

# **STATE OF THE GULF OF MEXICO SUMMIT 2006**

## **TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**

### **ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT**

The *State of the Gulf of Mexico Summit* will be a major step toward creating a more in-depth awareness of those issues that lead to a sustainable quality of life based on sound economies and healthy and productive marine ecosystems. The *Summit* will foster an international perspective on economic and environmental issues critical to the sustainability of the Gulf coast community.

Catastrophic storms have focused an intense spotlight on the vulnerability of the Gulf of Mexico economy, environment, and public health to natural events and man-made threats. The *State of the Gulf of Mexico Summit* will provide a forum from which to launch recovery strategies built on long-term planning that reduce future vulnerability and achieve true sustainability.

#### **Theme**

Recovering Sustainable Productive Economies and Healthy Marine Environments within the Gulf of Mexico Region

#### **Goal**

Convene a Summit to focus attention, discussion, and collaborative action on achieving sustainable economies and environmental quality within the Gulf of Mexico Region.

#### **Objectives**

- 1) Engage Gulf State Governors from the United States and Mexico in developing proactive programs addressing the challenges of sustainable economies and healthy marine environments in a time of recovery.
- 2) Engage the management of coastal and offshore industries in developing proactive programs addressing the challenges of sustainable economies and healthy marine environments in a time of recovery.
- 3) Engage resource managers/agencies and leaders of non-governmental organizations in developing proactive programs addressing the challenges of sustainable economies and healthy marine environments in a time of recovery.
- 4) Present an overview of the environmental and economic *State of the Gulf of Mexico 2006* for public awareness and understanding.
- 5) Introduce the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, a framework for integrated and collaborative regional governance.

- 6) Establish working panels (economy, environment, public health, and governance) to continue long-term planning to address recovery and the inevitable growth and development along Gulf coasts and in the watersheds of the Gulf of Mexico.
- 1) Keep the members of the Gulf of Mexico Community apprised of the state of the Gulf of Mexico and progress toward a productive and sustainable future through the publication of a “report card.”

## **Rationale**

To meet the needs of current and future generations within the Gulf of Mexico community, a healthy and sustainable economy must be achieved as well as a healthy and sustainable environment. These are cornerstones of a desirable quality of life. The Gulf of Mexico is the most economically productive body of water within the territories of the United States and Mexico. Millions of people call the Gulf shores “home” and many millions more come to these ancient shores to play in the sun and water.

The economic health of the Gulf is based on maintaining and developing a dynamic and healthy business and industry climate. As the population of the Gulf Coast continues to grow, business and industry infrastructure must respond to the increased need for jobs and products. Population growth, economic development, and environmental conservation must be planned for and balanced.

Superficially, the Gulf of Mexico appears to be environmentally healthy and productive. However, there is mounting evidence that its living resources, habitats, and water quality are on the decline. Public health issues are increasing. Most of this decline in environmental conditions can be attributed to the pressures of a growing population in coastal areas and within the expansive watershed area of the Gulf of Mexico.

Currently, Gulf coast counties of the United States and Mexico are home to approximately 38 million people, a number that is growing exponentially. It is not inconceivable that by the year 2100, the coastal area from Cancun, Quintana Roo to Key West, Florida could be a nearly continuous metropolitan area broken only by areas set aside for conservation and agricultural uses. The environmental pressures on the habitats and resources of the Gulf of Mexico will multiply accordingly. It is imperative that today we commit to collaborative efforts to develop strategies for resource utilization and regional management that ensure the Gulf of Mexico will forever more remain healthy and productive.

## **Why Support the State of the Gulf of Mexico Summit 2006**

Today is a time of change. Societal attitudes are changing, governmental focus is changing, industrial philosophy is changing, and our visions of the future are changing. Today, we are more knowledgeable of these changes on a global basis. We understand the realities of sustainability, both economic and environmental. Today, we cannot stand

before the next generation, our children and grandchildren, and say “we made mistakes simply because we did not know.” Today - we know.

Governments cannot meet the economic and environmental challenges of today or tomorrow unless the individual, businesses and industries, universities, and NGOs join in a collaborative effort of voluntary proactive stewardship. The State of the Gulf of Mexico Summit is a step toward this international partnership.

The *State of the Gulf of Mexico Summit 2006* will:

- Focus international attention on the Gulf of Mexico, its economic and ecological value and the challenges of today and the future.
- Bring together leaders of government, industry, science, academia, and conservation to discuss the issues and form collaborative efforts for the future.
- Establish a communication mechanism, the “Report Card” to keep awareness elevated.
- In the public mind, link environmental quality and economic progress as inseparable cornerstones of quality of life.
- Minimize the need for government intervention by creating opportunities for proactive collaborations in stewardship.

## **Topic Areas**

### **HURRICANE RECOVERY**

The four topic areas will consider the condition of the Gulf of Mexico following the hurricanes of recent years and the challenge of recovery facing the Gulf of Mexico Community. The question of, “How do we plan for and implement a recovery strategy that reduces the potential for negative impact and increases the potential for achieving sustainability?” will guide the discussions.

### **COASTAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

An analysis of historic growth in the coastal area and a projection of its future growth give insight into environmental management challenges of the future. Projecting future growth and the resulting changes in land use patterns throughout the Gulf of Mexico watershed are critical to establishing resource management strategies that will be effective in creating a sustainable economy and environment.

### **ECONOMIC VITALITY**

The societies of the Gulf of Mexico community are founded upon a diverse and dynamic economy. Economic security for the individual is based upon jobs and business opportunities. Economic resources and environmental quality are cornerstones of the quality of life achievable by the individual. Environmental challenges cannot be successfully dealt with without economic resources.

## **HABITAT ALTERATIONS**

Population growth and the consumption of natural resources (biological and mineral) unavoidably alter habitats and ecosystem dynamics. To achieve sustainability, habitats that remain functioning and productive, human impacts must be planned for and managed in a science-based regional ecosystem framework. Chemical and mechanical processes of the atmosphere and waters of the Gulf of Mexico inseparably link diverse habitats into the regional ecosystem. To be effective, environmental management must occur on a larger regional scale.

## **PUBLIC HEALTH**

Degraded habitats pose both pathogenic and chemical threats to human health. These threats to human health will increase with continued degradation of the natural environment and growth of coastal populations.

## **COLLABORATIVE REGIONAL GOVERNANCE**

Atmospheric and oceanic processes are continuous, unfettered by geographical or political boundaries; consequently, the ecosystem of Gulf of Mexico cannot be governed as segregated areas defined by jurisdictional boundaries of local, state, and national governments. In the absence of a formal regional governance structure for the Gulf of Mexico a voluntary collaborative regional management mechanism is needed to achieve the most effective ecosystem management strategy.