper and other important fish species. The new version includes promises to build a county park, adding an ostensible "public purpose" to the project, and Pasco County is now a party to the permit application. In these tough economic times, Florida's interests are better served by promoting and protecting the natural treasures that have supported our communities for generations.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection gave thumbs up to this massive dredge project, unprecedented in size and scope. The project received a strong letter of opposition to the adverse impacts to tidal wetlands, emergent marsh and various seagrass habitats from National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). According to NMFS, the variety and propor-

tion of the seagrass is critical to the success of the habitat for the purpose it serves as a nursery for essential fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico. To proceed, the project will need permission from the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), and we can't let that happen.

GRN, local groups and volunteers are working to show the Corps the folly of this project and request a full Environmental Impact Statement for the project. For more information, please contact Cathy Harrelson, Florida Organizer for Gulf Restoration Network, 727-415-8805, or cathy@healthygulf.org.



Florida seagrass beds are important habitat for fish, manatees, and other wildlife.

Creature Feature: The Sperm Whale

Did you know that the Gulf is home to sperm whales? According to a federal stock assessment report, in 2009 there were estimated to be 1400-1600 sperm whales living year round in the Gulf.



GRN's Jonathan Henderson recently captured these beautiful images on a monitoring flight with On Wings of Care over the Gulf of Mexico.

These amazing creatures have massive heads and prominent rounded foreheads. They also have the largest brain of any creature known to have lived on Earth! Sperm whales are known to dive as deep as 3,280 feet in search of giant squid to eat. In order to do so, these mammals must be able to hold their breath for at least 90 minutes.

All sperm whales are considered endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, but the Gulf population is especially vulnerable due to its relatively small size. In fact, scientists predict that human-caused death of just three of the Gulf sperm whales could jeopardize the entire population. Studies have shown that the Gulf's sperm whales tend to feed in the area of the BP drilling disaster, a fact that has scientists deeply concerned about their well-being.

While impacts the oil is having on the whales will be unknown for years, recent sightings by GRN's Jonathan Henderson on aerial monitoring flights is a welcome sign.



Photos: GRN / On Wings of Care

Students Restoring the Gulf

Gulf Restoration Network hosted an Environmental Leadership Conference on Tulane University's campus this September for student leaders and service-learners. We trained 30 young activists in the art of environmental advocacy, and many of them joined a field trip to Jean Lafitte National Preserve. Our host, Dr. Bob Thomas from Loyola University, described the unique and diverse habitats and species in the preserve as the group walked from a bottomland hardwood forest, past the Cypress-Tupelo swamps, over Bayou Coquille and ended at a freshwater marsh.

Adam Bauer-Goulden, a Tulane service-learner, enjoyed the Environmental Leadership Conference: "This weekend's activities were very informative and extremely fun! I learned a lot about grassroots organization and the art of petitioning. I



Shadows of students looking at a 12-foot alligator in the Jean Lafitte National Preserve - Barataria Unit. The tour was lead by Dr. Bob Thomas from Loyola University.

Photo courtesy of Dr. Bob Thomas.

was also very happy to learn about ways that GRN is attempting to hold BP responsible for the oil spill. The tour of Jean Lafitte Preserve was really exciting; I have never been to a Louisiana wildlife area before. I became even more convinced that the Mississippi River and all of its marsh and swamp ecosystems here in Louisiana are an extremely important resource that needs to be protected."



GRN Intern, Julie Slevin, at a BP accountability rally.

Another student Sarah Shoun was excited to be able to help protect the Gulf this semester. "The BP drilling disaster is very sad but I hope (with the GRN) that we can create an even greater impact with every coming year."

To learn about GRN internships, visit healthygulf.org or contact Dan Favre at dan@healthygulf.org.

Photo: GRN



Gulf Restoration Network

338 Baronne Street, Suite 200
New Orleans, LA 70112

PO Box 2245
New Orleans, LA 70176

Louisiana Office 504.525.1528
Florida Office 727.415.8805

www.healthygulf.org

United for a Healthy Gulf



Photo: Jeffrey Dubinsky

Be Green

Switch to the Gulf Currents e-newsletter

Sign up online

www.healthygulf.org/newsletters

Call 504.525.1528 x210

E-mail enewsletter@healthygulf.org

The Oil Is Still Here, And So Are We

Join the GRN and help us do more...

Your donation today will allow us to
continue the fight for the Gulf's
people and wildlife.

Sign up online

www.healthygulf.org/membership

Call 504.525.1528 x210

E-mail membership@healthygulf.org



GULF CURRENTS

Gulf Restoration Network's Quarterly Newsletter

Sneak Preview of Volume 15, Issue 3 for Fall 2011:



Sperm Whales in
the Gulf, page 7.

Homescreenings
Update, page 4.



Summer Outreach
Campaign Wraps
Up, page 4.

Pascagoula River
Victory,
page 3.

