

Sea Grant responds to Gulf Oil Spill

The 40th anniversary of Earth Day last spring was marred by the blowout of British Petroleum's Macondo oil well, followed by the largest oil spill in history. Since then, a number of questions have been posed – Will the Gulf recover from this? Could it happen again? How could we have learned better from past oil spills in our response this time?

"The potential for disaster was great," says New York Sea Grant (NYSG) Director **Jim Ammerman** of the Gulf oil spill, "but so far environmental impacts have been less than feared." Ammerman shared his impressions on the subject both during his talk as part of Stony Brook Southampton's fall lecture series and as a panelist for Stony Brook University's Living World lecture last October.

Photo courtesy of Virginia Sea Grant



Ammerman, like many scientists, is quick to remind us that much is still unknown about the oil spill and its impacts and will remain so for some time. "Although shoreline impacts by the spill have been limited, partly due to dispersant use, the ultimate effects of deep water dispersant use are unclear," says Ammerman. While damaged marshes already appear to be re-growing and bird mortality is less than after prior spills, other uncertainties include the impacts on the region's turtle and tuna populations. Also, seafood appears safe (from open fishing areas in the Gulf), but additional testing is needed.

"This oil spill certainly makes us wonder if a similar situation could happen here and, if it did, how we would respond," says NYSG's Long Island Sound Educator **Larissa Graham**, the Editor for last fall's oil spill-themed *Sound Update* newsletter. According to one of the *Sound Update* articles, the Area Contingency Plan for Long Island Sound documents how the Coast Guard will work with federal, state and local governments to prepare for and respond to oil spills. In late February, Graham, along with NYSG's **Paul C. Focazio**, will lead teachers from the New York State Marine Educators Association for a five-day trip to the New Orleans area to learn about restoration efforts and talk with experts about wildlife rehabilitation. The group will also engage in some restoration work, similar to efforts made last fall by Sea Grant staff from throughout the national network's 32 programs. During their planting, coordinated by Louisiana Sea Grant Extension Associate **Caitlin Reilly**, Sea Grant-ers contributed about 55 volunteer hours for a planting effort along 200 feet of shoreline in New Orleans' City Park. "In the face of land loss, we see a lot of need for restoration in Louisiana, especially after Hurricane Katrina," says Reilly.

— **Paul C. Focazio**

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