

# MISSISSIPPI PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Greetings from the Magnolia State. We're beginning to dry out from the "Great Flood", and the oil spill of April 2010 continues to consume much of our staff time as we assess the damages to our state's natural resources along the gulf coast. We are looking forward to fall in Tennessee at the annual SWPBA Meeting. In the meantime, here is our news:

## **Our Phone Numbers Have Changed**

Our phone system has been changed for some time now. Although the SWPBA Contact List has now been corrected, we thought it best to ensure that everyone has our new numbers. Our new phone numbers are below:

Main Laboratory Number 601-961-5701  
Fax Number 601-961-5704  
Al Gibson 601-961-5763  
Alice Dossett 601-961-5664  
Chip Bray 601-961-5687  
Chuck Thompson 601-961-5795  
Doug Upton 601-961-5635  
Gretta Williams 601-961-5227  
Jennifer Milner 601-961-5739  
Jenny Ulmer 601-961-5632  
Mike Beiser 601-961-5681  
Natalie Guedon 601-961-5765  
Pete Howard 601-961-5724  
Valerie Alley 601-961-5182  
Will Green 601-961-5762

## **Natural Resource Damage Assessment** **Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill**

We are now in our second year of conducting the Natural Resource Damage Assessment in response to the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. State agencies from Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas are involved as well as the Department of Commerce (NOAA) and the Department of the Interior. Within days after the incident, biologists from these agencies began meeting to discuss the incident and to plan studies to assess the impacts to the natural resources of the Gulf. Technical Working Groups (TWGs) were formed to concentrate on specific categories of injuries. Among the TWGs were Birds, Fish, Shoreline, Marine Mammals, Sea Turtles, Submerged Aquatic Vegetation, Water Column, Human Use, and several others. The TWGs, working in cooperation with the responsible party, have developed a large number of study plans related to potential injuries. Studies that are currently ongoing in Mississippi waters in June include: Oyster settlement, Marsh grass, submerged oil, Gulf Sturgeon health assessment, Osprey nesting material survey, toxicity studies, and benthos studies.

## **Fish Tissue Monitoring Program**

The Fish Tissue Monitoring Program has been put on hold due to the response to the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, and staff sample fish tissue on an as needed basis. Our fishery biologists have been sampling some of the lakes in the Mississippi Alluvial Plain, the site of the flooding of the Mississippi River, to look at potential contamination as a result of the flooding.

## **Mercury Study for Marine and Estuarine Fishes**

The fishing rodeo season is almost upon us once again. Since seafood is important to the economy of the coast as well as the health and quality of life of many coastal residents, we are continuing our study of mercury levels in marine and estuarine fish tissue. We are looking at approximately 80 different species of fish with 10 fish representing each of three size classes. We have finished our collections of many of our large pelagic species (i.e., tuna, wahoo, mackerel), but are still looking for many of our deep water species such as groupers and snappers. We are also missing some of our smaller inshore species such as hardhead and gaftopsail catfish, pompano, and pigfish. We are hoping the rodeos and fishermen will continue to help us and bring us the species we still need.

## **Ambient Coastal Monitoring**

MDEQ has continued an effort to monitor the water quality of along the state's 3 coastal county areas. Currently 25 probabilistic sites will be used to assess the water quality of the Gulf Coast.

This program is crucial to evaluating the quality of coastal waters as communities rebuild and grow following Hurricane Katrina and the Deep Water Horizon Incident. It is additionally imperative as the implementation of the Governor's Gulf Region Water and Wastewater Plan comes into effect.

## **Ambient Beach Monitoring**

Sampling for MDEQ's ambient beach monitoring program continues and includes approximately 22 sites along the 3 coastal counties. Current data and status of all beaches monitored in Mississippi can be seen at



the University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Coast Research Laboratory's website:

**<http://www.usm.edu/gcrl/msbeach/index.cgi>**

Or at the MDEQ's website:  
**[http://www.deq.state.ms.us/MDEQ.nsf/page/Main\\_Advisories?OpenDocument](http://www.deq.state.ms.us/MDEQ.nsf/page/Main_Advisories?OpenDocument)**

Then follow the link to Beach Advisories.

## **Gulf of Mexico Alliance**

MDEQ along with its sister Gulf of Mexico states has taken an active role in supporting the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, and it's Governors' Action Plan for Healthy and Resilient Coasts. This plan is aimed at protecting and restoring water quality and habitat in the Gulf of Mexico and its estuaries, and improving public awareness of the Gulf through environmental education. The Alliance is devoted to accomplishing

these goals through regional collaboration within the 5 US Gulf of Mexico States and its neighboring 6 Mexican states. Current information is available at the Gulf of Mexico Alliance website <http://www.gulfofmexicoalliance.org/welcome.html>

### **Ambient Fecal Monitoring**

Ambient fecal monitoring is continuing and includes approximately 40 sites. Our personnel are currently collecting samples from primary recreational areas throughout the state.

### **Ambient Fixed Station Monitoring**

Ambient fixed station monitoring continues and includes approximately 30 sites. Our personnel are collecting samples from bridges throughout the state.

### **Wadeable Streams/§303d Monitoring**

MDEQ has currently completed its ninth year of wadeable streams sampling. Results from this M-BISQ effort will be used to assess the status of §303(d) listed water bodies and to steer future biological monitoring and assessment activities that are focused on wadeable streams and rivers.



### **Ambient Lake Monitoring**

Ambient lake monitoring has been re-instated this year and will include the sampling of 20 lakes. Our personnel are currently collecting samples from lakes throughout the state.

### **Personnel**

This past year we welcomed Elena Woodard to our Surface Water Monitoring Section. She came to us from Mississippi College with a Bachelors degree in Biology and Natural History. We welcome Elena onboard as she has passed the fire walking test and is fitting nicely with our team.

This we also said farewell to David Barnes as he retired after many years of service to the state. He will be missed, but we are sure David will be enjoying himself somewhere while basking in the sun and listening to Buffett songs. After all 'It's Five O'Clock Somewhere'.