

**GULF
RESTORATION
NETWORK**

healthygulf.org

GULF CURRENTS

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VICTORY IN GULF STATE PARK!

Big news for the Gulf - in February 2016 a federal court barred the state of Alabama and federal trustees from using \$58.5 million of Early Natural Resource Damage funds from the BP oil disaster to construct a hotel and convention center in Alabama's Gulf State Park until further analysis is completed. **This is a big win for the Gulf and we have you to thank for this victory.**

Since the beginning, Gulf Restoration Network and our supporters have raised serious objections to the hotel and convention center. It's not only wildly inappropriate to use BP restoration dollars to construct a fancy meeting space - it's also a project that damages our environment and limits public access to the beach.

In October 2014, GRN filed suit against the Federal Natural Resource Damage Assessment Trustees - the body tasked with restoring, replacing, and rehabilitating impacted resources and later included the State of Alabama.

"THIS IS A BIG WIN FOR THE GULF AND WE HAVE YOU TO THANK FOR THIS VICTORY."

From the beginning, our Trustees should have known better. **The law is clear: restoration dollars should be spent to restore the resources damaged by BP**, and not on projects that harm our natural environment. If the Trustees had complied with the law and considered alternative ways to spend the \$58.5 million, it would have been obvious that this money should go towards real restoration.

And the judge agreed with us! He ruled that the government violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by failing to evaluate reasonable restoration alternatives. The decision prevents the State of Alabama from using any of the \$58.5 million in early restoration dollars to fund the hotel and convention center until a proper alternatives analysis is completed.

This is a victory for all. This important decision affirms that our leaders cannot merely give lip service to the law. Had this project been approved, it would have set a terrible precedent - not only for the Gulf Coast, but also for any restoration efforts following similar disasters. Our Trustees must protect our



Beachgoers at the Gulf State Park beach. Photo credit: Flickr user Outdoor Alabama.

natural resources and do their best in the public's interest - not mispend precious restoration dollars. At its core, the proposed convention center and hotel undermined the public's trust.

This decision helps us set the standard as we move into the next phase of post-BP disaster restoration. We are hopeful this victory will encourage our decision-makers to ensure that future funding flows to the best and most deserving restoration projects in the Gulf.



Gulf State Park pier. Photo credit: Flickr user Outdoor Alabama.

TAKING A STAND FOR OUR FUTURE



Aaron Viles, Board Member.

Last year was the hottest year on record, topping the previous record set in 2014. Across the world, communities are already feeling the impacts of global climate change. From sea level rise and extreme storms, to coastal erosion, to frequent spills and accidents, **the Gulf of Mexico and the people that live here are on the frontline of the impacts from the oil and gas industry.**

In his recent encyclical, Pope Francis stated that “[t]he climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all.” Not only is climate a common good, but any chance we have to prevent catastrophic

climate change will require a common effort on the part of every citizen of the world.

This reality was reflected in Paris last year, as government representatives and tens of thousands of regular citizens gathered together at COP21 to craft a unified approach to reducing carbon pollution.

Although the agreement that came out of COP21 wasn’t perfect (largely relying on voluntary measures), it represents a significant step forward in the fight to protect humanity. Now comes the hard part: taking the actions necessary to make this agreement a reality.

"THE GULF OF MEXICO AND THE PEOPLE THAT LIVE HERE ARE ON THE FRONTLINE OF THE IMPACTS FROM THE OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY."

Here in the Gulf, that means we can’t just keep drilling ourselves into oblivion. The offshore reserves in the Gulf are the 8th largest source of potential carbon pollution in the world.

Recognizing this threat, Gulf Restoration Network recently joined hundreds of other organizations and tens of thousands of people in calling on the Obama administration to halt new offshore lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico.

For too long, the Gulf South’s economic fate has been tied to the booms and busts of the oil and gas industry. When times are good, the industry provides jobs, but also extracts enormous costs from our environment and communities. When times are bad, the industry doesn’t hesitate to lay off thousands upon thousands of people and abandon whole communities.

It’s time to break the cycle. Ending new offshore lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico is a first step in tackling climate change and making the transition to a more stable, sustainable and equitable economy for our region.



Left: People walk in front of the Mercedes Benz Superdome to protest leasing in the Gulf of Mexico. Right: A sheen can be seen in the waters in Plaquemines Parish. Photo Credits: GRN.

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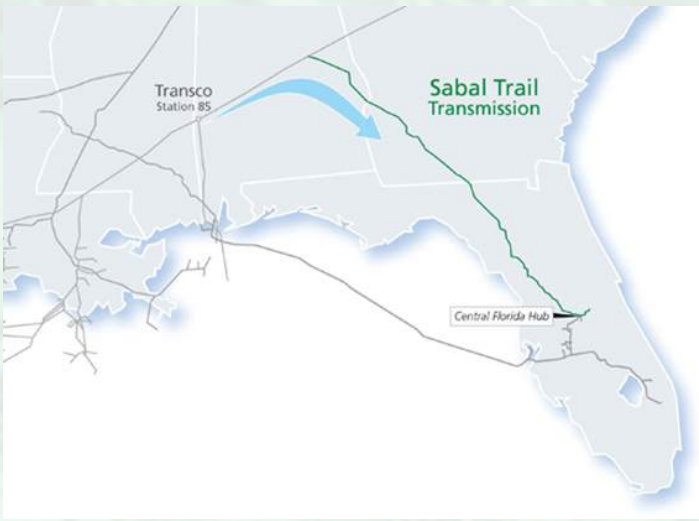
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THE SUNSHINE STATE STANDS UP TO SABAL TRAIL



The proposed route for the Sabal Trail Pipeline. Photo Credit: Flickr user John S. Quarterman.

The Sabal Trail pipeline is a 515-mile fracked gas pipeline that is proposed to cut through Alabama, Georgia and Florida.

This pipeline is slated to slice through hundreds of miles of wetlands and to cross sinkhole-prone areas of Florida, including directly through the Floridian Aquifer, which provides 60% of Florida's drinking water.

Despite these risks, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has approved this proposal. Frankly, we are not surprised. FERC has approved 99% of permit requests since 1986 – Sabal Trail is another dangerous project that is getting a rubber stamp.

In Florida, landowners' basic property rights are in jeopardy of being taken through eminent domain, and they are fighting back. Standing with our local partners, Gulf Restoration Network filed objections against the Sabal Trail Pipeline on December 11th, 2015.

Additionally, five new natural gas export facilities have been proposed along Florida's coastlines, making many residents wonder if these pipelines have any real domestic need or public benefit. These export facilities are just a few of the over 40 projects across the nation that have started their approval process with FERC.

"THIS PIPELINE IS SLATED TO SLICE THROUGH HUNDREDS OF MILES OF WETLANDS AND TO CROSS SINKHOLE-PRONE AREAS OF FLORIDA."

Several of the 40 proposed projects are in places of high risk – such as the five natural gas export facilities planned on a ship channel near the Rio Grande in Texas. This site is next to one of the most successful restoration projects in modern US history, popular tourist beaches and a space rocket landing pad.

At a time when our coast is facing the destructive impacts of climate change and sea-level rise, the last thing we need is the expansion of dangerous oil and gas industry projects in our coastal floodplains.

With local and national partners, community members, and key stakeholders, we are building opposition to ensure that FERC and the Army Corps of Engineers do their jobs of regulating the natural gas industry in the Gulf.

Join us in protecting our wetlands, communities and climate by getting involved at the local level.



The Santa Fe River near High Springs Florida. Photo Credit: Ebyabe - Own work, CC BY-SA 2.5, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=8731251>.

OUT & ABOUT WITH GRN



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Clockwise from top-left:

The women of GRN on International Women's Day. GRN's banner displayed in front of Mondo for the annual fundraiser. GRN's Scott Eustis taking photos during a flyover. A bald eagle in flight in Jesuit Bend. Fort Massachusetts on Ship Island. Staff and attendees enjoying dinner for the annual fundraiser at Mondo. A vibrant camellia. A Voodoo Music + Arts Experience festival goer holds up a sign with the hashtag #NoCoastNoMusic. GRN staff and friend hold up their findings during the Cruising for the Coast Event. A ship selfie of the Captain Pete. (Center) The GRN staff went to Saraland, AL north of Mobile for their annual staff retreat.

All photos except the bottom left are courtesy of GRN. Bottom left photo is courtesy of Anthony Schoenecker.

AVEDA FOR CLEAN WATER



A young customer prepares to get her hair done for Aveda Earth Month.
Photo Credit: GRN.

Access to clean water is a human right. Unfortunately, not everyone in the United States has that access. From Flint, Michigan to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to the deep waters of the Gulf, pollution and toxins threaten the health of our families, animals and environment.

Aveda sees the importance of clean water not only in the services they provide - cuts, spa treatments, hair and makeup products - but in the communities they serve. As a result, for the past 10 years, Aveda has committed to prioritizing and funding clean water initiatives around the world.

GRN is proud to be an Aveda Earth Month partner by joining with salons across the Gulf (plus Arkansas, Oklahoma and Tennessee) who raise money to support GRN's clean water work. **Check out your local Aveda salon to see what they have planned and help support Earth Month 2016!**



Photo Credit: FWS.gov.

NEW FACES

We are very excited to introduce two new members of GRN's board: Ackie Adams and Martha Collins!

Ackie is a long-time GRN supporter and has spent years helping GRN educate and organize Aveda salons during Earth Month. Martha 'Marti' Collins brings over a decade of environmental organizing, litigating and lobbying experience to our board. **We know that these two passionate leaders will strengthen our work and can't wait for them to get started!**

We are also pleased to announce a few staff updates: Megan Meyer, a committed volunteer, joined our development team as Membership Coordinator; Johanna de Graffenreid is our new Coastal Campaign Organizer, and Shona Clarkson, formerly Development and Communications Coordinator, transitioned to a new role as GRN's Communication Specialist.



GRN's newest board members Ackie Adams and Martha Collins. The current Gulf Restoration Network staff: Ackie Adams and GRN staff Photo Credit: GRN. Photo of Martha Collins courtesy of Martha Collins.

VICTORIES FOR PASCAGOULA

For months, GRN has been working to stop the Big Cedar Creek Lake projects in George County, Mississippi. **This project includes a plan to dam major tributaries of the Pascagoula and destroy 2,800 acres of wetlands – all in an effort to build unnecessary fake lakes.**

We had two significant victories in our work to stop this project. First, the Environmental Protection Agency Region 4 Administrator commented that the fake lakes project would have “substantial and unacceptable adverse impacts” to the waters, wetlands and natural resources adjacent to, and downstream from, Big and Little Cedar Creeks. GRN and many of our partners also submitted comments opposing the lakes.

Then, in January of 2016, efforts by Pascagoula River advocates, including the Coast Sierra Club, peeled away Jackson County’s official project sponsorship.



Cypress trees in the swamp. Photo Credit: Flickr user alicespix.

The permit for the Fake Lake was initially sponsored by George and Jackson Counties. However, the Jackson County Supervisors voted to withdraw support, leaving George County as the lone project sponsor.

Volatile public meetings last December about the lakes, plus persistent work by the Sierra Club, and installation of two new Jackson County Supervisors in the last election all changed the support picture. The Mobile Army Corps of Engineers District hasn’t made a permit decision, but it must recognize that this project has serious problems.

GRN will continue working to stop the Fake Lakes project – stay engaged for opportunities to take action.

A FUTURE FOR GULF FISH



Fishermen bringing aboard a haul of red snapper. Photo Credit: Flickr user Louisiana Sea Grant College Program Louisiana State University.

decision makers abandon the red snapper conservation plan and weaken protections. Red snapper have a 50-year lifespan and are at peak spawning at 10 to 15 years. **Despite the prevalence of young fish, these fish populations have years, if not decades, of rebuilding left before they will reach sustainable levels.**

Working with national partners, GRN supports a big-picture approach to fisheries management, including safeguarding bait fish that recreational and commercial fish depend on, reducing wasteful bycatch, protecting habitat, a science-based evaluation of new fisheries and gear, and ecosystem based management plans. Keep an eye out for opportunities to take action and support Gulf Fish Forever!

2016 marks the 40th anniversary of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the primary federal law governing ocean fish. **Our Gulf Fish Forever Campaign is working to make this a banner year for the sustainable management of fish populations.**

To date, the Act has allowed fish populations, including those here in the Gulf like red snapper and red grouper, to be saved from collapse, and to come back strong. Some see the progress over the past 40 years as an opportunity to create abundant, sustainable fisheries in the Gulf for generations to come. Others see it as an invitation to overfish again. The case of red snapper is an example.

After a near collapse in 2007, strong conservation efforts resulted in the resurgence of a lot of young red snapper in the Gulf. Because of this success, some are demanding that



A goliath grouper swims among a school of fish. Photo Credit: Flickr user FWC Fish and Wildlife Research Institute.

GRN KEEPS OUR EYES ON THE GULF

At least once a month, staff from GRN are either up in the air, or out in a boat, monitoring the state of the Gulf's waters and the impact that industry has in our beautiful region.

Almost every time we fly, we find new leaks and spills.

Last year, we took our friends from the band The Suffers on a flyover of Cox Bay, Louisiana. As we crossed the bay, we saw a rainbow sheen flowing from a rusted, unprotected facility and into the marshes on both sides of the canal. The spill was large enough that members of The Suffers, Jon and Adam, were able to snap pics with their phones!

When we spot signs of a spill or a leak, we immediately report them to the Coast Guard. Upon discovering this particular spill, we photographed and researched the location for a responsible party. BOPCO, a Louisiana oil company, is culpable for the spill in Cox Bay.

Our monitoring work is critical - many assume that the government is adequately monitoring the oil and gas industry, and government expects the industry to report on itself.



GRN's Scott Eustis shares a flyover with members of The Suffers and SouthWings pilot Emmet Bartholomew. Photo Credit: GRN.



A BOPCO rig leaks into the water. Photo Credit: GRN.

The fact is: an industry left to self-report is an industry that under-reports or doesn't report. Trusting the oil and gas industry to care for our coast means that thousands of rust-bucket rigs and pitted platforms will dot the coastal marshes and that spills will go unreported and never cleaned up.

Two months later, we took another flight over Cox Bay and saw clean water and marshes surrounded with boom. Because of our hard work, and commitment to a clean and healthy Gulf, this oil spill was stopped.

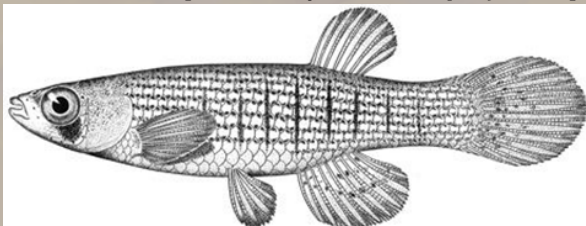
Whatever happens, GRN will be watching with the help of Southwings pilots, the support of Gulf Coast artists like The Suffers, and members like you!

WHAT DO SMALL FISH SAY ABOUT BIG RIVERS?

The large coastal plain rivers and wetlands in Louisiana and Mississippi contain an abundance of fish species. The Pearl and Pascagoula are home to hundreds of common fish, like catfish and bass, and numerous rare species like the threatened Gulf sturgeon.

All fish are important players in these river ecosystems. Despite their small size, they can tell important stories.

The starhead topminnow (*fundulus dispar*) is frequently confused with other similar species. However, genetic research indicates that the Pearl River is the only river along the Gulf coast that supports populations of this fish. They are two inches long with up-turned mouths, iridescent sides, vertical bars, olive spots and a teardrop mark below each eye.



An illustration of the starhead topminnow. Photo credit: National Museum of Natural History Collections.

From sampling data after 1960, we see the abundance of this tiny fish is declining. When rivers are dammed or disconnected from their floodplains these fish lose essential habitat.

GRN opposes plans for additional damming that would destroy wetlands in the Pearl and Pascagoula systems, in part, so the stories

of floodplain dependent species like this fish aren't about loss.



Gulf Restoration Network

330 Carondelet Street, 3rd Floor
New Orleans, LA 70130

PO Box 2245
New Orleans, LA 70176

Louisiana Office 504.525.1528
Mississippi Office 601.954.7236
Texas Office 512.675.0076

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Facebook.com/healthygulf

UNITED FOR A HEALTHY GULF

FUNDRAISING BY THE NUMBERS

In the last year, you have helped us to:

- Protect **1,972** acres of wetlands from destruction
- Inspire **16,213** individual calls/petitions to protect the Gulf
- Report & document **15** oil spills & leaks across the Gulf
- Open **1** new office in Austin, TX

These numbers are HUGE and your continued support builds on this momentum. **Consider renewing your membership as a Gulf Sustainer and your \$20 a month will protect clean water, animals and communities year round.**

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Senior Policy Analyst, Jordan Macha, opened our Austin office last year. Photo Credit: GRN.

Gulf Restoration Network, founded in 1994, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to uniting and empowering people to protect and restore the natural resources of the Gulf of Mexico region.