



# GULF CURRENTS

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Spring 2011

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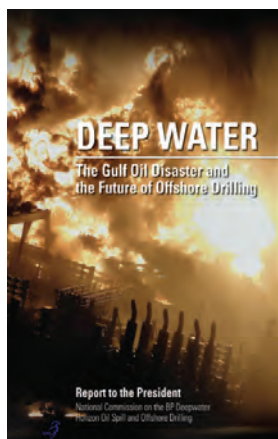
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## National Commission Finds Need for Offshore Drilling Reform



In January 2011, the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling issued its report *Deep Water: The Gulf Oil Disaster and the Future of Offshore Drilling*. The report is the culmination of the Commission's 8-month effort to learn essential lessons from the disaster that released millions of gallons of oil and toxic dispersant into the Gulf.

The Commission's findings highlight the need for changes in both the way the oil industry does business and the way federal agencies and the public scrutinize those activities. Specifically, the Commission found that, although the Macondo well blowout can be traced to a series of mistakes made by BP, Halliburton, and Transocean, these mistakes reveal systematic failures in the way the industry as a whole manages risks.

The Commission report includes numerous recommendations to address the causes and consequences of the BP Horizon disaster and make future drilling safer. Highlights include recommendations for:

- ◆ Congress to:
  - dedicate 80 percent of the Clean Water Act penalties assessed against BP to long-term restoration of the Gulf of Mexico;
  - establish a Regional Citizens' Advisory Council, funded by the oil industry with members representing citizen interests in the region (i.e. fishing, eco-tourism, conservationists) to provide long-term oversight and industry accountability; and
  - significantly increase the liability cap and financial responsibility requirements for offshore facilities.
- ◆ The federal government to:
  - engage a competent, independent engineering consultant to review existing regulations, then develop and implement regulations at least as rigorous as those in "peer" oil-producing countries like Canada and Norway;
  - cultivate and maintain government expertise on offshore drilling safety;
  - provide protection for whistleblowers who notify authorities of lapses in safety;
  - create and maintain readily deployable resources, including well-trained locals, for large scale-rescue, response, and containment after a disaster; and
  - strengthen the role of science and consult more experts and agencies at every stage of outer continental shelf oil and gas decisionmaking.



Photo: GRN



Photo: GRN

The challenge now is to ensure that the Commission recommendations are implemented by the federal government, Congress, and the oil industry in hopes of avoiding another drilling disaster. Take action at [www.bpdillingdisaster.org](http://www.bpdillingdisaster.org) to help push for implementation to protect and restore the Gulf of Mexico.

To read the Commission Report go to: <http://www.oilspillcommission.gov/final-report>



# A MESSAGE FROM THE VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

## Tackling Climate Change

Hank Caddell  
Vice President of the Board

**R**eportedly “climate change denial” is an article of faith among the vast majority of new leaders who swept into control of the U. S. House of Representatives last November. Rational discourse seems to have taken a holiday when it comes to this issue. The idea of man-induced climate change was decisively defeated at the polls, so it’s time to move on to other issues, right? Wrong.



Photo: Jeffrey Dubinsky

I believe this impasse can and must be broken if we can focus with humility on some of the most obvious evidence supporting manmade global warming.

I would invite all of our elected officials to access the growing scientific literature showing that the ice of Greenland and Antarctica is melting away at an extraordinary rate. It is not unreasonable to expect sea levels to rise as much as six feet before the end of the 21st century – not a happy prospect for us living along the Gulf Coast.

For many years the climate scientists have suggested that global warming will result in more intense and erratic climatic events. Over the past year, from massive floods in Australia and Pakistan to China’s worst drought in 100 years, this prediction seems to have been fulfilled.

Paradoxically, the north polar region is drastically warmer than usual while at the same time record cold air has been unleashed upon parts of the United States. The latest suggestion is that the “Arctic fence” affecting the circulation of cold air from that region has been disrupted.



Photo: GRN

We Americans are, and for many years have been, the energy hogs of the world. A vast, disproportionate share of the carbon dioxide loaded into our atmosphere has come from us. We bear a strong responsibility going forward if there is to be reasonable hope for our grandchildren and their children. We are bequeathing to them a deficit far more

serious than a purely financial one. We must not sacrifice them for lower electric rates in the short term.

After experiencing the nation’s first large-scale taste of climate chaos, we in the Gulf Coast have just been through another large scale environmental disaster with the BP oil disaster. We have learned first hand that when the environment fails the economy will fail. We must work hard to transcend politics and pull together.

*Hank Caddell is the Vice President of the GRN Board of Directors. He formerly served as Chief of the Environment Protection Division of the Alabama Attorney General’s Office, and he is a founder of the Alabama Coastal Heritage Trust.*

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## GRN Talks to Dr. Samantha Joye

**Dr. Samantha Joye is a biogeochemist with the University of Georgia and a leading researcher on the BP drilling disaster, focusing on the ultimate outcome and impacts of the 5 million barrels of oil released during the Macondo well blowout. GRN caught up with her this spring.**

**Gulf Restoration Network:** How would you characterize the Gulf of Mexico – I've heard people say it's an oily ecosystem.

*Samantha Joye: No, it's not an oily ecosystem. There are oil slicks in the Gulf from natural seeps, but they pale in comparison to something like the BP discharge. It's like comparing a mouse to an elephant.*

**GRN:** How are the areas that you study being impacted by the BP drilling disaster?

*SJ: Things are different, for sure. But it is very tough to say what the impacts are until you've studied them for years after the initial event. . . and I think there are probably impacts out there that we haven't even identified yet.*

**GRN:** How would you characterize the research environment right now in response to the BP drilling disaster?

*SJ: As of this minute, there doesn't appear to be a lot of follow-up research being done. I think it's critical to do long-term monitoring at a large number of sites, and I do worry that it's not going to happen because of the perception that everything is fine.*

**GRN:** How do you think that money from BP's fines and penalties could be spent to ensure a robust marine ecosystem?

*SJ: Using the fines and penalties to support research, I think, is a really good thing because we don't have enough data on how the Gulf of Mexico ticks as a natural hydrocarbon basin and we really need that information to understand the impacts of any future blowouts or oil spills. And we all know the reality of the situation is... it's very unlikely whether this is an "if" question, it's a "when" question. So we have to be better prepared next time and the only way is if we have better data on how the system works.*

Read the full interview at [www.healthygulf.org/blog](http://www.healthygulf.org/blog).



A sample of oil over sediment.

Photo: Samantha Joye

## MRGO Ecosystem Restoration Slowly Moves Forward

The Mississippi River Gulf Outlet shipping channel is widely believed to have contributed to decades of wetland loss and to the catastrophic flooding during Hurricane Katrina. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recently released a draft plan that marks a long-awaited step toward protecting communities along the MRGO and moving forward on crucial restoration projects for Orleans and St. Bernard Parishes.

The MRGO Must Go Coalition partnered with leading scientists and large landowners in St. Bernard Parish to submit detailed recommendations to the Corps for review and incorporation into its final plan to restore massive damage caused by the obsolete, federal navigation channel. The recommendations were based on two prior reports released by the Coalition and reviewed over several months by a group of coastal scientists with expertise in the MRGO study area.

Highlights of key recommendations from the MRGO Must Go Coalition include:

- Use the existing Violet canal corridor for the new Violet Diversion;
- Use Mississippi River sediment to rebuild wetlands, rather than dredging Lake Borgne;
- Develop a baseline and then a comprehensive restoration plan for the Central Wetlands;
- Restore regional oyster barrier reefs along the east and north sides of the Biloxi Marsh;
- Utilize external scientific input to finalize and implement the plan;
- Use natural gas as a clean and efficient energy source;
- Include a new channel constriction; and additional bankline restoration of the MRGO channel.

The recommendations are available in their entirety at [www.mrgomustgo.org](http://www.mrgomustgo.org).



Photo: GRN/SouthWings

The central wetlands, which once provided critical storm surge protection for St. Bernard Parish and the Lower 9th ward, are now open water due to the MRGO.



## Aveda Styles for Earth Month

Update your 'do this April, and stop by an Aveda salon to help GRN continue the fight for healthy water.



Photo: GRN

Walkers pose at the Biloxi, Mississippi Walk for Water event.

Since 2006, Aveda salons across the southeast and their distributors, The Salon People, Aveda Services Southeast, and The Neill Corporation have partnered with the GRN and raised over \$1.4 million to promote healthy waters throughout the Gulf. Salons host fashion shows, walks, concerts, and donation days to spread the word and raise funds. Find an Earth Month event near you by using our online event calendar, [www.healthygulf.org/aveda](http://www.healthygulf.org/aveda).

We're proud to partner with a company that makes protecting the environment look so good! The GRN extends a heartfelt thanks to all of the Aveda salon staff and their clients for everything they do to make Earth Month a success. Last year, their contributions enabled us to save over 22,000 linear feet of streams and 232 acres of wetlands from pollution by sewage and fertilizer runoff.

## 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](http://www.healthygulf.org/healthy-gulf-krewe), or contact Ayn Pivonka at [ayn@healthygulf.org](mailto:ayn@healthygulf.org) or 504-525-1528 ext 212.

## One-Year Memorial of BP's Drilling Disaster

After a full year, BP's crude and toxic dispersant continue to wreak havoc on the Gulf's environment and communities. Unfortunately, the Gulf still has not seen the meaningful action that is needed from Congress and the administration to ensure full and fair restoration.

You can help push the government to hold BP accountable by joining one of the many events, such as press conferences, rallies, benefit concerts, and Earth Day fairs, that are happening on and around April 20th. To find an event near you, check out [www.healthygulf.org/calendar](http://www.healthygulf.org/calendar).

## Give Your Support to the Gulf

Looking for a unique gift for a wedding, graduation, or other special event this spring? Do you want to make a statement in support of the Gulf?

In addition to taking action and making donations, another great way to support GRN's work is to purchase products that are contributing proceeds to GRN's work for a healthy Gulf of Mexico. See our website for a long list of music, jewelry, soap, books, art, t-shirts, hats, bags, and other unique items that make perfect gifts throughout the year. Please support them, and their donations to GRN will help us continue our work.

For more information, visit [www.healthygulf.org/support](http://www.healthygulf.org/support).



Photo: Defend New Orleans



Photo: Bird Project

## Go Cruising for the Coast

Cruising for the Coast Fundraiser  
Tuesday, April 26, 2011  
6 to 8 p.m.  
Gulfport, Mississippi

Get out on the water this spring at GRN's annual fundraising event, Cruising for the Coast, in Gulfport, MS.

Join us for an evening with updates and discussion about GRN's campaigns in Mississippi, enjoy delicious hors d'oeuvres and Lazy Magnolia beer, win unique raffle items, and watch the sun set over the Gulf.

Capt. Louis Skrmetta of Ship Island Excursions will host the annual event on one of his ferry boats. A third generation charter service operator, Capt. Louis faced impacts from the oil disaster along with many other coastal businesses—see the interview in GRN's video series Gulf Tides episode 5. ([www.youtube.com/healthygulf1](http://www.youtube.com/healthygulf1))

Funds raised from this event will support GRN's ongoing fight for the Gulf's people, places, and wildlife as we recover from the devastating impacts of the 2010 BP oil drilling disaster.

Bring your family and friends and enjoy a relaxed evening celebrating the beauty of the Gulf of Mexico.

Tickets start at \$50 per person/\$80 for two.

With questions or to reserve your place:

call 504.525.1528 x210

e-mail [membership@healthygulf.org](mailto:membership@healthygulf.org)

visit [www.healthygulf.org/msfundraiser](http://www.healthygulf.org/msfundraiser)

## Thank you, Nick!

Big thanks to Nick Poggioli who was GRN's Campus Organizer through the AmeriCorps VISTA Program at Tulane University for the past year. He marshalled GRN's student organizing program and helped with outreach efforts during a crazy year in the Gulf. Now, he's riding his bike across the country and taking photos all along the way. Keep up with Nick's adventures at [www.ninasbuick.com](http://www.ninasbuick.com).



Photo: Nick Poggioli

## Welcome New Staff

GRN is expanding! We extend a warm welcome to three new staff members.



Scott Eustis has come on board as our Coastal Wetlands Specialist. With an extensive background in wetlands and fisheries research, Scott will support GRN's Science and Water Policy team by analyzing wetlands restoration projects, providing scientific arguments against bad developments and wetlands destruction, and representing GRN in many public forums.

Leanne Sarco joins GRN as the new Campus Organizer, a position made possible through a partnership with Tulane University's AmeriCorps VISTA program. Leanne worked with volunteers on Grand Isle, LA over the last year to help respond to the BP oil drilling disaster. She will work to involve university students in GRN's work while building organizational capacity and visibility through volunteer trainings and outreach.



Photo: Jeffrey Dubinsky



Tarik Zawia is the Canvass Director for this summer's door-to-door outreach campaign. Last summer, after graduating from Cornell University, Tarik came to New Orleans to work as a Field Manager on our summer outreach campaign. Now he's back to head up the summer outreach

campaign that will engage tens of thousands of people in one-on-one conversations about the health of the Gulf while building GRN's membership base.



## Citizens say "NO" to Kemper Coal

Nestled in the rolling hills and rustic pine forests of central Mississippi just north of Meridian, Kemper County is a beautiful and peaceful place to call home. Unfortunately, all of that could change if Mississippi Power gets its way.

Several years ago, Mississippi Power proposed a plan to build a dirty, unnecessary, and expensive coal plant and lignite mine in Kemper County that will damage 2,300 acres of wetlands, disturb more than 29,500 feet of streams, and release toxic chemicals like mercury into our environment. And Mississippi Power wants to charge its ratepayers upwards of \$2.8 billion dollars for this dubious privilege!



Citizens gathered to protest the Kemper coal project.

Despite several outstanding legal and regulatory challenges to the proposal, the company has been moving full-speed ahead, clearing pine forest on the site, and even throwing a "groundbreaking ceremony" last December. To counter this shameless publicity stunt, GRN and our conservation partners at the Sierra Club co-sponsored an airplane banner over the event that read "Dirty Expensive Unnecessary."

More recently, over fifty concerned citizens and ratepayers gathered at the Harrison County Courthouse to say "NO" to Kemper coal and support the Sierra Club's legal challenge to the proposal. Although the court did not rule in the Sierra Club's favor, they plan to appeal the decision to the Mississippi Supreme Court, and we will continue to fight this dirty, expensive and unnecessary boondoggle.

Photo: GRN

## Creature Feature: Bryde's Whales

One of the larger creatures inhabiting the Gulf is the Bryde's whale (pronounced "broo-dus"). Although only medium-sized in whale terms, the Bryde's whale averages over 42 feet long from tip to tail and generally weighs around 26,400 pounds. Their bodies are dark grey with white underbellies, and they have long throat grooves running down their sides.

These majestic creatures cruise in tropical and sub-tropical waters, eating a wide array of fish and crustaceans, including mackerel, anchovies, shrimp, crab, and octopus. They are baleen whales, which means they use meshlike plates in their mouths to filter food from the sea. They're fast hunters that dart after their prey with mouth wide open, often finishing their rush with a spectacular jump out of the water.



Photo: Doug Perrine

Bryde's whales are excellent divers. They can dive for up to fifteen minutes at a time at depths of over a thousand feet. Usually solitary travelers,



Photo: Hail Sato

the whales will sometimes be found in small pods of two or three.

Since they are lacking in heavy layers of blubber, Bryde's whales went relatively unhunted until the 1950s. But as other, more valuable species of whales were depleted, hunters turned to Bryde's whales, taking them out in large numbers throughout the 1970s. Today Bryde's whales are now a protected species. The estimated current population of these sleek bohemths is somewhere between 40,000 and 80,000 worldwide, but only an estimated 40 Bryde's whales call the Gulf home.



## LEANing Forward in the Gulf



GRN is proud to highlight the work of a valuable partner and a leader in the struggle to protect the public from health risks stemming from BP's drilling disaster. The Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN) bridges the gap between citizens, business, and government to foster communication and develop solutions to environmental problems in Louisiana. LEAN has been out front since the start of the disaster demanding proper protection for spill clean-up workers, supplying respirators, and documenting BP's pollution in the Gulf.

LEAN's work has been inspiring and heartbreaking. In a report drafted by Wilma Subra, LEAN Technical Advisor, LEAN has shown us that Gulf coast residents have been contaminated by oil. The report compared the blood samples of Gulf residents to the blood of unexposed Americans and found that BP spill

cleanup workers and community members had shockingly high levels of toxic chemicals in their bodies. These toxic chemicals have been shown to cause harm in such high amounts. For these people and their families, the specific short-term and long-term impacts of having high amounts of hydrocarbons in their blood are currently unknown. The chemical experiment on the Gulf and its people continues, but we trust that LEAN will be there fighting for our communities.

## The 2011 House Budget Proposal, or, the Resolution to Dirty Our Waters



Photo: GRN

The recently released budget proposal from the U.S. House of Representatives deals a serious blow to our fight for a clean environment. This is a backdoor attack on the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and Wildlife Conservation Programs.

Not only does this proposal slash investment in clean energy, but it also leaves in place billions of dollars of outdated subsidies for oil companies. The proposal cuts \$454 million from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's budget, leaving our oceans more vulnerable to BP-like disasters. It also cuts \$341 million from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the group responsible for flood damage reduction and ecosystem restoration so badly needed in the Gulf.

We all understand that Congress faces a desperate need to get our nation's financial house in order. But attempting to do so through drastic cuts to programs that protect our environment undermines our future and the health of our Gulf.

## Walking to DC for the Gulf



Louisiana resident Cherri Foytlin, mother to six children and wife to displaced Deepwater oil rig worker Forest Foytlin, has had enough. As her family's livelihood is increasingly threatened by the fallout of the BP drilling disaster, Ms. Foytlin has run out of time and patience.

Beginning March 13, 2011, Ms. Foytlin embarked on a journey that she hopes will forever turn the tide of destruction left in the wake of the BP drilling disaster. Ms. Foytlin will walk 1,243 miles from New Orleans to Washington, D.C. En route she hopes to garner enough support to captivate the nation with her message of change. In our nation's capitol, Ms. Foytlin hopes to meet with President Obama, and formally invite him to return to the Gulf on April 20, 2011 to help memorialize the first year of the ongoing BP drilling disaster and commit his administration to fight for the future of the Gulf, our coast, and our communities.

Accompanying her will be singer and crawfisherman Drew Landry, who gained prominence when he serenaded the Oil Spill Commission with his powerful "BP Blues" (check out episode 11 of Gulf Tides on GRN's YouTube channel to see a clip: [www.youtube.com/healthygulf1](http://www.youtube.com/healthygulf1)), the Vanishing America Project of photographer Holt Webb, and the video team of Project Gulf Impact.

[www.theroadtowashington.com](http://www.theroadtowashington.com)



## Gulf Restoration Network

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Louisiana Office 504.525.1528  
Florida Office 727.560.2479

[www.healthygulf.org](http://www.healthygulf.org)

# United for a Healthy Gulf

## 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](http://www.healthygulf.org/membership)

**Call** 504.525.1528 x210

**E-mail** [membership@healthygulf.org](mailto:membership@healthygulf.org)

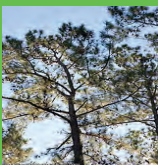


Photo: Jeffrey Dubinsky

## Be Green

**Switch to the Gulf Currents e-newsletter**

**Sign up online**

[www.healthygulf.org/newsletters](http://www.healthygulf.org/newsletters)

**Call** 504.525.1528 x210

**E-mail** [enewsletter@healthygulf.org](mailto:enewsletter@healthygulf.org)

## The fight for a healthy Gulf is at your door!

Once again this summer, GRN will be visiting neighborhoods throughout the Gulf as part of our Defend the Gulf outreach campaign! We will engage community members in thousands of one-on-one conversations, build public pressure to force BP and the federal government to fix the coast, and increase our member base of individuals dedicated to the natural resources of America's Gulf Coast.



Photo: Dubinsky Photography for GRN

This May through September, dedicated activists will be knocking on your door to ask you to support the fight for a healthy Gulf by signing up as a Gulf Sustainer with a monthly contribution. Your donations are crucial for securing a healthy Gulf for today's and tomorrow's generations.

It's membership support like yours that gives GRN the resources to tackle the most pressing threats to the Gulf right now, every day. So join the movement! The opportunity to be a part of protecting and restoring a healthy Gulf will soon be knocking at your door.