



GULF CURRENTS

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Summer 2011

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The Great Flood of 2011

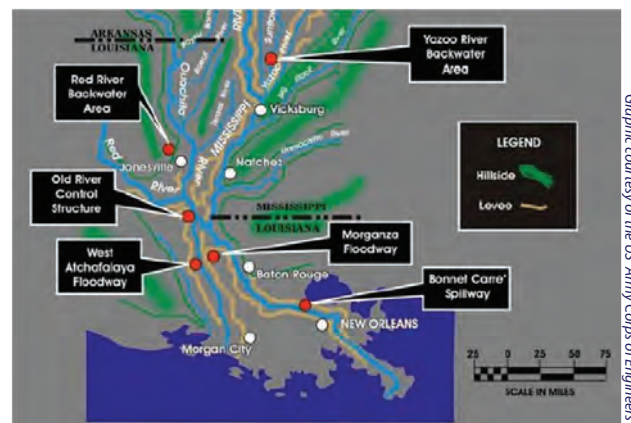


Photo: Gulf Restoration Network

Not long after marking one year of BP's on-going oil disaster, Gulf Restoration Network, like much of the nation, began nervously watching the massive amounts of flood water coming down the Mississippi River. Like the oil disaster, GRN has been on the ground and in the air observing the impacts of the flood, the response of the Corps, and, regrettably, the missed opportunities to rebuild the ailing Mississippi River Delta. While the most dire predictions of community flooding have been thankfully avoided, many people have been severely impacted by the flood. Families and businesses that were between the levees and the river, as well as those within the Morganza and Bird's Point floodways have experienced devastating damage, and our hearts go out to them.

After the great flood of 1927, the Corps effectively walled off the entire Mississippi River, which has protected most communities from subsequent floods. During high water events, there are several designated "floodways" that can be opened to remove some pressure on the river levees, and this year the Corps opened up three: the Bird's Point floodway (Missouri), the Morganza floodway (Louisiana), and the Bonnet Carré spillway that drains into Lake Pontchartrain (Louisiana). These floodways diverted millions of gallons of Mississippi River water, some of which inundated farmland, homes, and oil and gas facilities.

The flood system performed generally as expected, but while walling off the Mississippi has protected many communities in the short term, it has also reduced the Mississippi River Delta's long-term sustainability. Before levees, sediment was regularly washed over the river banks where it built land. Now, as a football field worth of wetlands erodes every hour, massive amounts of this valuable sediment is being carried to the deep waters of the Gulf. A huge opportunity is literally flowing by. It is vital that when the next big flood comes (and it will), we have sediment-transporting river diversions designed into the levee system, which would once again allow the lifeblood of the Mississippi River Delta to flow into the marsh where it belongs.



Graphic courtesy of the US Army Corps of Engineers



Photo: Gulf Restoration Network

For more on river diversions, see "Sediment Diversions" on page 7.

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Gulf Future Coalition

Cynthia Sarthou
Executive Director

In March 2011, one hundred nineteen people representing 53 organizations created *Gulf Future - A Unified Action Plan for a Healthy Gulf*, a plan of action for Gulf Coast recovery following the BP oil drilling disaster.

Some of the specific demands Gulf Future calls for are (1) passage of legislation to bring 80% of the Clean Water Act Fines to the Gulf; (2) implementation of the recommendations of the President's Oil Spill Commission, including the establishment of a Gulf of Mexico Regional Citizens Advisory Council; (3) addressing the public health impacts of the oil disaster; and (4) ensuring that both the Natural Resource Damage Assessment and the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force created by President Obama are comprehensive and effective.



Photo: Jeffrey Dubinsky



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Gulf Future advocates celebrated a victory on May 6, 2011, when, in response to calls for meaningful public engagement, the Task Force announced plans to create a Citizen Advisory Committee to inform implementation of their Gulf restoration strategy. This is distinct from the Gulf of Mexico Regional Citizens Advisory Council that would work to improve oil drilling safety that Congress must establish.

In late May, members of Gulf Future descended on Washington, DC to press lawmakers to move forward with legislation responding to the nation's largest oil disaster. Gulf Future advocates stressed the need for Congress to pass legislation:

- Ensuring that Clean Water Act fines levied against BP and other responsible parties are used to pay for ecosystem restoration in the Gulf; and
- Creating a Gulf of Mexico Regional Citizens Advisory Council to give local, impacted Gulf communities input on oil and gas activity.



For more information about *Gulf Future - A Unified Action Plan for a Healthy Gulf* visit www.gulffuture.org

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UPDATES ON THE BP OIL DRILLING DISASTER

Victories for the Gulf

Citizen Advisory Committee on Restoration

On May 26, 2011, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson announced that the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force will formally establish a Citizen Advisory Committee to help guide restoration efforts in the aftermath of the BP disaster. The Committee will serve as a source of independent advice for the Task Force, a multi-agency, federal and state group created by Presidential order "to effectively address the damage caused by the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, address the longstanding ecological decline, and begin moving toward a more resilient Gulf Coast ecosystem."

This committee will consist of 25 community members from the 5 Gulf states, and will likely represent different sectors of our Gulf community: tribal groups, academics, community-based environmental justice organizations, tourism and recreational business owners, commercial fishing associations, and conservation groups. This degree of formalized citizen participation is wonderful news, and achieves a key objective of the Gulf Future Action Plan.



Citizens assemble the Gulf Future Action Plan for Coastal Restoration at Weeks Bay, AL this spring.

It is important to note that this is not the Gulf of Mexico Regional Citizens' Advisory Council (RCAC) that would enable local, impacted communities to play an oversight role to ensure the safety of the oil and gas industry. GRN and our partners continue to fight for an RCAC to help prevent future oil disasters.

\$1 Billion for Early Restoration

BP has agreed to a down payment of \$1 billion of potential Clean Water Act fines for early restoration. These funds will jumpstart restoration efforts while the potentially protracted legal battle over the total fines plays out. Per the agreement, signed with the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) trustees, including all 5 Gulf states, BP will fund projects that:

- Restore natural resources injured as a result of the Deepwater Horizon disaster,
- Restore natural resources of the same type, quality, and comparable value to compensate for losses,
- Are not inconsistent with long-term restoration needs, and
- Are feasible and cost-effective.

GRN will continue to work hard to ensure these dollars are allocated to science-based ecosystem restoration through a transparent process. To submit your ideas for restoration projects to the NRDA trustees, visit:

www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/restoration/give-us-your-ideas/

On-Going Impacts from BP's Oil and Toxic Dispersants



Photo: Gulf Restoration Network

Citing an ongoing criminal investigation into the BP disaster, the U.S. government is keeping a tight lid on its probe into hundreds of unexplained dolphin deaths along the Gulf Coast. According to NOAA, between November, 2010 and May, 2011, there have been at least 238 confirmed cetacean strandings, of which 96% were dead. Samples and specimens are turned over to the government under a controversial protocol that shuts out and angers many marine experts. This poor creature was discovered and reported by GRN on a field monitoring trip near Fourchon Beach in Louisiana on May 17, 2011.



Photos: Gulf Restoration Network

It has been over 14 months since the Deepwater Horizon exploded and sank in the Gulf, yet much oil remains in coastal areas. As the temperature heats up along the coast, once buried and submerged oil is resurfacing in impacted areas already declared "NFT" or "No Further Treatment" by BP and the Unified Command. In other areas, BP contractors are using controversial techniques such as marsh raking to remove huge chunks of delicate marsh grass to get at the buried oil. The photos above were taken on a GRN-sponsored media tour of Bay Jimmy, Louisiana on April 18, 2011.

Scavenger Hunt for a Healthy Gulf

On April 17, GRN in partnership with NOLA Brewing presented the Easter Keg Hunt, an event in which teams of more than 300 participants sought out clues on foot and bicycle while enjoying the sounds and sights of a beautiful afternoon in Mid-City New Orleans. Following the scavenger hunt, the after-party was filled with NOLA Brewing beer, prizes for best costumes and team names, live music, food from local food trucks, and lots of Easter-themed fun.

Thanks to NOLA Brewing, Mid-City businesses, and all participants for supporting a healthy Gulf!



Bunny-themed costumes abound at the Easter Keg Hunt. Congratulations to winners, Stephanie Short and Derek Lintern (at right).



Photos: Gulf Restoration Network

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

Cruising for the Coast

The evening of April 26 was a bit windy in Gulfport, Mississippi; but it didn't stop GRN and supporters from enjoying the annual fundraiser, *Cruising for the Coast*, on the Capt. Pete. More than 100 attendees feasted on food donated from an array of local restaurants, entered the raffle to win items ranging from a painted mailbox to tar-paper brooches to live oak plants, and enjoyed live music. The rest of the cruise was spent taking in the Gulf on the breezy bow, joined by a couple of dolphins who swam alongside the party.

Thanks to all of our supporters who attended and contributed!



Photos: Roy Nichols

Aveda Catwalks for Water

Aveda salons throughout the south catwalked and rocked for clean water this past April. Our Earth Month partnership with Aveda included over 200 salons, many who planned concerts, fashion shows, cut-a-thons, and walks to raise money for GRN and raise awareness of the threats to our waterways and the Gulf of Mexico. More than half of all streams and rivers in the United States drain into the Gulf of Mexico. By ensuring that steps are taken to clean up polluted waters, we can sustain the ecologically vibrant resources that support habitat, wildlife, and communities.

GRN thanks all the participating salons and staff for their hard work and dedication to protecting the health of the Gulf for future generations.



Photo: Jeffrey Dubinsky

GRN staff member, Natasha Noordhoff, is crowned queen of Waterball 2011, an Earth Month fundraiser held at The Varsity in Baton Rouge.



Photo: Kimberly James

Aveda Services Southeast held a Fashion Show for the Earth in Atlanta, GA featuring local designers to raise awareness about clean water.



Photo: Constantine Photo

Models pose at the Catwalk for Water fashion show at The Pearl in San Antonio. Local designers were challenged to create outfits portraying the theme of the night: Water.

Bonnarooooooo!

For the fourth consecutive year, Gulf Restoration Network went to the Bonnaroo Music Festival to engage concert-goers in our efforts to restore and protect the Gulf. Thousands of people took action to support the Gulf in the aftermath of the BP disaster, and our team of advocates had a great time defending the Gulf at Planet Roo, Bonnaroo's green pavilion.



Photo: Gulf Restoration Network

Showing off the GRN photo gallery and asking a festival-goer to sign a petition.

Participate in Public Health

The National Institute of Health (NIH), a federal program, has embarked on a very important health study called the GuLF STUDY: Gulf Long-Term Follow-Up Study. The NIH will be following people who worked to clean up BP's oil and tracking their health for the next five years.

This is the first time in the United States that health impacts will be studied on oil spill clean-up workers in spite of the numerous oil spills that have occurred on our shores. GRN is very proud to be on the Citizen Advisory Group, a group of local stakeholders that are advising the medical researchers.

It is critical that this study be conducted with transparency so Gulf Coast residents can trust the process, and the study needs participants. If you worked on the clean-up directly, or supported it indirectly, and are over 21, you may qualify to participate.

For more information, visit www.nihgulfstudy.org.

Update: Florida Near-Shore Oil Drilling Ban

Conservation leaders in Florida have been working tirelessly to ensure that Florida's coasts are protected from oil and gas drilling. Recently in order to accomplish this, Floridians have been working to pass a statewide citizen-led ballot initiative to ban near-shore drilling. Collecting the 650,000 signatures to accomplish this is difficult, but it can be done when undertaken by the coordinated efforts of citizen groups in well-planned organizing campaigns. Unfortunately, the legislature has passed a new law that severely undermines our efforts.

The Voter Elections Bill HB 1355 decreases the ability for citizens to petition for a constitutional amendment by cutting the time to collect petitions in half. Previously, a valid petition was good for four years. Now, that time has

been cut to two years.

Our work has been made much more difficult, but it is not impossible. The petitions collected so far constitute a great foundation for our campaign, even if they will now expire before 2013. It is almost a certainty that the legislature will revive the near shore drilling efforts in 2012 and beyond. However, with the right funding and hard work, the citizens of Florida can succeed in securing strong protections for our coasts.

Remember, Florida has enjoyed bipartisan administrative and legislative support for coastal protection from oil and gas drilling for over 25 years. We have a legacy of protection and success to build upon and keep up the fight, despite the legislature's recent efforts to make our mountain steeper to climb.

Gulf Restoration Network has played a strong role in lobbying, education, and media to keep the public engaged on this issue. Thanks to all who work to protect our coasts, and let's continue to be vigilant.



Photo: Gulf Restoration Network

The Florida dream: clean beaches with no oil rigs in sight.

Creature Feature: Louisiana Pancake Batfish

Far less appetizing than its name would imply, the Louisiana Pancake Batfish was first discovered in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. It's flat round body resembles a pancake, while its spikes and bulging eyes make for a shockingly hideous appearance. Small enough to fit in the palm of a human hand, these bottom-dwellers live some 1500 feet below sea level.

Last year the Pancake Batfish made its way to the International Institute of Species Exploration's list of top 10 new species.

Its popularity amongst scientists is largely attributed to the odd manner in which they move along the ocean floor. Using their thick, arm-like fins, Pancake Batfish "hop" on the sea bed, often resembling a crawling bat.



Photo courtesy of LSU

While other batfish can be found along the Atlantic Coast, the Louisiana Pancake Batfish has only been found in the Gulf of Mexico. Unfortunately, the species' entire known range lies within the area affected by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. As such, Pancake Batfish are first and foremost threatened by large undersea oil plumes. But even if batfish don't directly encounter these oil plumes, their existence is still a concern. Pancake Batfish feed on small invertebrates which are expected to be hit hardest by the oil and dispersant mix used by BP.

This potential disruption of the food chain, in conjunction with the threat from oil plumes, make the newly discovered Louisiana Pancake Batfish one of the most vulnerable species to the effects of the BP oil disaster.

Sediment Diversions: Putting the Mississippi River Back to Work for Coastal Louisiana

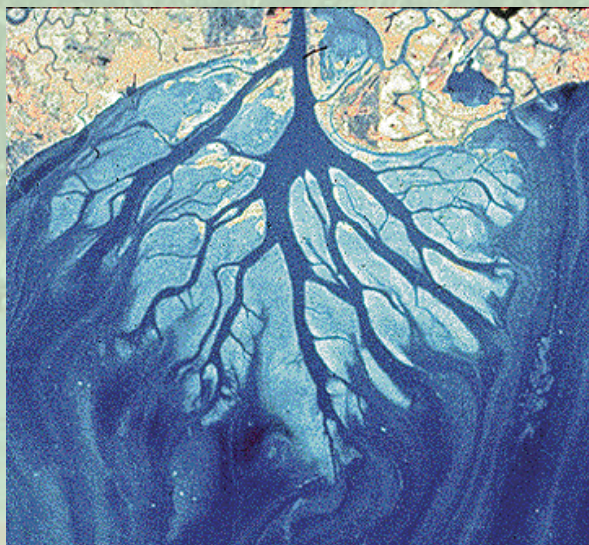
The Flood of 1927 spurred a federal flood control policy that has since cut off the Mississippi River from the wetlands and denied the Mississippi River Delta vital sediment needed to maintain land in the estuary against the forces of erosion, subsidence, and sea-level rise.

Since that flood, several gates, like the Bonnet Carre or Caernarvon, have allowed the river back into the delta, but never with the intention of building land. We await the construction of a genuine sediment diversion that will put the river back to work creating wetlands. The first is to be Myrtle Grove, situated on a subsided agricultural plot in lower Plaquemines on the West Bank of the river, emptying into the lower Barataria Basin.

This structure will be the first to be designed to carry sand and mud into Barataria Bay. This sediment will fill in subsided marsh back to an elevation where the land can sustain itself over the next century of subsidence and sea level rise.

In addition to building land itself, the fresh water and sediment from Myrtle Grove will also sustain many of the shorter-term marsh creation projects in the Bayou Dupont area. Studies have shown that sediment input from the river strengthens marsh roots, increases the marsh's ability to sequester carbon, builds land vertically to counter subsidence, and helps the marsh hold fast against powerful surges of water from hurricanes.

GRN is working to ensure that Myrtle Grove is being designed to bring the ecological functions of the river back into Barataria Basin. To restore the Gulf Coast and the Mississippi River Delta, Myrtle Grove must be the first of many sediment diversions.



Landsat image courtesy of US Geological Survey

This satellite image of the Atchafalaya River Delta demonstrates the land-building potential of waterways flowing into the Gulf. We must re-create opportunities for the Mississippi River to deposit sediment and freshwater in ailing wetlands.

What's That Smell?

For years now, the city of Hattiesburg, Mississippi has been plagued by a distinctive sewage odor during the warmer months. The stench is coming from the aging South Lagoon that can't handle a growing population and untreated waste from the USA Yeast factory. In the last five years alone, the Hattiesburg South Lagoon has violated the Clean Water Act 10 times by dumping poorly treated waste into the Leaf River. The people of Hattiesburg, and those who live downriver, deserve better.

It's time for the state and federal government to make sure that Hattiesburg is not violating clean water laws, and for the city government to take concrete action towards a brighter, cleaner future by investing in new, modern sewage treatment infrastructure.



Satellite imagery of the South Lagoon shows the enormous size and its proximity to the Leaf River. A recent GRN canoe trip uncovered poorly treated sewage from the lagoon being released into the river.

Image courtesy of Google Maps.

Hattiesburg is a great city with a lot of potential for growth, but the stench coming from this outdated and overworked sewage lagoon is a major barrier to its progress. Tourists and prospective students visiting the city are understandably repulsed by the odor. The ineffective sewage lagoon is releasing pollution into the Leaf River, a popular destination for families who enjoy fishing, canoeing, and other outdoor recreation.



GRN Mississippi Organizer, Raleigh Hoke, talks with the Mayor of Hattiesburg about the campaign to clean up the lagoons.

The city, state, and federal environmental agencies have spent far too much time and money chasing down false solutions. The bottomline: EPA and MS Dept. of Environmental Quality need to start enforcing clean water laws, and it's time for elected officials to show real leadership by investing in new, modern sewage treatment plants that boost growth in an environmentally sustainable manner, not hinder it.



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 727.560.2479

www.healthygulf.org

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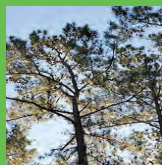


Photo: Jeffrey Dubinsky

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Knocking for a Healthy Gulf



Photo: Dubinsky Photography for GRN

This summer, GRN is taking the fight for a healthy Gulf to your doorstep with dozens of dedicated activists visiting neighborhoods throughout the region. In May alone, we had over 10,000 one-on-one conversations with Gulf citizens and engaged almost 600 new members to build support for using BP's fines for restoring the Gulf and establishing a Gulf of Mexico Regional Citizens Advisory Council to help prevent future oil disasters.

If you haven't already spoken with a GRN advocate, keep an eye out for the opportunity to be part of protecting and restoring a healthy Gulf to come knocking at your door.