



GULF CURRENTS

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HURRICANE ISAAC AFTERMATH

Hurricane Isaac turned out to be another serious blow to communities that have already suffered greatly over the past 7 years in Louisiana and Mississippi. Our thoughts go out to those who continue to rebuild from the flooding and damage from storm surge, rain, and wind. The GRN blog has information for those working towards recovery and suggestions for those who would like to donate to organizations doing hands-on recovery work, along with our extensive documentation and field monitoring of Isaac's impacts.

Sadly, the storm once again demonstrated that the continued loss of wetlands in coastal Louisiana leaves coastal communities ever more vulnerable (see page 2 for more). Hurricane Isaac also once again highlighted the Gulf's unfortunate position as America's Energy Sacrifice Zone.

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Damaged oil infrastructure near Myrtle Grove, LA leaking oil into the water.



Runoff from the flooded Kinder Morgan coal terminal pollutes surrounding waters, wetlands, and farmlands.

VICTORY! THE RESTORE ACT PASSES

In an unusual bipartisan victory this July, the RESTORE Act, which dedicates BP's Clean Water Act fines to Gulf restoration, was included in the Transportation Bill that passed Congress, and was signed by the President! GRN, our allies in Congress, and other environmental groups worked hard to make this a reality, but this wouldn't have been possible without you. Thank you for all your phone calls, emails, donations, and all you've done to prioritize the Gulf.



Bayou Dupont marsh creation project. Efforts such as these can be scaled up once RESTORE Act resources are directed to Gulf coast restoration efforts.

This is a giant step for the health of the Gulf, but like many environmental victories, this is not the end of the journey. The success of this legislation will take time and effort to ensure, and we need your support as we continue working hard to:

- Hold BP accountable. The legislation directs BP's eventual Clean Water Act fines to the Gulf, but there is a wide range of possible fines. We've got to keep the pressure on so BP pays the maximum penalty under the law; and,

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A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Cynthia Sarthou, GRN Executive Director

Hurricane Isaac turned out to be another assault on the already battered communities of Louisiana and Mississippi. Although only a category 1 hurricane when it landed, Isaac packed quite a wallop. Many residents of coastal communities, such as Braithwaite, Lafitte, Houma and many more—already battered by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the BP drilling disaster—have suffered severe flooding and the loss of life and property.

Sadly what the storm made very clear is that the continuing loss of wetlands in Coastal Louisiana renders coastal communities ever more vulnerable.

I heard a lot after the storm about the need to push for new federally-built levees for vulnerable communities. As much as coastal communities may want a levee, the reality is that even if authorized by Congress it would be 20-40 years before they would be built. Contrary to much of what you hear, this is not simply due to a cumbersome planning or environmental review process. It results instead from a forty-year backlog in Army Corps of Engineers' civil works projects – levees, river locks and navigation channels – and decreasing agency budgets.

"...EVEN IF AUTHORIZED BY CONGRESS IT WOULD BE 20-40 YEARS BEFORE [THE LEVEES] WOULD BE BUILT."

The short term (20 years or so) protection of vulnerable communities lies in the strategic restoration of coastal wetlands and the implementation of strategies - such as elevation of houses, comprehensive storm water management, green infrastructure, stringent building codes and the like - to reduce risk and increase community resilience.



The community of Braithwaite, LA experienced devastating flooding from Hurricane Isaac's storm surge.

As disturbing as this may seem, Congress' passage of the RESTORE Act provides Gulf communities with a ray of hope, as we are now ensured a percentage of Clean Water Act fines assessed against BP for much needed restoration. This victory was due in large part to the thousands of people across the Gulf who responded to action alerts and others who weighed in to support Gulf restoration.

United for a Healthy Gulf,

Cynthia Sarthou
Executive Director

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COASTAL LINES OF DEFENSE

South Louisiana is faced with the ever increasing challenge of storms flooding our communities. In some coastal areas, even minor tropical storm systems result in major flooding problems that are expected to get worse over time due to sea-level rise and coastal erosion. In New Orleans, thunderstorms can give rise to flood waters thanks, in large part, to an antiquated and insufficient drainage system. As part of GRN's coastal lines of defense efforts, we are educating the public and leadership on ways to better live with water.



Street flooding outside GRN's office in New Orleans during a summer thunderstorm.

In August, GRN and our partner Bayou Interfaith Shared Community Organizing (BISCO) hosted a forum in Terrebonne Parish to discuss the state government's dedication of significant future funding for flood-resistant development measures such as elevation of homes, flood-proofing, voluntary acquisitions or buy outs of flood-prone areas, and community relocation. We look

forward to hosting more of these discussions.



A rain garden in the Lower 9th Ward.

spaces that also store water. These steps can prevent flooding by slowing drainage, safely storing and filtering water, thus minimizing the burden on the city's system.

Louisiana is soliciting input on how to best use its resources to support coastal communities. Projects continue in New Orleans that will spend hundreds of millions on stormwater drainage projects. It is high time for all of us to figure out the best ways to live with water.



Forum in Terrebonne Parish to discuss flood-resistant development.

WEEKI WACHEE SPRINGS: A FLORIDA ICON

Weeki Wachee Spring in Hernando County, Florida, has been known since the 1940's for its mermaid shows. The spring discharges fresh water to the Weeki Wachee River, which becomes brackish as it flows through mangrove swamps, hardwood hammocks and salt marshes prior to reaching the Gulf.

As with most Florida springs, Weeki Wachee is at serious risk from the cumulative effects of reduced rainfall, over-pumping and nitrate pollution from agricultural use and residential fertilizer. In addition to the chaotic effects of climate change, a 2004 study determined that land use changes over the past 100 years have significantly decreased summer rainfall and increased temperatures in Florida. When wetlands are converted to agricultural and urban use, we lose the natural surface storage areas for the water, the study reported.

The harmful growth of the native algae, *Lyngbya wollei*, and low levels of dissolved oxygen are signals of high nitrate levels in the aquifer - toxic to people and animals. A 1,500 percent increase in algae in Weeki Wachee Spring required intense restoration by the Southwest Florida Water Management District, requiring establishment of a state park in 2008.

Restoring wetlands, reducing water consumption, setting restorative minimum spring flows, and implementing a recovery strategy are all needed now to restore Weeki Wachi and other springs and keep freshwater flowing to the Gulf.



The beautiful Weeki Wachee Spring in Hernando County, FL.

SAVE THE DATE!

Defend our Coast, Defend our Culture fall fundraiser
Sunday, Oct 14, 2012

6-8pm at Chef Susan Spicer's Lakeview restaurant, MONDO
Join us for an evening of great discussion, food and music to benefit the GRN

Tickets start at \$100 person/\$180 for two
Contact Natasha Noordhoff at [504.525.1528 x210](tel:504.525.1528) or at natasha@healthygulf.org for more information.



VOODOO EXPERIENCE

This October, GRN will once again be at the Voodoo Experience music festival in New Orleans to educate festival-goers and the bands playing about protecting and restoring the Gulf. Come check out some great acts like Neil Young and Crazy Horse, Green Day, and lots of New Orleans favorites, then make sure to stop by and say hi at GRN's coastal lines of defense demonstration site.



MARSH DOG AND GRN PHOTO CONTEST

GRN teamed up with Marsh Dog, the maker of wild nutria dog biscuits, to get photos of dogs and their owners enjoying the Gulf. For more, visit www.marshdog.com.



Photo winners Marty Miller and Rocket on poodle patrol.

HANDS ACROSS THE SAND

This August, GRN joined the world-wide Hands Across the Sand movement to protect our coasts from oil drilling by organizing events in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Florida.



Over 350 people came out to say no to oil drilling and yes to clean energy and clean water at St. Pete Beach, Florida.

VICTORY! THE RESTORE ACT PASSES (CONTINUED)

- Ensure effective restoration. As the dollars start to flow, it will be critical that Gulf Coast states make wise decisions about restoration spending. We'll be watching to make sure the money is well-spent.

So, take a moment to relish this hard-fought victory. Together, we pushed DC to support the Gulf! That's impressive, and that's why your efforts are so important to us.



Rebuilding a barrier island, one of our coastal lines of defense, to protect communities and wetlands. RESTORE Act dollars can fund more projects like this.

PADDLING THE HEART OF AMERICA



Photo courtesy of Daniel Alvarez

Daniel Alvarez is kayaking 4,000 miles across the heart of America, from the northernmost point of Minnesota to the southernmost point of Florida. Along the way, he's celebrating the work of organizations that help keep wilderness adventures possible and raising awareness of environmental issues. Gulf Restoration Network is excited to welcome him to the Gulf! Follow his incredible journey at www.predictablylost.com.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: ROBERT WIYGUL

Robert Wiygul, a former GRN Board Member and currently an active supporter, deservedly won the Sierra Club's prestigious William Douglas Award, which recognizes individuals who have made outstanding use of the legal and judicial process to achieve environmental goals.

Robert is a talented environmental lawyer who has represented GRN on a number of cases, including most recently our efforts to stop oil and gas drilling off Mississippi's coast and a successful case to halt construction of a coal-fired power plant in Kemper County. He has also been instrumental in helping environmental groups and the community at large navigate the complex legal responses to the BP oil disaster.

Beyond the law, Robert has a deep understanding of organizing, public education, and strategic campaigns to protect our natural resources, and his guidance over the years has been an incredible gift to GRN and the entire environmental movement in the South. Many congratulations on this incredibly warranted recognition.



Robert Wiygul at the Gulf Gathering in 2011.

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A SMALLER 2012 DEAD ZONE DOES NOT MEAN LESS POLLUTION

As she does every year, Dr. Nancy Rabalais at the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium (LUMCON) measured the Dead Zone in July, and the small 2,889 mi² Zone wasn't really a surprise. Due to the massive droughts in the Midwest, nitrogen and phosphorous pollution loads that fuel the Dead Zone were low due to the low flow into the River. Sufficient action to reduce Dead Zone pollution has still not been taken.

"SUFFICIENT ACTION TO REDUCE DEAD ZONE POLLUTION HAS STILL NOT BEEN TAKEN."

Tropical weather in the Gulf can also temporarily reduce the Dead Zone because it mixes up the water. So, there are three ways to address the Gulf Dead Zone: 1) hope for more droughts in the Midwest, 2) hope for more hurricanes in the Gulf, or 3) actually clean up the pollution that drives the Dead Zone. You know which one folks at GRN pick.

A big question is, "what's going to happen next year?" Will the pollution that didn't wash into the Mississippi this year make its way into the Gulf in the spring, causing the formation of the Dead Zone earlier? Or will it cause an even bigger Dead Zone next year? Only time will tell, but in the meantime, GRN will continue to push EPA and the states to take decisive action to reduce Dead Zone-causing pollution.



Photo courtesy of Nancy Rabalais

CREATURE FEATURE: SWALLOW-TAILED KITE



A swallow-tailed kite in flight.
Photo by Bill Stripling

The Swallow-tailed Kite, *Elanoides forficatus*, is a species that seeks out the largest blocks of connected forested wetlands in coastal Louisiana and Mississippi. It illustrates the need for places that are "big, wild and connected", a catch-phrase for conservation biologists like E.O. Wilson.

Relatively un-fragmented wetland forests in Louisiana's

Atchafalaya Basin, and the swamps on public lands in Mississippi's lower Pearl and Pascagoula Rivers offer large habitat blocks that attract and sustain these birds during the breeding season. According to raptor

researcher and Orleans Audubon Society president, Jennifer Coulson, conservationists believe that contiguous, 100,000-acre tracts of forested wetlands are needed to sustain healthy sub-populations.

These are large birds with a four foot wingspan, striking black and white plumage and a deeply forked tail. They catch insects on the wing and eat lizards and snakes. Researchers believe that between 800 and 2,500 pairs of these birds breed in their U.S. range, and so a sighting is considered a rare event by bird watchers.



Photo by Bill Stripling

CRACKS IN THE FACADE: A MISSISSIPPI UPDATE



Mississippi gopher frog: One of the proposed sewage treatment plants would be located next to the only known wild breeding site for the Mississippi gopher frog. Photo courtesy of the USFWS.

Seven years after Hurricane Katrina’s landfall, Mississippi has made great strides in rebuilding and improving the health of its coast and communities, but Hurricane Isaac’s unwelcome visit was a vivid reminder of the continuing challenges. We can’t control when a hurricane takes aim, but some of the big issues facing the coast are a legacy of former Governor Haley Barbour’s policies that are now being widely questioned.

Governor Barbour and his friends moved aggressively after Katrina to funnel hundreds of millions of dollars in federal recovery funds meant for low-income housing into a massive expansion of the Port of Gulfport, and a slew of unneeded water and sewage

infrastructure in the coastal counties. Since then, GRN and our allies have been fighting these projects due to concerns over their impacts on wetlands, water quality, and endangered species.

Recently, a port official revealed that the central rationale for the expansion – that an expanded Panama Canal would bring new business to the port in the form of “mega-ships” – just isn’t true. The Port’s channel can’t handle the big ships. In the case of the sewage and water projects, federal officials are now auditing the entire plan amidst concerns over corruption and the aggressive use of eminent domain. Criminal investigations could follow.

With these projects (and others like the Kemper County coal plant and the effort to open up state waters to offshore gas drilling), cracks are starting to show in the elaborate façade that Governor Barbour helped build. GRN and our allies will keep on working to reveal the reality and ensure the health of Mississippi’s environment.



Proposed expansion plans for Port of Gulfport. Photo from U.S. Army Corps.

HURRICANE ISAAC AFTERMATH (CONTINUED)

(continued from Page 1)

Hurricane Isaac showed that much of BP’s oil remains in the soils and just below the waters of the Gulf, even in many areas the Coast Guard has begun to let BP off the hook for cleanup.

Beyond BP, there were 450 reported spills and incidents, from flooded-out coal terminals to leaking refineries and abandoned infrastructure spilling oil in wetlands, that showed industry was clearly not ready for this storm.

One of the best steps to help increase hurricane preparedness in the oil and gas industry is the creation of a Gulf of Mexico Regional Citizens’ Advisory Council to give local, impacted communities a voice in industry oversight.

GRN wishes a swift recovery to everyone impacted, and we’ll continue working to help restore a resilient Gulf.



Oil and sheen are back in Bay Batiste, LA. September 10th

GULF RESTORATION NETWORK



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UNITED FOR A HEALTHY GULF

HURRICANE ISAAC BATTERS GULF COAST



**GRN FIELD MONITORING
UNCOVERS IMPACTS,
MORE INFORMATION INSIDE**

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.