



HALEY BARBOUR
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

January 9, 2006

Dear Community Leader:

As a stakeholder and key partner with an interest in the environmental and economic health of the Gulf of Mexico, you are invited to participate in an important workshop at the **Mississippi State University Coastal Research and Extension Center in Biloxi, Mississippi on Wednesday February 1, 2006 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.** (Directions are enclosed).


The workshop is a community-focused effort of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA), which formed in response to the *U.S. Ocean Commission Report* (September 2004) and the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* (December 2004). These reports noted specific ocean-related problems nationwide and, among other solutions, called for a regional collaborative approach to improve the environmental and economic health of the Gulf of Mexico. This endeavor is particularly important now as we make a commitment to work together to rebuild the Gulf Coast after the devastating 2005 hurricane season.

In response to the issues outlined in the *U.S. Ocean Commission Report* and the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, stakeholders representing diverse organizations and agencies within the Gulf region produced reports to address issues critical to the health of the Gulf of Mexico, including increased nutrient loading, improved water quality, restoration of coastal wetlands, identification of Gulf habitats, and environmental education. In June 2005 members of the Alliance, including representatives of the White House staff, representatives of the five Gulf States, and employees of several federal agencies, met in Naples, Florida to review the papers and initiate an integrated management discussion concerning Gulf environmental issues and possible solutions.

In an effort to communicate the goals of the Alliance to local leaders and public audiences and to solicit responses concerning the progress of the Alliance, stakeholder meetings are being conducted in each of the five Gulf States. Meeting participants will have an opportunity to discuss issues of concern related to the health of the Gulf of Mexico and offer possible solutions to these problems. The information derived from each meeting will be incorporated into a long-term *Action Plan*, which will be presented at a summit meeting in Corpus Christi, Texas in March 2006.

The community workshop in Biloxi will provide an opportunity for stakeholders in Mississippi and Alabama to offer local perspectives on issues that are critical to the ecologic and socioeconomic health of the Gulf of Mexico. It will also provide an opportunity to establish improved relations among federal, state, and private entities. I sincerely hope you will participate. Space for the workshop is limited. **Please confirm your participation by completing and returning the enclosed registration form. The deadline for registration is Friday January 20, 2006.**

Sincerely,



Haley Barbour