

Coordinating Federal Support for the Gulf of Mexico Alliance

In response to the U.S. Ocean Action Plan, representatives from thirteen federal agencies have come together to form the Gulf of Mexico Regional Partnership Federal Workgroup to provide support to the Gulf of Mexico Alliance in addressing priority coastal and ocean issues identified by the Gulf States. The Federal Workgroup provides the venue for focused collaboration and integration of federal effort needed to most effectively address the complex and pressing issues facing the Gulf of Mexico.

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance is a partnership, initiated in 2004, of the U.S. Gulf of Mexico states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, intent on significantly increasing regional collaboration to enhance the environmental and economic health of the Gulf of Mexico. The Alliance also includes participation by the Gulf of Mexico States Accord, which brings prospective collaboration with the Mexican Gulf of Mexico states.

The Bush Administration's U.S. Ocean Action Plan (USOAP) recognizes the leadership that the Gulf States have demonstrated in forming the Alliance and identifying key priorities for action in the Gulf region. The Ocean Action Plan calls for increased integration of resources, knowledge, and expertise to address these key priorities, citing a "particular emphasis on public health, specifically on water quality for shellfish beds and beaches in the Gulf of Mexico and the use of a regional ocean observing system to provide a real-time alert system for beach and shellfish bed closings."

The Alliance has identified five priority coastal and ocean issues that are regionally significant and can be effectively addressed through cooperation at local, state, and federal levels. These focus areas, which represent a starting point for action, include:

- ◆ Reductions in nutrient loading
- ◆ Improvement of Gulf water quality, with an emphasis on beaches and shellfish beds
- ◆ Restoration of coastal wetlands
- ◆ Identification of Gulf habitats to inform management
- ◆ Gulf of Mexico environmental education

To provide further direction, the states of the Alliance has drafted a series of regional white papers—one for each focus area. Each paper details the focus area, recommends actions for addressing the issue, and identifies any roadblocks in moving forward with action. These papers provide the collaborative focus for the Alliance in working with federal and international partners to draft a Gulf of Mexico Plan of Action. These white papers are available at:

<http://www.gulfofmexicoalliance.org>.



The Gulf of Mexico Regional Partnership Federal Workgroup

In response to the Ocean Action Plan, thirteen federal agencies have been brought together under the coordination of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to support the Gulf of Mexico Alliance. Following the leadership of the Alliance, this Gulf of Mexico Regional Partnership Federal Workgroup will explore collaborative opportunities that will increase the regional expertise and resources available to the Alliance in addressing the identified key coastal and ocean issues.

In supporting the Alliance, the Federal Workgroup will:

- ◆ Support Gulf of Mexico state leadership
- ◆ Build upon existing partnership frameworks in the Gulf, particularly the non-regulatory federal-state partnership framework operated through the EPA Gulf of Mexico Program
- ◆ Build Workgroup teams with federal co-leads that can most effectively contribute to a federal response within each of the focus areas
- ◆ Coordinate an innovative and integrated federal response to the state-drafted white papers that addresses identified needs and roadblocks. The Workgroup will strive to maximize the impact of the federal response by:
 - focusing or re-focusing ongoing and planned agency programs in the Gulf region to specifically address state-identified coastal and ocean issues;
 - identifying *high-impact* federal program integration opportunities to address these issues; and
 - identifying near-term deliverables and commitments that will increase the likelihood of long-term Alliance success
- ◆ Assist the Gulf States in creating a Gulf Alliance Plan of Action by November

To meet these objectives, Federal Workgroup members will work together and with the Gulf Alliance throughout the summer and fall 2005, culminating in the presentation of a Gulf Alliance Plan of Action at the 2005 Gulf of Mexico Summit on 7 – 9 November.

A “Regional Approach” Laboratory

The agencies of the Federal Workgroup bring established experience from diverse areas of expertise—integrating these capabilities can maximize federal resources in contributing to the long-term environmental and economic health of the Gulf of Mexico. The Federal Workgroup will seek to advance federal collaboration—in direct response to coastal and ocean issues identified by the Alliance—using the Gulf of Mexico as a “laboratory” for exploring better mechanisms for regional management, applying an ecosystem approach to management, applying integrated coastal and ocean observations for management purposes, and emphasizing local-state-federal collaboration.

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance:

- ◆ Alabama
- ◆ Florida
- ◆ Louisiana
- ◆ Mississippi
- ◆ Texas
- ◆ Gulf of Mexico States Accord

The Gulf of Mexico Regional Partnership Federal Workgroup:

- ◆ Council on Environmental Quality
- ◆ National Aeronautics and Space Administration
- ◆ National Science Foundation
- ◆ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- ◆ U.S. Department of Agriculture:
 - National Resources Conservation Service
 - U.S. Forest Service
- ◆ U.S. Department of Commerce:
 - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- ◆ U.S. Department of Defense:
 - U.S. Navy
- ◆ U.S. Department of Energy
- ◆ U.S. Department of Interior:
 - Minerals Management Survey
 - National Park Service
 - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 - U.S. Geological Survey
- ◆ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:
 - Food and Drug Administration
- ◆ U.S. Department of State
- ◆ U.S. Department of Transportation
- ◆ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

<http://www.gulfofmexicoalliance.org>



July 2005