



**PRESS RELEASE FROM  
NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC  
ADMINISTRATION  
GULF OF MEXICO FOUNDATION  
GULF OF MEXICO PROGRAM**

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**NOAA PROVIDES \$250,000 TO THE GULF OF MEXICO FOUNDATION  
*Habitat Restoration Partnership Benefits Gulf Coast***

The Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program (GMP) recently awarded \$250,000 and \$90,000 respectively to the Gulf of Mexico Foundation for habitat restoration in the five states bordering the Gulf of Mexico.

These funds will be used to support grass-roots efforts to restore critical fisheries habitats in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida in areas known as Gulf Ecological Management Sites (GEMS), designated as critical to the sustainability of the Gulf's living marine resources.

These awards launch a major effort to reclaim essential fish habitats of the Gulf of Mexico by implementing "in-the-field" efforts to restore and improve marine and coastal habitats that have been degraded or lost. The GEMS Program has evolved since its inception in 1991, when it began with the Gulf of Mexico Program and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The funding from NOAA marks the continued evolution of this program as the first step in a new three-year partnership. With matching grant awards, the total value of the effort could exceed \$5 million over the term of the partnership.

"NOAA fisheries is pleased to have established a regional partnership with the Gulf of Mexico Foundation to restore fisheries habitats across the five Gulf states," said Bill Hogarth, assistant administrator for NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA fisheries). "The combination of first-hand knowledge from each state's GEMS manager, NOAA fisheries' technical expertise and funding is sure to result in successful, prioritized fisheries habitat restoration Gulfwide."

NOAA fisheries provides federal support for the partnership through its Community-Based Restoration Program, which works with community organizations to support locally-driven habitat restoration projects in marine, estuarine and riparian areas since 1996. NOAA-funded projects provide strong on-the-ground habitat-restoration components that offer educational and social benefits for people and their communities in addition to long-term ecological benefits for fishery resources.

“We at the Gulf of Mexico Foundation are thrilled to have the opportunity to work with NOAA, the Gulf of Mexico Program, and the Gulf states to implement this major effort to reclaim lost habitat,” said Dr. Quenton Dokken, executive director of the Gulf of Mexico Foundation. “Fish, shrimp, oysters, and other living resources of the Gulf of Mexico are the foundation for several billions of dollars of commerce each year. They are an integral part of the historical and future socioeconomic structure of the Gulf Coast.”

Seagrass habitats, oyster reefs, marsh and wetland habitats and many more unique and essential fish habitats will be targeted. The purpose is to ensure that those habitats essential to the successful life cycles of the living marine resources of the Gulf of Mexico continue to exist and become more healthy and productive over time. The Gulf of Mexico Foundation, a regional non-profit marine conservation organization, will coordinate habitat restoration and education outreach efforts across the Gulf states.

To develop a sense of stewardship within the affected communities, a comprehensive educational outreach program will be a cornerstone of the effort. Outreach programs will be incorporated into the efforts, such as the Cyberways and Waterways Program, with its interactive website, and the Adopt-A-Wetland Program with extensive teacher education programs. Local school groups and civic organizations will be involved, and these groups will ultimately ensure the continuation of the program beyond the grant period.

“The Gulf of Mexico Program is excited about being a partner in protecting our Gulf GEMS”, said Jim Giattina, Gulf of Mexico Program Director. “By all of the agencies and individuals in the five Gulf Coast states pulling together like this, we are able to protect our GEMS as one Gulf community.” The Gulf of Mexico Program was formed in 1988 to develop and implement voluntary, incentive-based management strategies to protect, restore, and maintain the health and productivity of the Gulf ecosystem. More information on the program can be viewed at: <http://pelican.gmpo.gov>

NOAA fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement, and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat.

Information on NOAA fisheries available at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov> Information on the NOAA Community-Based Restoration Program is available at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/> More information on the Gulf of Mexico Foundation can be viewed at: <http://www.sci.tamucc.edu/gmf/>