



Mississippi-Alabama GOMA Stakeholder Meeting

February 1, 2006

Mississippi State University (MSU) Coastal Research and Extension Center (CREC)

Large Group Session

Rationale: Participants were asked to generate a list of issues that are critical to the environmental and/or economic health of the Gulf of Mexico. The results were compiled by the meeting facilitators, and the audience voted on the list of issues as is indicated below. The five issues with the largest number of votes were the focus of afternoon discussion groups.

Brainstormed Issues:

- Political Reforms and Funding – 1 vote
 - Fear to speak-up
 - Funding for Gulf of Mexico Alliance
 - Reform the MDEQ permit board. It is heavily weighted with executive branch appointees. For political reasons, this board cannot make tough decisions to deny permits when they should be denied. This throws all controversies to the chancery court system. This is ridiculous. DEQ should be able to make decisions when necessary.
 - Prioritize and target funding stream. Too much diversity creates a “watered down” approach to issues such that addressing them becomes ineffectual.
 - Pick your top needs;
 - Direct funding to them consistently; and,
 - Don’t get off track with “popular issues” that may arise along the way.
- Restore, Preserve, and Support Coastal Communities and Working Waterfronts – 8 votes
 - Loss of water-born industries.
 - Protection and preservation of indigenous coastal communities relative to coastal developmental and governmental regulations.
 - Preservation of working waterfronts; water-dependent vs. water-enhanced use.
 - Dredging, support of seafood industry, shipbuilding, tourism, coastal (land and water) clean-up.
- Air Quality – 2 votes
 - Air quality changes and risk assessment in natural and man-made disasters in coastal regions.
- Public Access and Green Space – 2 votes
 - Buffers, conservation space
 - Partner with Land Trust to preserve green space to assist in solving some watershed and water quality problems.
 - Greenspace/public access and recreation.

- Local decisionmakers/leaders balance economic and environmental concerns/goals (need to understand economic benefits and quality of life) – 13 votes
 - Education of public officials, elected and appointed regarding the repercussions of land use management decisions.
 - Balancing environmental and economic development.
 - Can local leaders come to an understanding of the economic benefits of quality of life?
 - How do we get our elected and appointed officials and business leaders from wanting more housing and shopping centers?
- Population growth and development – 8 votes
 - Direct new population growth into city mixed use areas.
 - How do we reduce our population so we do not have these abundant problems?
 - Increased coastal populations and habitat loss due to development.
 - Unrestrained coastal zone development that assumes natural coastline erosion/deposition can be prevented.
 - Inland BMP implementation.
 - Lack of appreciation for and enforcement of BMPs, especially in coastal zones.
 - Land protection/Land use
 - Building codes
 - Sustainable coastal development
 - Coastal redevelopment and impact to the environment
 - Building codes needed as first measure;
 - Local planning;
 - Green building programs;
 - Smart growth; and,
 - Amendments to building codes are needed to provide better termite protection against Gulf-wide problems with Formosan termites.
- Coastal Hazards (e.g., hurricanes, mitigation smart rebuilding and recovery) – 8 votes
 - Will we rebuild like we did after Camille, or take all the good planning and FEMA recommendations and rebuild wisely?
 - Hazard mitigation through environmental restoration.
 - Pre-planning and coordination for coastal hazard mitigation (storm water buffers).
 - Unwise development in areas susceptible to storm surge.
 - Pollutants – Any new pollutants because of hurricanes.
- Research and modeling needs – 0 votes
 - Studies commissioned to identify key priority environmental issues for the Gulf based on data vs. anecdotal sensationalism by the media and some NGOs.
 - Lack of baseline data.
 - All stakeholders need to promote implementation and use of GCOOS – the Gulf of Mexico Coastal Ocean Observing System. Also, the nation’s overall IOOS data needs to be “banked” at SSC.
 - Weather Research Forecast Model (WRF) for land fall hurricane tracking and intensity change over the Gulf of Mexico (storm surge, heavy precipitation, wind effects).
 - Air quality monitoring

- Sediment supply and distribution – 1 vote
 - Gulf-wide sediment management plan.
- Lack of regulation – 1 vote
 - Lack of local government regulatory resources (funding, staff, expertise, political will) for managing land use.
- Coordination and cooperation, especially for regional land use planning, research and policy – 2 votes
 - Organizing GOMA for sustainability.
 - Regional land use planning – mapping resources and using them to help guide development.
 - All Gulf states, Mexico, and Cuba working together on Gulf of Mexico issues (e.g.: sharing information, setting common goals, interacting on research, economic development, and policy issues).
 - Cooperative land use planning.
- Education and outreach/communication (includes sharing of monitoring data) – 18
 - Expand education of key Gulf Coast environmental issues. Enlist speakers/ambassadors from community groups, NGOs, and industry as well as involved agencies to talk/teach at schools, civic groups, etc. Assist ambassadors with training/speaking tools to enable effective fact-based environmental education.
 - Educate all levels of society about the problems and solutions available based on good data.
 - Public education
 - K-12 education
 - The need for community outreach and education by using the university in state to do or assist in research and develop education/training programs. Start K-12 to help make people aware of problems.
 - Environmental education for K-college, coastal resource managers, general public. Opportunities should be specifically designed for these audiences. This requires funding in the form of additional people/staff to take on new programs and projects.
 - Community education that targets adult audiences is traditionally poorly funded or cut in funding decisions. There needs to be scientifically sound messages, yet appropriate language for audience. It needs a strong, consistent funding stream.
 - Public education about human impacts on Gulf ecosystems and water quality.
 - Public awareness of Gulf issues.
 - Environmental education for youth, community, leaders, etc.
 - Communication between all players: state, federal, private, and public.
 - Environmental education in the Gulf region should utilize public service announcements, require instruction with water safety courses, publish pamphlets to be distributed with fishing licenses each year and boat registration.

- Educating the public about the problems and solutions relating to the Gulf of Mexico.
 - K-12 (both formal and informal)
 - Adult (formal – undergraduate, graduate, and adult community education; informal – public outreach, recreational facilities, conservation departments, etc.)
- Habitat restoration, degradation, protection, identifying characterizing, and saltwater intrusion impacts – 20 votes
 - Preservation of natural ecosystems.
 - Watch the projects to further develop the Pearl River by placing two new dams in the Jackson, MS reach of the river. These projects promise flood control while allowing riverfront development – “Shangrila.” Two additional dams will cause low flow conditions in drought years that the downstream areas of the Pearl cannot sustain, including coastal marshes and estuaries in LA and MS that depend on regular seasonal fresh water discharges.
 - Land protection (riparian buffers, conservation easements, purchase outright).
 - Habitat preservation
 - Wildlife habitat concerns
 - Identification, quantification, and restoration of natural coastal habitats.
 - Loss of shoreline and wetland SAV habitats to dredging/filling, development, channelizing, dams, etc. (including loss of riparian habitats that could serve as buffers).
 - Restoring wetlands, rivers, and estuaries.
 - Habitat degradation
 - Saltwater intrusion and ecological change
 - Habitat loss
 - Causes
 - Impact on wildlife, economy, and social well-being
 - Ways to mitigate loss and increase (restore) most critical areas
- Invasive species – 12 votes
 - Invasive Exotics (aquatic and terrestrial plant and animal)
 - Remove invasives and restore habitats after removal.
 - Also included should be education to the general public about what invasives are, why they are bad, what you can do to get rid of them in your yard in an economically and environmentally sound method.
- Water quality, nutrients, stormwater and wastewater – 1 vote
 - Under-regulated and engineered; public and private sewer districts.
 - Sewage infiltration and inflow resulting from the combination of extreme rainfall events and aging/failing wastewater infrastructure.
 - Monitor wastewater runoff and monitor nutrients entering the Gulf.
 - Nutrient enrichment and components that contribute to that (N and PO₄).
 - Effects of nutrient loading, eutrophication, and hypoxia on water quality and ecosystem function.
 - Stormwater development and redevelopment.
 - Stormwater pollution
 - Nutrient loading including non-point sources and sewage issues.
 - Reducing nutrient levels in bays, rivers, and estuaries.

- Water quality (general) including pollutants other than nutrients (such as mercury) as well as disease concerns - 12 votes
 - Water sampling for regulatory compliance.
 - Adequate monitoring of water quality and real-time alerts of negative impacts, including spills (pollution and waste water), beach closings, fish and shell fish impacts.
 - Mercury and other pollutants (nutrients, sediments, algal blooms, low dissolved oxygen).
 - Presence of mercury in fish.
 - Thermal pollution
 - We need better understanding of waterborne and seafood-borne diseases so that we can better mitigate adverse health impacts on tourism, water recreation, and seafood consumption.
 - Gulf water quality should address the following issues:
 - Saltwater intrusion
 - Red tides
 - Effects on seafood industry
 - Soil erosion impacts
 - Up-stream dumping issues
 - Septic and sewer systems

Top Five Issues – Discussion Groups

Group One – Habitat: Restoration, Degradation, Protection, Identification, and Characterization

Group Two - Education & Outreach / Communication

Group Three – Local Decision Makers / Leaders balance economic and environmental concerns / goals (need to understand economic benefits of quality of life)

Group Four – Invasive Species

Group Five – Water Quality including pollutants other than nutrients
-mercury and pathogens