



Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant responds to the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium's extension and outreach activities

After the explosion of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig April 20, 2010, the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium's response focused on extension and outreach activities. Throughout the spill, which was capped July 15, and still now, MASGC continues to bring information to communities, take leadership positions in recovery efforts and offer training for water-based industries.

Informing business, communities and scientists

Community forums. Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant (MASGC) joined forces with other agencies to enlist scientific, financial, psychological and legal experts in the Gulf to take part in three community forums and answer residents' questions. Federal and state government agencies also took part in the question-and-answer forums, which drew 525 people. Photos of forums: <http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=237789&id=195874938017>; transcripts of forums: <http://gulfseagrant.tamu.edu/oilspill/transcripts.htm>

Engaging with fishing communities. Extension and legal specialists have been working with fishing communities to provide information on the spill and facilitate interaction with BP to help with the damage claim process. Legal programs have been providing legal explanations (not advice) of complex documents. MASGC's Vietnamese-speaking seafood technologist has facilitated Vietnamese-American fishing communities' interactions with the government and BP by providing translation and a trusted source of information.



Fisheries technologist Peter Nguyen, right, talks with a shrimper whose boat is carrying boom.

Experienced oil-spill veterans. A couple of weeks after the spill, Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant brought Torie Baker of Alaska Sea Grant and Joe Banta of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council to the Gulf to talk about what they went through in the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill and answer questions about what to expect. They also offered resources, such as the "Coping with Technological Disasters Guidebook" (<http://www.pwsrccac.org/projects/osrplan/coping.html>), to the Gulf programs.

Compiling online resources. Sea Grant communicators in the Gulf of Mexico collected oil-spill related information to post on the regional website (gulfseagrant.tamu.edu/oilspill/index.htm). All links suggested for inclusion were sent to the communications director at Louisiana Sea Grant. Then, Louisiana Sea Grant designed the site and updated files were posted through Texas Sea Grant, who housed the site. The website also contained calendar information for oil-spill related events.

Database of oil-related activities, funding. A database of oil-spill-related research and monitoring activities was developed in July 2010 to keep people informed about what is going on in the Gulf of Mexico and help reduce duplication of effort (<http://gulfseagrant.tamu.edu/oilspill/database.htm>). Scientists have entered more than 195 research and monitoring activities into the database. The site also offers information on potential funding opportunities (<http://gulfseagrant.tamu.edu/oilspill/rfp.htm>).

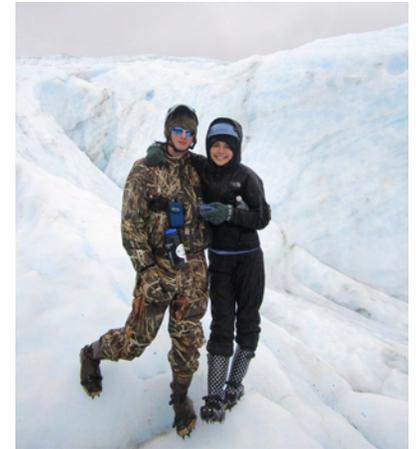
Scholarships for oil-spill education. MASGC sponsored two scholarships to allow Gulf high-school students attend the 2010 Ocean Science Leadership and Expedition program in Cordova, Alaska, and learn about oceanographic principles and issues, such as oil spills, marine debris and climate change. The students returned to the Coast and shared their experiences with their peers and communities (<http://www.masgc.org/sbonline/fall10/10q.htm>). Four students from Mississippi and Alabama will attend the camp in 2011 with the help of MASGC-funded scholarships.

Oil spill causes change in research plans. At least 14 organizations are using the 2009 Gulf of Mexico Research Plan to address regional research needs. The plan is being updated to take oil-spill-related research priorities into account. One thousand people have provided input. Updates to the regional planning effort are available at <http://www.masgc.org/gmrp/index.htm>.

Tourism industry. The Facts and Fishin' workshop in Orange Beach, Ala., helped people in the tourism industry and the community learn more about the post-Deepwater Horizon disaster situation. Local scientists and community leaders shared their perspectives to help residents become informed voices in the community.

Training

Seafood safety assurance. The Gulf of Mexico Sea Grant programs along with the Cooperative Extension System offered several seafood safety assurance workshops to seafood processors and sellers in the Gulf states. During these events, participants were given the opportunity to focus on their sense of smell to detect oil in seafood that had been spike with crude oil and diesel fuel. The smell test was one element processors could include in their Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points plans to give buyers more assurance that seafood is safe. Extension specialists with the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System also developed a special training program for charter captains and deckhands to address seafood safety questions.



Two students hike a glacier during a camp about oil spills, climate change and environmental science.



Seafood processors learned how to use sensory training to detect the scents of crude oil and diesel.

Peer listeners. MASGC worked with partners to provide peer-listener training to Gulf Coast residents in four states and teach participants strategies to effectively listen to people dealing with stresses related to the oil spill. The Peer Listener Program gives trained listeners the tools to be there for friends and family during difficult times and when to seek professional mental-health services. More than 600 people were trained in 27 workshops throughout the Gulf states.



Gulf residents attend peer listening training.

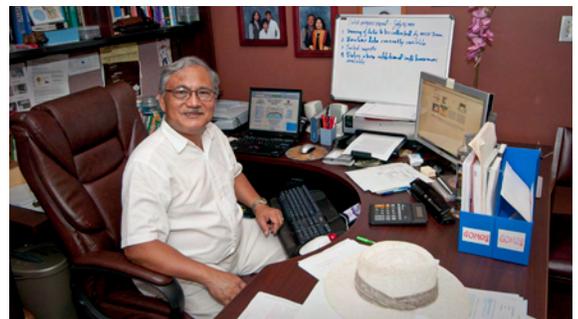
MASGC also worked with the Cooperative Extension System, mental-health organizations and other partners to update and localize a peer-listener training manual. There have been requests for this training in northern Alabama, where people are living in the wake of the fatal tornadoes that hit in April 2011. More information: <http://masgc.org/page.asp?id=588>.

Dolphin SMART operators land jobs. MASGC's nature-tourism specialist encouraged the National Marine Fisheries Service to hire Dolphin SMART trained tour operators to assist in Marine Mammal Health Assessments in Perdido Bay, Ala. At least four jobs were created in this effort. Dolphin SMART-recognized tour operators have learned sustainable dolphin viewing best practices. More about Dolphin SMART: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/dolphinmart/welcome.html>.

Home and boat clean-up. MASGC extension specialists participated as instructors in oil clean-up workshops for homeowners in Mobile and Baldwin counties in Alabama and developed two fact sheets for homeowners and boat owners on proper procedures for cleaning oil and residue from private property and on recreational boats.

Leadership

MASGC helps shape recovery plans. MASGC Director LaDon Swann served on the Coastal Recovery Commission of Alabama <http://crcalabama.org/> and the Mississippi Gulf of Mexico Commission <http://www.mgcomc.org/> and helped create comprehensive, long-term plans for the future of both coastal states. Those plans can be found on the commissions' websites. MASGC Extension Specialist and Economist Ben Posadas served on the Technical Working Group on Human Use Impacts of the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill, the Gulf States Oil Spill Extension Task Force, the Mississippi Institute of Higher Learning Gulf Oil Spill Impact Assessment and the Coastal Research and Extension Center Oil Spill Impact Assessment. Go to <http://curis.msstate.edu/nregomosefforts.html> for more information.



Economist Ben Posadas served on several oil-spill impact task forces.

Sea Grant coordinates with partners. Gulf Sea Grant programs organized a seafood working group to provide guidance and coordination regarding seafood safety, fisheries closures and approaches to re-opening closed fisheries. The group, called the Fisheries Assessment and Seafood Team, engaged with local communities and fishing interests. MASGC continues to coordinate with National Estuarine Research Reserves, Coastal Zone Management programs, the NOAA Gulf of Mexico Regional Team and others on oil-related needs and issues.



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