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Restoring the Gulf Coast

EQUALS CREATING JOBS AND GROWING ECONOMIES

A series of reports from two independent economic research firms documents the Gulf-wide economic benefits and business opportunities created by comprehensive coastal restoration. Good restoration projects are urgently needed, not just to stop coastal erosion, but to create jobs in the restoration economy and to protect existing tourism jobs.

Coastal restoration sustains economic restoration

These reports demonstrate that, in addition to protecting people and wildlife, coastal restoration projects funded through the RESTORE Act and payments resulting from the *Deepwater Horizon* oil disaster will:

- **Create more jobs.** Coastal restoration efforts, which are rapidly growing, currently provide direct jobs for 297 businesses in 39 states, including construction, equipment manufacture and/or repair, design, construction and transport services.
- **Benefit mostly small and medium-sized businesses,** which are critical to restoring the overall economy and local communities.
- **Rejuvenate older businesses** with greater opportunities for innovation and new market potential.
- **Make the Gulf region a global leader** in coastal restoration capabilities that could be applied throughout the world's threatened coastal regions.

What's at risk?

Coastal wetlands in the Mississippi River Delta are disappearing at the rate of a football field an hour. This is putting coastal cities, communities

and unique ecosystems at increasing risk from hurricanes and rising sea levels. It is also threatening thousands of businesses and jobs along the Gulf Coast and across the country, as well as the billions of dollars the region contributes to the U.S. economy each year.

A healthy coast supports a healthy economy

Some examples of the northern Gulf of Mexico's contributions to the U.S. economy include:

- \$34 billion a year in tourism
- 90 percent of the nation's total offshore crude oil and natural gas production
- 33 percent of the nation's commercial fisheries
- 44 percent of all U.S. marine recreational fishing catch (by weight)
- 10 of the nation's 15 largest shipping ports by cargo volume

The direct connection between the health of the ecosystem and the economic health of the Gulf and nation underscores the urgency for using the money from the RESTORE Act and other payments resulting from the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil disaster to properly and effectively restore the fragile Mississippi River Delta and Gulf Coast.

“Restoration projects are very important to small and medium-sized firms like ours because they provide a valuable stream of work in a fragile economy.”

—James Marino, P.E.,
President of Taylor
Engineering

ECOSYSTEMS



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“Coastal habitat restoration typically creates at least 3–4 times as many jobs as road infrastructure or oil and gas projects for every \$1 million invested.”

—Keith Bowers,
President, Biohabitats, Inc.

Case study: tourism

All forms of tourism generate 2.6 million jobs in the five Gulf Coast states, nearly five times the number of jobs provided by the region's other three largest resource-based industries: commercial fishing, shipping and oil and gas.

Specifically, Gulf Coast wildlife tourism, which includes recreational fishing, hunting and wildlife watching, cannot exist without a healthy ecosystem and currently:

- Generates more than \$19 billion in annual spending.
- Attracts 20 million participants annually across the five Gulf Coast states.
- Delivers \$5.3 billion annually in federal, state and local tax revenues.

In coastal counties and parishes, tourism jobs—many of which are particularly dependent on wildlife related activities—can account for up to 36 percent of all private jobs. Those 53 counties and parishes have more than 25,000 tourism-related businesses and nearly 500,000 associated jobs.

Case study: oyster reefs

Depending on the location, 50–89 percent of all oyster reefs have disappeared from the Gulf of Mexico during the last 130 years. Oyster reefs provide habitat for numerous species of fish and mobile crustaceans, all of which are a part of a food web that supports a \$2.4 billion fishing industry and its 200,000 jobs. Oysters are natural water purifiers and have the ability to filter up to 1.5 gallons of water an hour, reducing the need for expensive wastewater treatment plants.

Oyster reef restoration currently provides jobs to 132 businesses in 22 states. Established businesses—large and small—in the extractive industries, marine construction and shipping are recognizing oyster reef restoration as an opportunity to diversify in the face of shrinking existing client bases and to use existing resources to increase revenues and employment.

Case study: geosynthetics

Restoration projects could spur innovation in older, traditional industries as well. Geosynthetics, the plastic fabrics used in road and railway construction and landfill containment ponds, currently are used in coastal management projects and provide jobs for 84 businesses along the Gulf Coast and in 31 other states.

Expanding coastal restoration efforts could allow the industry to expand into new markets such as intelligent geotextiles, in which geocomposites fitted with fiber optics can detect and provide warnings for potential breaches in coastal structures before they occur. Industry leaders say they could see an explosion of uses for geotextiles including marsh creation, artificial reefs for ecosystem restoration, levees, dikes and floodwalls for flood prevention and jetties, dunes and beach cores for erosion control.

The above data is the product of surveys conducted by Datu Research, LLC and the Duke University Center on Globalization, Governance & Competitiveness. Full reports can be found online at mississippiriverdelta.org/economics: Restoring the Gulf Coast: New Markets for Established Firms; Wildlife Tourism and the Gulf Coast Economy; Restoring Gulf Oyster Reefs: Opportunities for Innovation; and Geosynthetics: Coastal Management Applications in the Gulf of Mexico.

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