

Gulf of Mexico Alliance Environmental Education Network Partners and Their Progress

An occasional, informational piece about projects conducted by our educational partners around the Gulf of Mexico. If you would like your program included or know something of interest, please contact Lee Yokel, lyokel@disl.org, 251-861-8201.



Coastal Learning



LIFE



Save Our Seagrass



Oceans Alive!



Science & Spanish



Coastal Roots

J.L. Scott Marine Education Center Designated Coastal Ecosystem Learning Center

On November 2, 2007, the J.L. Scott Marine Education Center (MEC) was designated the 21st Coastal Ecosystem Learning Center by Coastal America. This milestone was a high achievement marking just over two years post-destruction of a Biloxi facility by Hurricane Katrina.

The event was much celebrated. First Lady, Laura Bush, gave the keynote address and announced a new Administration initiative on marine debris. Among the other numerous dignitaries attending were Mississippi Governor, Haley Barbour; Dirk Kempthorne, Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior; Timothy Keeney, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere; Ben Grumbles, Asst. Administrator for Water, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; and James Connaughton, Chairman, Council on Environmental Quality, and Chair, Coastal America Partnership who presided over the event and William Walker, Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources. It was announced that the MEC will be one of only five CELCs in the Nation that will receive an ocean interpretive Station interactive kiosk that will be tied directly to an interactive exhibit of the Smithsonian's Ocean Hall, scheduled to open on September 25, 2008.

Dr. Sharon Walker, former Director of the MEC, was instrumental in establishing the designation. She is currently the Mississippi education state lead for the Gulf of Mexico Alliance Environmental Education Network.

J.L. Scott MEC
www.usm.edu/aquarium/temp.php

228-818-8890

Coastal America
www.coastalamerica.gov/



Florida's LIFE Program Receives Coastal America Award

On November 15, 2007, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Environmental Education received a Coastal America Award for its Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE) program. Coastal America established the Awards Program in 1997 to recognize outstanding team efforts to restore and protect the coastal environment.

The LIFE Program is an initiative to establish a series of field-based, environmental-science, education programs around the state of Florida. The goal of the LIFE Program is increased student achievement and teacher professional development in science. Content and delivery varies between sites though each utilizes a core set of guiding principles. Concepts of LIFE are now being implemented in programs located at the Louisiana University Marine Education Consortium and Texas State Aquarium through an EPA Gulf of Mexico Grant related to the Gulf of Mexico Alliance. This has increased the LIFE program partnership beyond Florida's boundaries.

Greg Ira, Director of FDEP Office of Education, is instrumental to the success of this program. He is also the lead for the Gulf of Mexico Alliance Underserved and Underrepresented Populations Working Group.

FL DEP LIFE Program

<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/secretary/ed>

850-245-2132

Coastal America
www.coastalamerica.gov/



The Nature Conservancy Kicks Off New Program SaveOurSeaGrass.org

The Nature Conservancy in Texas has launched a new public awareness campaign to help protect valuable submerged aquatic vegetation. The program, developed in the Laguna Madre, will enable recreational boaters in this area to help protect seagrass for future generations through voluntary use of marked preferred access lanes.

Seagrass is the foundation of life in the Gulf of Mexico. It provides habitat to many commercial and recreational species to include fish, shrimp and waterfowl. The declining quantity and quality of these seagrass habitats now represent a serious threat to wildlife, recreation and the economy along the Gulf Coast. TNC is working to expand their program around the Gulf and are engaged in targeting the Mississippi to Florida barrier islands.

The program asks boaters in shallow water to stop their engine, lift the boat's prop, and drift with the wind or troll with a motor or poll. Billboards, marina signage, and brochures have been developed along with a website to support the effort. Partners include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Coastal Conservation Association, the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and its Seagrass Working Group.

Rafael Calderon and The Nature Conservancy have been an active, regional participant in the Gulf of Mexico Alliance.

The Nature Conservancy
<http://www.saveourseagrass.org>



Dauphin Island Sea Lab
www.disl.org
251-861-2141



Dauphin Island Sea Lab Discovery Hall Program Educates Early Ocean Scientists

In 2000, the Dauphin Island Sea Lab added a summer class to their Discovery Hall Programs – Oceans Alive! This class, geared toward the K-3rd grade audience, has been received with overwhelming success.

Oceans Alive! generally has standing room only. In an effort to address requests for the curious 5 to 8 year old crowd, DHP developed the course for summer participation. Young students, with a guardian, get early hands on education about marine biology, ecology and zoology. For an afternoon participants touch specimens, look for seashells at the beach, catch sea creatures and enjoy other activities before heading home. Everyone receives a certificate and a t-shirt, most leave having experienced an adventure they will always remember. Children and adults alike don't realize they just had a class in ocean education and can't wait for their next barrier island excursion.

Dr. John Dindo, Chair of Dauphin Island Sea Lab's Discovery Hall Programs, is the Gulf of Mexico Alliance Alabama state lead for education. He has participated in the foundation of a number of educational endeavors.

The Gulf of Mexico Foundation Science and Spanish Club Network

The Science & Spanish Club Network, SSCN, is an eight year old multicultural approach to coastal environmental education. A program of the Gulf of Mexico Foundation, it develops youth leadership in stewardship about the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, and Greater Gulf Stream ecosystem. The SSCN uses a three-phased curriculum to improve a student's sense of physical place to become more keenly aware of living and working in the coastal zone through hands-on and process-oriented experiences.

A typical Science & Spanish Club operates in 21 sites with two faculty sponsors, one for science and one for Spanish and culture, that meets weekly, usually after school with a volunteer membership range of 10-40 students. Initially conceived for middle school students, it has now branched into high school. SSCN sites are primarily along the Texas central to lower Gulf Coast; Matamoros, Mexico; Penuelas, Puerto Rico and emerging connections in Rayne, Louisiana; St. Croix US Virgin Islands; Long Island, New York; and Greensburg, Kansas.

Richard Gonzales, Gulf of Mexico Foundation SSCN Program Coordinator, has been key to the inception and success of this program. He is an active member of the Underserved and Underrepresented Populations Working Group of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance Environmental Education Network.

Louisiana State University Coastal Roots Program

The Louisiana State University (LSU) Coastal Roots Seedling Nursery Program for Habitat Restoration helps Louisiana schools to establish seedling plant nurseries on K-12 school campuses. Currently, 20 middle and high schools in 11 Louisiana parishes participate in the program. These student-run nurseries produce native plants to use in habitat restoration efforts at a local site in need of vegetative plantings. First established in 2000 by the Louisiana Sea Grant College Program, Coastal Roots is now directed by faculty from the LSU Colleges of Education and Agriculture, as well as an LSU AgCenter Marine Agent.

The primary goal of the LSU Coastal Roots Program is to assist students in cultivating an attitude of stewardship toward our natural resources and to provide an active learning situation in which they can explore a variety of strategies for sustaining our coastal habitats. In early winter students begin by planting their seeds in their nurseries. The following fall, students travel to a nearby site to transplant their crop. Between 2000 and 2006, over 1900 student participants planted nearly 18,000 school-grown native seedlings and grasses during 57 planting events. In 2007, participating schools will plant well over 3000 tree seedlings on 11 planting trips. Six additional schools will make planting trips in the Spring 2008 to plant their crop of school-grown grasses.

Dr. Pam Blanchard, LSU College of Education, helps facilitate the program among the schools. She is a member of a number of professional organizations and is a member of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance Environmental Education Network.

**The GMF
Science and Spanish
Club Network**
www.gulfmex.org



**LSU Coastal Roots
Program**

<http://coastalroots.lsu.edu/>

