



2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

Looking like a NASA closeup of Jupiter, this USGS image reveals sediment in the Gulf of Mexico.



OUR NEXT YEAR

AT THE INTERSECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND JUSTICE

The Gulf South is on the frontlines of climate change and environmental injustice. That is why when we set out to develop this strategic plan we knew it would need to focus on justice for Gulf communities and the ecosystems that sustain them.

Healthy Gulf has been working with communities along the Gulf for 32 years. In that time it has become painfully clear that the same forces which are willing to sacrifice our natural resources for profit are equally willing to force communities of color to pay the price of that environmental degradation. The fight for healthy wetlands, and a healthy coast, is inseparable from the fight for healthier communities. That is why Healthy Gulf has made a commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. We have taken a hard look at our internal operations and taken the necessary steps to be able to attract and retain staff and board members that reflect the rich diversity of the Gulf region. This work is far from over; in many ways, we are just beginning to focus our programmatic work at the intersection the environment and equity.

We have been fulfilling our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, by ensuring that our new strategic plans filter our internal operations and external programmatic work through a lens of equity and inclusion. The goal of our strategic planning process was not just to further our efforts to fight pollution and protect wetlands, but the creation of a plan that both addresses internal organizational barriers to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice and centers our critical work for clean water, healthy wetlands, and a thriving marine ecosystem at the intersection of environmental and justice issues. With this goal in mind, Healthy Gulf partnered with Converge for Change, whose mission is to accelerate the creation of a radically just new world where communities of color thrive, to support us as we navigated the planning process.

As a necessary first step, we engaged a diverse cross-section of Healthy Gulf's staff, board, allies, partners, and funders to better understand our strengths, weaknesses, and unique position in the environmental and justice landscapes. The responses were eye-opening and gave us a more complete perspective on the opportunities and challenges that we must address in both our work and the funding landscape. The input from these interviews was then used to inform our strategic priorities for the year to come.

We believe that our 2026 Healthy Gulf Strategic Plan embeds the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in a comprehensive way. As we implement the plan, we are confident that we can grow our board, staff, and membership in ways that better reflect the Gulf's diversity, effectively position our work at the intersection of environmental and justice issues in the Gulf of Mexico region, and be better allies to those fighting at the frontlines of injustice.

MISSION

Healthy Gulf's purpose is to collaborate with and serve communities who love the Gulf of Mexico by providing the research, communications, and coalition-building tools needed to reverse the long pattern of over exploitation of the Gulf's natural resources.



VISION

A healthy Gulf of Mexico returned to its former splendor that supports a thriving ecosystem that includes the Gulf's natural resources and, just as importantly, the people, communities, and cultures that depend on those resources.

OUR VISION FOR IMPACT:

By 2027 as a result of this strategic plan Healthy Gulf will have:

- Operationalized our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of our work
- Supported a just transition by reducing the impacts of the petrochemical industry, pollution, and wetlands loss, protecting our coastal communities, and providing a positive vision for how Gulf communities equitably adapt to and fight climate change
- Increased and strengthened Gulf-wide partnerships, particularly with coalitions working on Environmental and Climate Justice
- Diversified funding, ensuring support for existing priorities and responding to emerging threats

HEALTHY GULF CORE VALUES

The following core beliefs inspire and guide the Healthy Gulf's work, its operation and how staff and board deal with people with whom we interact.

Environmental Health

We believe that supporting the environmental health and ecosystem richness of the Gulf region is necessary to secure quality of life, sense of place, economic vitality, and social justice within all Gulf communities.

Inclusion/Inclusiveness

We believe in the importance of embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion in deep and transformative ways. We aspire to:

- create a welcoming and inclusive work environment;
- be inclusive in the way we engage with partners, affected communities, and the public;
- model our commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity in all that we do.

Dignity and Respect

We believe that Healthy Gulf staff, board, partners, members, supporters, and people, in general, have the right to be treated with dignity and to be respected as a whole person.

Independence

We believe that ensuring that we remain a strong, independent organization is essential to our ability to speak truth to power, stand up for underrepresented people and communities, and otherwise address major environmental problems in our region. Healthy Gulf does not accept donations from major industry or polluters, does not agree to accept donations intended to limit the scope or nature of our work, and otherwise defends peoples' fundamental right to advocate and lobby for their constituents and causes.

Transparency

We believe that we have a responsibility to our members, donors, and partners to be a transparent organization. We will provide relevant and reliable information about our partnerships, our financial position, and our performance as an organization, while honoring legally protected information.

Self-determination

We believe that it is important that communities and individuals have the power to make decisions, have the right to choose what they will do and with whom they will do it, and otherwise be in control of their community. Healthy Gulf recognizes that self-determination results from greater political and economic equity in all communities, so we stand in solidarity with broader movements that are fighting for equality.

Responsiveness

We believe in the importance of responding to urgent issues that arise often unexpectedly, that threaten our environment and communities. As a small, regional organization, we have the ability to act swiftly and decisively in handling an urgent issue.

Safety and Health

We believe that the health and safety of our staff, board, colleagues, and communities is important. We aspire to a workplace where safety and health are valued along with productivity, quality, and pay. We believe that Gulf communities deserve a healthy environment to live, work, and recreate.

Collaboration

We believe in the value of working with others and achieving together what may not be possible alone. We aspire to bring a collaborative spirit and strategy to all that we do as individuals and as an organization, learning from the insights and leadership of others, and openly sharing what others may be able to learn from us.

GLOSSARY OF KEY WORDS

Just Transition

A vision-led, unifying, and place-based set of principles, processes, and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy. A just transition must be just and equitable. It must redress past harms and create new relationships of power for the future. It moves us away from extractive systems of production, consumption, and political oppression, and towards resilient, regenerative, and equitable economies.

Equity

The fair treatment, access to resources, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation and access to resources for historically marginalized groups.

Ally

An ally is a person who seeks to take action in solidarity with a marginalized group. Allyship is the active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating institutionalized societal power structures. Allyship is a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, transparency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people. Therefore, allyship is not self-defined—our work and our efforts must be recognized by the people we seek to ally ourselves with.

Environmental Racism

Whether by conscious design or institutional neglect, actions and decisions that result in the disproportionate exposure of people of color to environmental hazards.

Climate Justice

A form of environmental justice, climate justice is the fair treatment of all people and the freedom from discrimination in the creation of policies and projects that address climate change as well as the systems that create climate change and perpetuate discrimination. Climate justice links human rights and development to achieve a community-centered approach, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable people and ensuring that the burdens and benefits of climate change and its impacts are shared equitably and fairly.

Environmental Justice

All people and communities have the right to equal environmental protection under the law, and the right to live, work, and play in communities that are safe, healthy, and free of life-threatening conditions. Environmental justice requires fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, and income with respect to the development, adoption, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.



**“ We must honor the rights of nature.
We must advance human rights for all.
We must transform from a disposable,
individual society into one that sees our
collective, long term humanity.”**

-Colette Pichon Battle, Healthy Gulf Board



A JUST TRANSITION

Healthy Gulf's programs will focus on a just transition that moves us away from extractive systems of energy production, consumption, and political oppression, and towards resilient, regenerative and equitable economies.

1 Hold the Oil Industry Accountable

Monitor, document, resist, and reduce the impacts of the petrochemical industry

Monitor and report oil industry impacts

Use our experience as a watchdog for the Gulf to hold the oil and gas industry accountable by monitoring petrochemical activity using aerial flyovers, boat trips, and mapping technology to expose the damage the industry has done and continues to do to the Gulf region.

Protect Gulf communities

Advocate for stronger safeguards that protect workers, Gulf communities, and the environment from harm at the hand of the oil and gas industry.

Fight for a Green New Deal

Act as an anchor organization for Gulf South for a Green New Deal, a multi-state effort to address the impact of the global climate crisis on some of the most unique frontline communities in the US.

Protect the Eastern Gulf Drilling Moratorium

Work with partners to ensure the Eastern Gulf of Mexico remains free from the destructive impacts of oil and gas exploration and development.

2 Protect Clean Water

Monitor, communicate and influence water policies and permits to prevent or reduce pollution

Reduce the nitrogen and phosphorus pollution flowing into the Gulf that cause the Gulf Dead Zone and toxic algae outbreaks

Promote strategies that will result in less pollution in rivers that flow into the Gulf, particularly nitrogen and phosphorus pollution. Communicate to our members and decision-makers the causes and action needed to reduce major pollution events, like the Gulf Dead Zone and toxic algae outbreaks.

Defend federal laws that protect Clean Water

Participate in national coalitions to resist federal and state attacks on the Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and other environmental laws.

Reduce pollution

Advocate to reduce pollution in major rivers and streams that flow into the Gulf of Mexico.



3 Advance Climate Justice

Support coastal communities as they adapt to climate change

Advocate for engagement of Gulf communities in decision-making processes affecting them

Actively support robust community engagement in equitable resilience/adaptation planning and decision-making.

Protect Gulf communities' natural flood protection

Advocate for protection and restoration of wetlands and floodplains and use of natural buffers and green infrastructure to reduce flood risk and increase community resilience in all Gulf states.

Help communities resist unsustainable development

Work with communities to resist development projects that would increase flooding, reduce storm protection, and put communities at risk.

Ensure Gulf communities' infrastructure is stronger and more resilient

Advocate for the use of available funds for infrastructure projects needed to protect people, improve public health, and make communities more resilient.

4 Conserve Gulf Resources

Protect and restore the fish, oysters, and other marine resources that sustain our coastal communities

Conserve Gulf marine life

Collaborate with partners and coalitions to defend and expand key federal protections for marine species.

Protect clean, flowing water

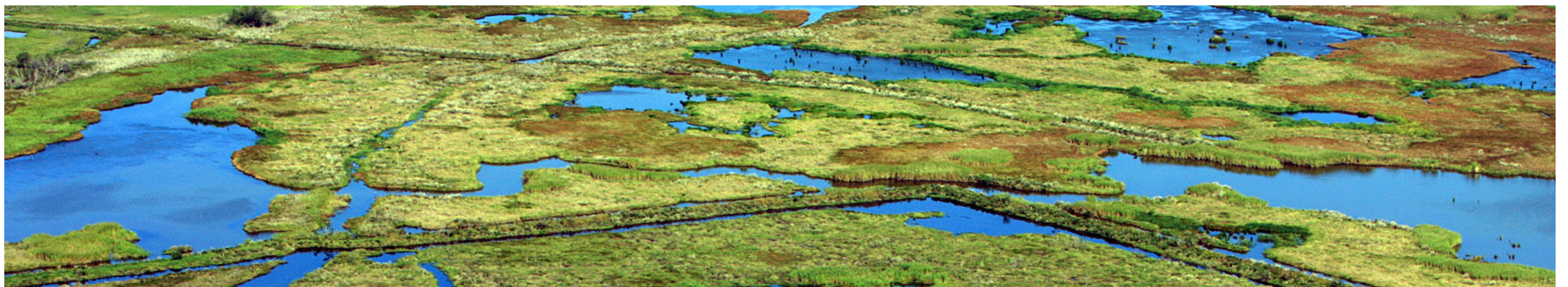
Advocate to reduce pollution and maintain sustainable freshwaters flows in major rivers and streams that flow into the Gulf of Mexico.

Restore Gulf oyster reefs

Press decision makers to increase protections that maintain and expand oyster reefs and production.

5 Respond to Emerging Threats

Healthy Gulf will remain nimble, flexible, and able to respond to emerging environmental threats to Gulf of Mexico resources. We will collaborate with local communities as we assess our role in the rapid response to emerging threats.



A photograph of a bird perched on a thin wire against a bright blue sky filled with large, fluffy white clouds. The bird is positioned in the center of the wire, which runs diagonally across the frame. The overall scene is serene and evokes a sense of balance and resilience.

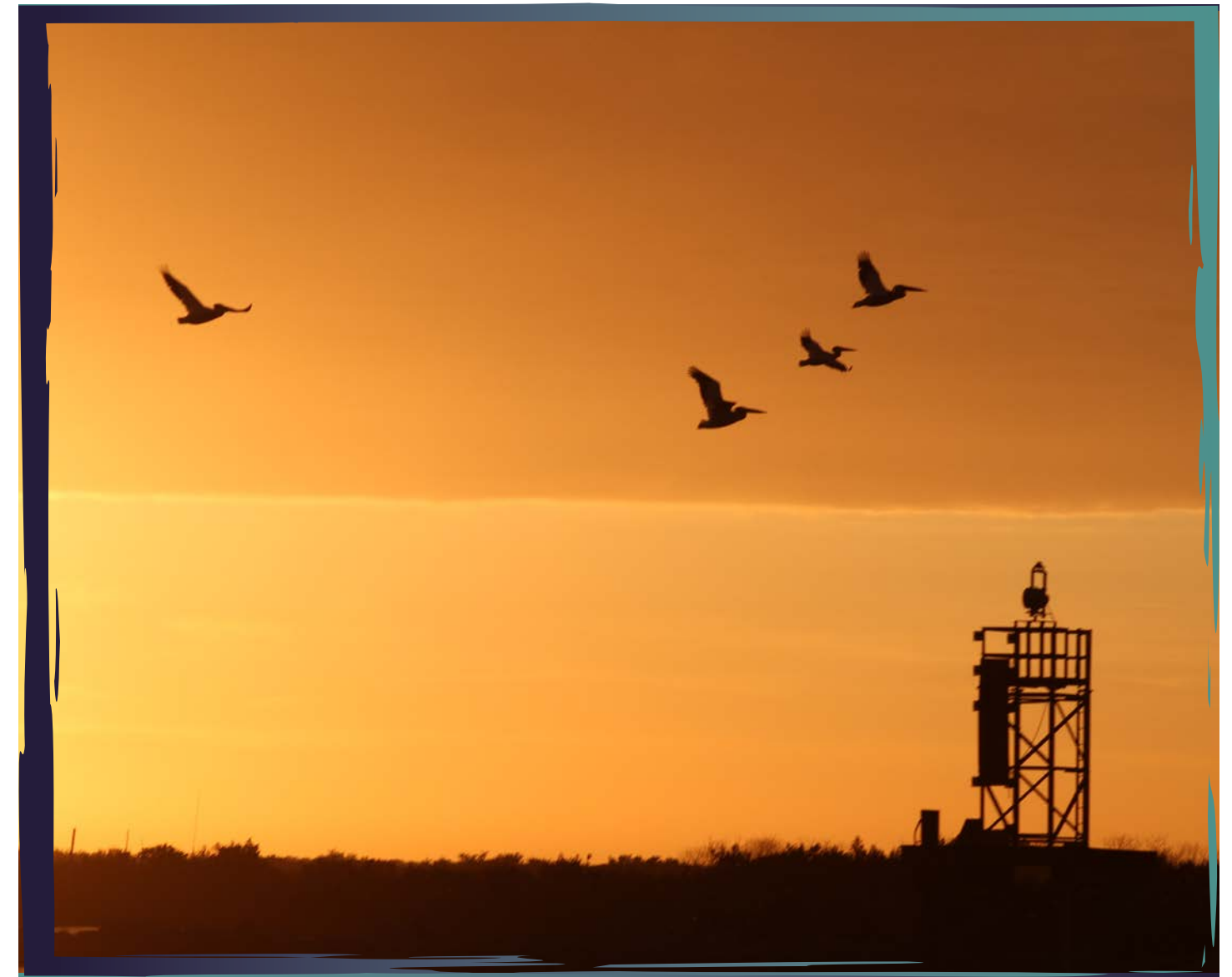
**“If there is no struggle there is no progress...
Power concedes nothing without a demand.
It never did and it never will.”**

-Frederick Douglass

WHO WE ASPIRE TO BE

We Strive to be a Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Organization

- Expand our member base to reflect the demographics of Gulf Coast states to learn and grow with the communities that we serve by developing and implementing creative outreach and engagement strategies to attract diverse audiences.
- Use our power analysis to guide all partnerships, collaborations, campaigns, policies, and programs, ensuring active participation and support for campaign approaches that partners see as supportive, not extractive.
- Implement a board recruiting process that increases the size of the board and ensures that the board members reflect the demographic diversity of Gulf states.
- Continually refine our staff recruitment, hiring, and onboarding processes, and implement policies, programs, and training needed to make Healthy Gulf a more welcoming and inclusive workplace that attracts and retains diverse talent.
- Develop internal decision-making processes that require consideration of equity in financial decisions, including procurement.



We Aim to Strengthen Our Financial Health

- Expand the base of financial support needed to achieve the goals we outline in this strategic plan through partnerships with new and existing members, donors, foundations, and businesses.
- Grow the organizational culture of philanthropy so board members and staff feel empowered to build relationships with new and existing donors, explore innovative partnerships, and find new revenue streams.

HOW WE WORK

1 Monitor, Research, and Analyze

Our Science and Policy Team uses research and organizational expertise to identify and assess the threats that Gulf communities face. We analyze the impacts on communities and natural resources to develop strategies for tackling those threats.

- Work with impacted communities to research and document the intersection of chemical risk, water, and land impacts with human health, emphasizing impacts to frontline communities.
- Review and comment on permits for wetland destruction, emphasizing environmental justice and frontline communities and ensuring that impacts to coastal and floodplain wetlands are avoided or minimized.
- Utilize Healthy Gulf's expertise in water law and policy to ensure state water quality standards and water discharge permits are protective of the health, livelihoods, and culture of Gulf Coast communities.
- Identify and promote strategies to reduce pollution in the Gulf of Mexico and major rivers systems that flow into it.
- Monitor and report known and potential polluters.



2 Influence Government Decisions

We hold industry accountable, using the results of our research and analysis of proposed decisions to highlight community concerns and ensure that decision-makers and industry fully comply with applicable laws and regulations.

- Advocate at the local, state, and federal level for the rigorous review of projects required by law, fully considering all negative as well as positive impacts to local communities and environments.
- Ensure that in permitting decisions, decision-makers require full compliance with all applicable laws and regulations, and avoid and minimize negative impacts.
- Use strategic litigation to ensure laws and regulations are fully implemented and enforced.
- Work to strengthen and resist efforts to roll back laws and regulations intended to protect communities and the environment.



HOW WE WORK



3 Support Community Organizing and Mobilization

We use outreach, technical assistance, and organizing strategies to support frontline communities and build the capacity of those communities to address threats to their health and environment.

- Advocate for and actively support robust community engagement in planning and decision-making at the local, state, and federal level on all decisions affecting a community.
- Sponsor workshops and trainings to build the power of frontline communities to voice their concerns and influence decision-makers.
- Work in coalition with impacted communities and organizations to uplift community concerns about the impact of petrochemical and other industrial development on human and environmental health and push for solutions.

4 Utilize Strategic Communication and Collaboration

We collaborate with groups and communities across the Gulf to raise awareness of environmental pollution and elevate the stories of frontline communities to build a base of engaged leaders needed to resist environmental degradation and injustice.

- Continually assess communications tools and best practices to build and share power.
- Train and elevate spokespeople and community storytellers from frontline communities, and collaborate with our allies to address environmental and climate justice, uplifting the stories of frontline communities.
- Pilot new and creative outreach strategies focused on engaging diverse audiences, supporters, and members.
- Strengthen existing strategic partnerships and build new ones with chefs, fishers, musicians, and others dependent on the natural resources of the Gulf for their cultures and livelihoods.
- “Show up” at meetings of other coalitions/partnerships (housing, voting rights, labor, etc.) to identify intersections between environmental and justice issues.
- Participate in national coalitions to resist attacks on the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and other important environmental laws.

