



JEB BUSH
GOVERNOR

STATE OF FLORIDA

Office of the Governor

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April 26, 2004

The Honorable Haley Barbour
Governor
Post Office Box 139
Jackson, MS 39205

Dear Governor ~~Barbour~~: *Haley*

This week, the U. S. Commission on Ocean Policy, appointed by President George W. Bush, released a preliminary report that culminates over two years of work and is the first major assessment in over 30 years. One of the report's primary recommendations calls for the development of regional goals and priorities. I think this is an excellent opportunity for the Gulf States to take the initiative and lead a regional effort focused on the Gulf of Mexico. I invite you to join me as we pursue the shared goal of protecting the Gulf.

For years, Gulf States have worked together in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program (GOMP). The GOMP has developed an effective regional partnership of federal, state, local and public entities committed to improving the environmental health of the Gulf in concert with economic development. The Program's strategic focus on habitat, public health and nutrient enrichment issues has resulted in measurable accomplishments, such as:

- Restoring 6,662 acres of valuable habitat restoration since the year 2000;
- Developing uniform public health advisories for shellfish consumption in Gulf states;
- Detecting and tracking harmful algal bloom (e.g., "Red Tide") on the U.S. and Mexican Gulf states;
- Conducting demonstration projects to address the impacts of on-site sewage systems; and
- Supporting numerous regional and national teams addressing issues such as nuisance species, mercury contamination, Gulf hypoxia, nutrient criteria, etc.

This has been an effective regional effort. However, it is incumbent upon the Gulf States to join together to bring the necessary focus to address the issues raised in the Commission's preliminary report.



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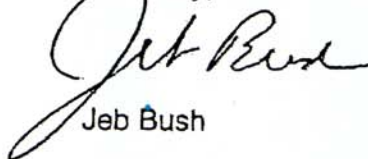
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I propose that the Gulf States lead the way on a regional effort focused on the Gulf without adding more layers of government. Through a renewed commitment to a more active regional approach, the states should determine restoration goals, establish research priorities, and participate in the planning of the Integrated Ocean Observing Systems currently being developed for the Gulf. By redoubling our efforts, we can ensure the vital economic assets of the Gulf are protected.

If our state governments take the initiative, we can ensure the efforts are steered primarily by the states bordering the Gulf—those most knowledgeable and affected by the condition of the Gulf. I am hopeful the federal government, seeing our partnership and commitment, will help us pursue our priorities. I look forward to working with you in pursuing our shared goal of a healthy and productive Gulf of Mexico.

Colleen M. Castille, Secretary, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, will lead these efforts for Florida. She will be contacting your staff shortly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeb Bush", written in a cursive style.

Jeb Bush

cc: Colleen M. Castille, Secretary
Charles Chisolm, Executive Director
Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality