

Gulf of Mexico Program

Large Aquatic Ecosystem (LAE)



The **Gulf of Mexico Program** was initiated in 1988 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a non-regulatory program. Founded on the threefold principles of partnership, science-based information, and citizen involvement to apply an adaptive management approach to large coastal freshwater and marine ecosystems. The mission of the Program is to facilitate collaborative actions to protect, maintain, and restore the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico in ways consistent with the economic well-being of the Region.

The Program provides a broad geographic focus on the major environmental issues in the Gulf, and from its inception, was envisioned as a multiagency partnership endeavor based on the simple premise that no one agency or institution alone has the technical skills, financial resources, or legislative authority needed to resolve the environmental or natural resource problems confronting an ecological system the size of the Gulf. The Program's success comes from its ability to engage many people across the Gulf region for leadership and to implement projects that move in an environmentally and economically sound direction.

The Governors of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas formalized the Gulf of Mexico Alliance in 2004. Thirteen federal agencies committed to supporting the Alliance and formed a Federal Workgroup with EPA's Gulf of Mexico Program, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Department of the Interior serving as co-leads. The Alliance released the *Governors' Action Plan I* in 2006 which was intended to be a dynamic starting point to set the stage for a long-term regional partnership. The *Action Plan* sets out projects to deliver significant on-the-ground results. Capitalizing on the momentum of the first Plan, a second *Action Plan*, released in 2009, addresses some of the more pressing issues affecting the Gulf region.

Challenges

The Gulf of Mexico is a vast and productive body of water of tremendous ecological, economic and social value. There are four major challenges to healthy and resilient communities in the Gulf region: (1) Sustaining the Gulf Economy; (2) Improving the Gulf Ecology; (3) Mitigating Impacts of Climate Change, and (4) Mitigating Harmful Effects of Coastal Water Quality.

Priorities

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance identified issues that are regionally significant and can be effectively addressed through increased collaboration at the local, state, and federal levels. These priorities represent an initial focus for action through the Alliance and align with the Gulf of Mexico Program priority issues:

- Water Quality for healthy beaches and shellfish beds.
- Habitat conservation and restoration.
- Ecosystems integration and assessment.
- Nutrient reduction and nutrient impacts.
- Coastal community resiliency.
- Environmental education.



Accomplishments

The Gulf of Mexico Program reflects upon 20 years of collaboration and environmental accomplishments to the benefit of the Gulf communities. With the cooperation of its partners, the program successfully implements water quality and ecological recovery programs. The Program's cooperative approach includes:

- Delisting approximately 131 rivers and streams from EPA's list of polluted waterways.
- Supporting the Gulf States with 543 projects some of the most difficult environmental issues confronting coastal waters and in implementing a wide variety of demonstration projects and studies that offer solutions to those problems.
- Protecting over 29,344 acres of coastal marine habitat.
- Designating all 6 Coastal Education Learning Centers, one in each Gulf state and in Veracruz, Mexico.
- Assisting the Gulf Alliance to fulfill 100 percent of the 2006 *Governors' Action Plan*.
- Commemorating the people and agencies working together to protect the Gulf's ecosystems through 188 Gulf Guardian Awards.
- Supporting international efforts by implementing integrated binational (U.S. and Mexico) early-warning detection systems for coastal community management of harmful algal blooms.
- Supporting the goals and actions identified in the *Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan*.

Future Direction

The Gulf of Mexico Region is experiencing the power of collaboration and partnerships. The results of the first *Governors' Action Plan* exceeded initial expectations, identifying specific actions needed to improve the health of the coastal areas and to improve the quality of life for the Gulf's citizens. Significant accomplishments have been achieved and lasting partnerships were established; however, the Gulf coast ecosystems are still at risk with challenges for years to come. To build on the success of the partnerships, the *Governors' Action Plan II* released in June 2009, is a far-reaching, five-year regional blueprint for 2009-2014 to increase the health of the ecology and economy of the Gulf and address the most pressing issues affecting the Gulf Region. The Gulf of Mexico Program will continue to enhance and expand effective working partnerships to identify and resolve environmental issues in the Gulf ecosystem. We will continue creating a Gulf that flourishes in all its natural richness and variety, while embracing the needs and desires of its people.

The Gulf of Mexico Program Facts

Watershed Size: ~2 million square miles

Waterbody Size: Gulf Region covers ~600,000 square miles

Population: 44.2 million people in 1995 and may increase to an estimated 61.4 million in 2025

EPA Regions: 4 and 6

Director: Bryon Griffith

The Gulf of Mexico Program was designated a member of the US Environmental Protection Agency's



Large Aquatic Ecosystem Council (LAE) in 2008. The Gulf of Mexico Program joins nine other geographic-based efforts that focus on protecting and restoring the health of critical aquatic ecosystems. The LAE Council seeks to merge geographic-based efforts with national water programs to advance the health of the nation's large aquatic ecosystems and strengthen national water programs.

LAE Program Web Sites

Chesapeake Bay Program

www.chesapeakebay.net

Columbia River Basin

www.epa.gov/region10/columbia

Great Lakes

www.epa.gov/glnpo

Gulf of Mexico Program

www.epa.gov/gmpo

Lake Champlain Basin Program

www.lcbp.org

Long Island Sound Study

www.longislandsoundstudy.net

Pacific Islands Office

www.epa.gov/region09/islands

Puget Sound - Georgia Basin

(Under Construction)

San Francisco Bay Delta Estuary

www.epa.gov/region9/water/watershed/sfbay-delta.html

South Florida Geographic Initiative

<http://epa.gov/region4/water/southflorida/index.html>

Office of Wetlands, Oceans,
and Watersheds

[www.epa.gov/owow/oceans/
partnerships/large_aquatic.html](http://www.epa.gov/owow/oceans/partnerships/large_aquatic.html)

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