



Mississippi-Alabama GOMA Stakeholder Meeting

February 1, 2006

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

Community Workshop Small Group Session (1 of 5)

Habitat

Facilitator: Jennifer Buchanan

Recorder: Charlie Robertson

1. How do you define this issue with respect to the health of the Gulf of Mexico?

- Historic loss of habitat has posed a significant risk to the Gulf of Mexico.
- These losses are both man made and natural.
- How would we define the word “habitat”? Would we like to look more at the ecosystem than the habitat?
- The ecosystem includes more of a functional definition, whereas a habitat is more the components of the ecosystem.
- First, we must determine the type of habitat that we have.
- Maintaining what we already have.
- The issue is historical and continuing loss and degradation of coastal habitats and its impacts on ecosystem functionality, human health, and economic resources.

2. Where do you go for information and assistance on this issue?

- National wetland inventory
- Aerial photography
- Technical reports
- State and federal agencies and universities
- Comprehensive land use plans
- Various websites
- NERR, NEP, MASG
- Private consultants

3. What constraints have kept you from helping to resolve this issue?

- Funding
- Lack of info. And resources
- Political constraints
- Lack of comprehensive planning

- Conflicting resource protection priorities
- Coordination
- Lack of national policy for restoration
- Lack of baseline data
- Lack of restoration resources
- Tools for monitoring success

4. What role should the public play in helping to resolve this issue?

- Demand more funding
- Backyard conservation efforts
- Stewardship efforts
- Identification of restoration areas
- Education
- Report violations
- Public advocacy
- Public accountability

5. What role should the government play at the local, state, and/or federal level in helping to resolve this issue?

- Provide funding and guidance
- Reasonable rules and regulations
- Federal government needs to endorse a national policy relative to restoration and conservation of coastal habitats.
- Federal government needs to provide adequate funding to support the national policy.
- States and local governments should adopt similar policies in a consistent fashion.
- States and local governments should also provide funding.
- State/local government should institute comprehensive land use planning to include buffer zones, green spaces, tree ordinances, wildlife corridors, BMPs, and appropriate enforcement measures.
- Government should provide sufficient funding to ensure a robust research capacity to address constraints and gaps identified above.
- Learn to better communicate with their target audience.



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**Community Workshop Small Group Session (2 of 5)
Education & Outreach / Communication**

Facilitator: Dr. Sharon Walker

Recorder: Amy King

1. How do you educate/engage/communicate with respect to the health of the Gulf of Mexico?

-Translate science to actionable items to public activities.

- A. Translate jargon / bridge terminology gap
- B. Engage public so they understand "what is in it for them" / relevancy
 - a. With 5 Gulf of Mexico States and Mexico coastline
 - b. Watershed

-Organize & Prioritize our plan

- A. Determine target audience (General Public, K-20, Coastal Resource Managers, Coastal Decision Makers, Land Users, Inside Beltway)
- B. Plan to approach different groups

-Acquire funding mechanisms to sustain equitable resources to carry out needs of each member state

2. Where do you go for information and assistance on education/ engagement/ communication on the Gulf of Mexico?

- Inventory existing organizations / agencies, i.e.:
 - Existing institutions, National Marine Educators Assoc.
 - Websites
 - North American Assoc. for Environmental Education
 - Assoc. of Experiential Educators
 - Work with media experts to frame issues
 - Coastal Services Centers
 - Sea Grant Programs/ NEP/NERRS/COSEE/GCOOS
 - Aquariums/museums/science centers
 - State and federal agencies
 - Look at successful models
 - NGOs/Non-Profits/"Grass-roots Communities

3. What constraints have kept you from helping to resolve educating/engaging/ communicating the health of the Gulf of Mexico?

- Fragmented efforts
- Lack of Funding
- Lack of focus, coordination, and vision
- Lack of interest and/or awareness
- Cross jurisdictions and boundaries
- Lack of public awareness
- Complexity of the problem / disconnect of scientific community and educators (bridging the gap)
- Identify target audiences and prioritize
- Relevancy to target audience

4. What role should the public play in helping to resolve education/engagement/communication for the health of the Gulf of Mexico?

- Being more proactive rather than reactive
- Become an advocate for the Gulf of Mexico
- Put pressure on the politicians
- Volunteerism!
- Instill an environmental value / ethic
- Assume personal responsibility for stewardship
- Behavior modifications and follow-through

5. What role should the government play at the local, state, and/or federal level in helping to resolve education/engagement/communication the health of the Gulf of Mexico?

- Develop proactive, aggressive, well-funded sustained media campaign
 - PSAs
- Lead by example by implementing environmentally responsible policies within governmental and other organizations
 - Purchase of consumables
- Provide a framework for participation, example: Scenic Streams Program
- Pass legislation for adequate and sustained funding



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**Community Workshop Small Group Session (3 of 5)
Water Quality including pollutants other than nutrients
(mercury and pathogens)**

Facilitator: Cheryl McClary

Recorder: Mike Shelton

1. How do you define this issue with respect to the health of the Gulf of Mexico?

- Mercury and other pollutants bioaccumulate causing long term detriment to the health of Gulf.
- Pathogens and other biological threats to human and wildlife health from both point and nonpoint sources at population and related infrastructure increases.
- Persistent pollutants (petroleum related and other organic pollutants) that cause long term anoxic zones in Gulf.
- Fluorine-based organic compounds including teflon-like and pesticides that impose long term risks.
- Estrogen and estrogen-like compounds causing detrimental effects on fish/wildlife populations.
- Overall increase in nonpoint source pollution caused by increased population, increased stormwater quantity and contamination flowing into Gulf.
- Other pollutants not identified directly but possibly indirectly by trend data for other water quality parameters.

2. Where do you go for information and assistance on this issue?

- USEPA Mercury Report to Congress
- online publications from federal, state and university entities (USEPA, FDA, USGS, public health consumption advisories and others)
- Pathogens: beach monitoring and beach closures – federal and state agencies performing testing and notices in local media or posting at beaches.
- NOAA Status and Trends Reports for persistent pollutants: organic compounds and metals in oysters, fish and the like.

3. What constraints have kept you from helping to resolve this issue?

- Hg - lack of data on baseline (preindustrial days)
- Hg - lack of knowledge about sources: local and global
- Hg - methylation processes

- Lack of clear information from public agencies due to absence of clear responsibilities to report, not a clear mandate to inform public.
- lack of enforcement
- lack of local ordinances promoting better planning and design stormwater management
- lack of land use planning

4. What role should the public play in helping to resolve this issue?

- Petition their legislative/elected officials for change
- Modify personal behavior both adult and youth seeking environmentally-friendly alternatives
- Request/demand better public education and outreach.
- Modifying infrastructure using better planning and design practices

5. What role should the government play at the local, state, and/or federal level in helping to resolve this issue?

- Better education of medical community on toxics and environmental contaminants and their health effects;
- Better enforcement;
- Incentives for implementation of better site design and techniques;
- Better education/outreach to community on toxics and environmental contaminants and their health effects; and,
- Funding research and mechanisms to get information into management decision making.



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Community Workshop Small Group Session (4 of 5)

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

Facilitator: Christy Loper

Recorder: Lee Yokel

1. How do you define this issue with respect to the health of the Gulf of Mexico?

- Our food basket, business, industry vs. Environmentalist want to address waste
- Cumulative impact – want long term balance, don't just look at short term but address 5, 10 25 year outlook. "We are all connected" average person doesn't see how water effect QOFLife.
- Economic has to continue but want it without destroying other industries (i.e. tourism, fishing, etc) Need to look carefully for balance – don't restrict all develop but make good choices and set good standards.
- Characteristically have handled things individually – need to coordinate regionally; have everyone working together.
- Environment stewardship and economic development are not mutually exclusive; need to move forward together – inclusive.
- DEQ + QOL are now economic drivers for MS; coastal driven by casinos (tourism as a whole) recognize green space, aquarium, museums are part of this.
- DEQ and QOL are economic drivers.
- Economy environment citizenry = culture; must have all citizens at the table to alleviate environmental injustice.
- Growth is a reality – understand what the impacts will be to minimize and manage them – things will not stay the same – manage resources as a whole.
- Sustainable development is an oxymoron – cannot have both – can have growth where other areas are not – contrary positions.
- Distinguish between controlled and uncontrolled growth – do it on a regional basis; watershed management.
- This meeting example of what is needed; devastation is an opportunity – clear slate now to do better/ more to include balance, regional, provide new.
- What was lost was done years ago – now know better – can address better techniques – work together; opportunity to "do it right."

2. Where do you go for information and assistance on this issue?

- SANE – south Alabama network for the environment – starting new; local chambers, envision coastal Alabama; NGOs working together; regional planning commission and member governments
- Public Outreach Task Force members i.e CTP, NERR, NEP, Coastal Section, DMR, CRMP (coastal resource management program); Smart coast
- CRMP – working with developers to understand what is “smart growth” what is a greener subdivision – increase profits and citing examples, assisting in developing a green subdivision (pearl river county)
- Smart Coast – conferences, workshops, reaching developers etc.
- Stakeholders living in the greater community are the resources – bringing these people together to seek their advice, get importance from them, hear their needs and concerns
- See environmental issues addressed will mean a good QOL = then can address other problems
- DMR – CRMP – special program Stakeholders meetings; more focus with developers and regulators (city county state federal) come together to talk about ways to make permitting process work better.. streamline operations
- Bayou La Batre – zoning issues as an example
- Local newspapers / media outlets
- Is there a larger audience from which to pull for information? Only when things get heated on specific issues do resources come out – difficult to deal with emotional issues at that time.
- Land Trust Program(Turkey Creek area) – worked with Board of Supervisors to find out what people wanted – did not address problems but facilitated wants and needs
- Independent Living Center / Mobile Advisory Commission for the Disabled - Forum to listen to the voices of the people – target was local community;
- Included local leaders / state people – recognized and opportunity
- Need to identify specific needs / opportunities and then get resources to the table to: listen, hear needs, what people want; address all segments of that target audience

3. What constraints have kept you from helping to resolve this issue?

- Emotional issues
- Resistance to change
- NIMBY – not in my backyard
- Lack of follow-up from leaders
- Local citizens as well as private sector
- “We have a failure to communicate”
- Lack of agency coordination – now trying to get everyone on front end of regulatory process, working together to avoid differing results
- Why do you believe what you believe? Culture sets our perspectives – our view of the environment and what we think needs to happen.

- Education – bring about exposure to new ideas, better techniques, ecology, economic drivers – to make better informed decisions – see multiple compatibilities
- Needs to be coordinated, managed, media approach to getting the word out (i.e TV, radio). Simple messages to better educate all segments of the population especially underserved populations.
- Communication key
- Change is possible despite circumstances – we need to remember despite of historical issues
- Need to think outside the box – stop preaching to the choir – find a way to get a new audience
- Distrust – ex. Underlying distrust of industry because their motivation is profit – have to overcome this – need factual information to and from the public;
- Distrust of government – agency will do bad
- Distrust – turf battles among agencies - “I’m here from Washington and I’m here to help”
- Distrust information provided – due to varying scientific community messages; scientific uncertainty
- Who do you believe?
- Trust

4. What role should the public play in helping to resolve this issue?

The group did not directly address this question. See commentary below.

5. What role should the government play at the local, state, and/or federal level in helping to resolve this issue?

The group did not directly address this question. See commentary below.

Current Opportunity – What happens next?

Bayou Area Chamber – exchange seafood for “an ear”; go with an agenda of 4 /5 clean cut issues – 2 enviro and 3 economic this year related to post-Katrina – get state legislature attention; getting heard by decision makers. Past results have included local changes such as state take over of ferry to include two ferries.

Creating action teams in local communities to come together to vision what they want as well as implement their long term recovery plans.

Opportunity now to listen to people, their ideas, what they want to happen as well as educate and communicate.

Need to find ways to get large groups of people together – maybe utilize entertainment(music) / festival with fun things – use it as an opportunity to address key things to raise awareness. One or two key issues at a time.

Opportunity to develop an environmental supreme court – local group with a variety of representation brought into environmental issues of concern. Maybe problem solving opportunity.

On a national level – University and National Assoc. of Univ and land grant colleges – smaller group involved in board of oceans and atmospheres (NASULGCs?) – would like a speaker from the alliance to address board – Opportunity to get message of need to / from collegiant organizations and Consortium of oceanographic research organization? Another opportunity to present position on issues

Idea would be to get colleges to address GMA needs

GIS capabilities of local governments – lack of coordination – opportunity to coordinate for good data; utilize this to “show” community the issues / problems / results

Dr. Jeff Ballwebber coordinating state wide effort – barrier as well as opportunity to help with education and make better planning decisions

DMR – CRMP – early push to do 3-coastal county GIS; was a good educational tool bringing together many issues (wetlands, wq, etc.)

Get elected and government officials to see economic advantages of quality of life issues. Inspiration will come from outside – seeing example in MS where really successful businessmen are saying “this is a good idea”;

Utilizing enlightened businessmen that have made money will get attention of local government

Local media to address the issues

Final Comments

Data – need consistency of data format; continuing to generate but need to make it transferable across formats / agencies

Data – where does it all go, need central repository (address past data next)

How to get input – people like giving you an opinion – every year Mobile Register does an insert for you to vote on “your favorite xxx”. Agency could coordinate with newspapers (have PSA requirement) have page or two of collective issues and concerns – let people vote by mail. Well designed newspaper survey on 8th grade level.

Summary page on scientist results that general public can understand – i.e. 6th or 8th grade level. Data is too technical and people do not understand.



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Community Workshop Small Group Session (5 of 5)

Invasive Species

Facilitator: Heidi Recksiek

Recorder: Marian Dicas

1. How do you define this issue with respect to the health of the Gulf of Mexico?

- Popcorn trees, Japanese climbing ferns, cogon grass, kudzu, formosan termites, giant salvinia, mosquito minnow, tropical soda apple, mulch (harbors invasives), fire ants....these are some examples of invasives.
- People don't acknowledge that introduced species are a risk. "Invasive species" is an issue that needs to be characterized as both current and potential.
- Many jurisdictions consider beautiful natives as "weeds."
- We need to plan ahead to resist invasives.
- Talapia are a serious issue in the Pascagoula. Zebra mussels are a potential problem along the coast.
- Exotic pets can also be invasive if released into our ecosystems. You can still buy exotics and invasives at Lowe's and/or Home Depot.
- Some programs actually encourage people to NOT dump exotic pets into natural waterways.
- Pet stores are bringing all sorts of animals (e.g, frogs) in high quantity...to make money.
- Feds are pushing a program (White List) that limits what can be brought into the country.
- Hurricanes have increased potential for spreading invasives, AND they have taken the focus away from the issues associated with this problem.
- More native species tend to fare well during storm events. Exotics sometimes don't fare as well (e.g., long leaf pines vs. lob lolly). Debris trees spread invasives such as termites.

2. Where do you go for information and assistance on this issue?

- Internet, government agencies, NGOs (TNC). These resources provide background issues on the species as well as how to deal with them. Sometimes the public doesn't know where to go to find info.
- Universities
- State agencies (MS Department of Agriculture and Commerce)
- NRCS-RC&D

3. What constraints have kept you from helping to resolve this issue?

- Lack of clearing houses to distribute information
- Research is on-going, and information changes rapidly.
- Lack of necessary channels to translate research to the public.
- Lack of funding makes it difficult to develop new programs; must find new channels to distribute information.
- Lack of understanding and awareness among public. If people don't feel directly impacted by the issue, they might not care enough about it to do something about it. We are challenged to explain why they should consider the issue to be important.
- Lack of understanding among industry.
- Lack of data (scientific and cost/benefit analysis)
- Lack of enforcement and laws
- Lack of information on distribution of invasives. Where are they?
- Lack of awareness of tactics that can be used to repel invasives.
- Lack of knowledge of the history behind invasives. Where did they come from?

4. What role should the public play in helping to resolve this issue?

- Garden centers/nursuries, mulch suppliers (or suppliers in general) need to distribute information and also be encouraged not to supply problem species.
- Public needs to advocate for funding to address this issue.
- Public is the key to resolving this issue. If the public understands the issue, they might be more likely to change habits that exacerbate the problem (rinse boats, clean grass-cutting equipment)
- People that sell plants might partner in the sense that they can do outreach (e.g. provide info about materials)
- Development sector can educate potential purchasers about what exactly they are purchasing. This crosses over to wetland issues, too.
- Public can inform appropriate agencies when they identify invasives on their property.
- Find out what is on your property; take the initiative!
- Master naturalists, garden clubs, bass fishing organizations all have a stake in this issue and can help promote the issue. They contact many people.
- Realtors are another target audience.
- Vigilance

5. What role should the government play at the local, state, and/or federal level in helping to resolve this issue?

- We need to provide pamphlets and education programs to spread the word.
- Quarantine policies need to be adopted and enforced.
- Sharing information (scientific and socio-economic) as it becomes available.
- Partner with entities "in the field" who can monitor existing conditions. For example, fishermen can monitor populations and determine whether or not they are being adversely affected. These groups can help with education, too.
- Newsletters; updates on existing studies, new technology for prevention. You can share info across state boundaries.
- Government is responsible for relaying accurate information to the media (t.v.,

radio, newspapers).

- Spectral signatures/aerial photography helps identify where these invasives are.
- Demonstrate costs to individuals in their outreach efforts.
- Must tackle this on a regional level!
- Habitual vigilance
- Provide education about long term impacts associated with invasives.
- Education should include forecasting.
- Share lessons learned.
- Demonstrations of native habitats to show people the benefits associated with natives.