



SUSTAINING WATER RESOURCES FOR THE MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST

Water is a pervasive aspect of life in the Mississippi Gulf Coast region. The region's water resources support its economic, social and environmental health. Many industries rely on the region's waters to operate. A majority of the most popular recreational activities are water-related. The use of the region's waters is complex and affected by a wide variety of factors, such as energy prices, trade policies, climate and development patterns.

The water-dependent economy is vulnerable to coastal hazards such as flooding, oil spills, environmental degradation, and lack of supply. However, natural features of the ecosystem, such as marshes and barrier islands, provide protection from storms. According to the Mississippi Department of Insurance, \$8.4 billion was paid to 240,000 claims in the three coastal counties within 12 months of Hurricane Katrina, but there would have been even higher losses if the coastal areas had not been protected by the ecosystem.



KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES



The Mississippi Gulf Coast has a water-dependent economy with many industries that rely upon their location on the water, such as energy production, shipbuilding, advanced materials, marine science, fishing, and tourism.



Although the water quality of the region ranks highly among residents, overconsumption and excessive runoff from fertilizers and chemicals poses a threat to streams, rivers, and coastal shores.



The future of the region will depend on protecting and preserving water resources, managing consumption, improving access, and implementing policies and programs that support tourism.

Mississippi marine commercial and recreational fisheries are a \$200 million industry

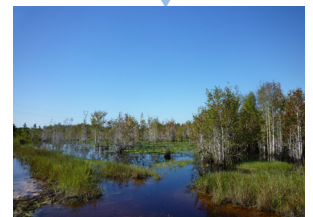


32%

Of land area in the 3 coastal counties is wetlands



The Gulf Coast produces 52% of the nation's crude oil and 54% of its natural gas



Mississippi is more dependent on groundwater than any other state

58%

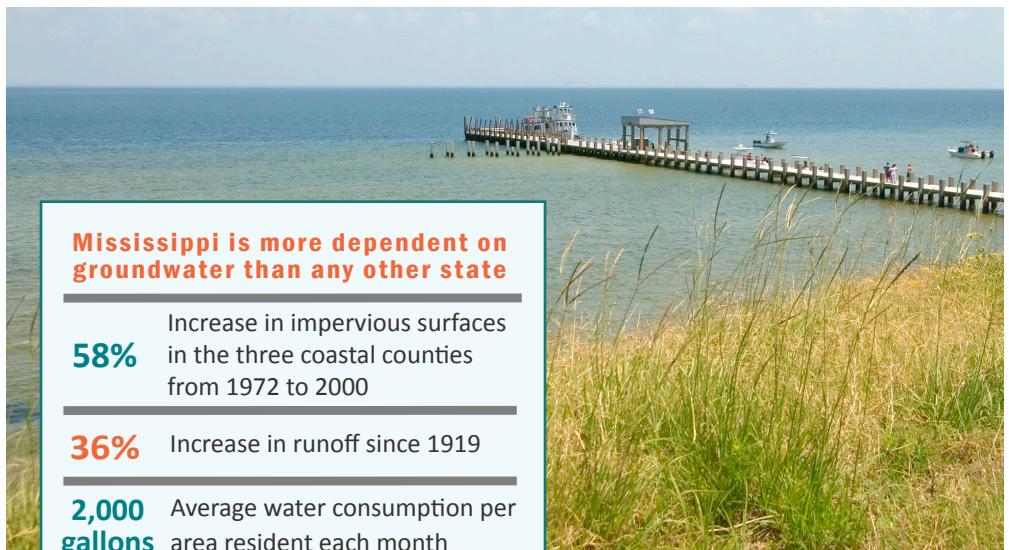
Increase in impervious surfaces in the three coastal counties from 1972 to 2000

36%

Increase in runoff since 1919

2,000 gallons

Average water consumption per area resident each month





Vision: To understand how the region's water resources can be used to increase economic competitiveness, support existing communities, attract federal investment, and value communities and neighborhoods.

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES



Fishers have divided concerns regarding necessary improvements and threats to their way of life. When asked if they had noticed a change in the water's condition, recreational fishers had mixed reactions: 20 percent stated the condition of the water had improved since either Hurricane Katrina or the BP Oil Spill, 15 percent indicated water quality had deteriorated in relation to those disasters, and 15 percent stated no change in water conditions. Respondents are concerned about water pollution as a threat to recreational uses of the region's waters.

Mississippi's beaches and bridges offer residents and tourists spectacular vistas of the Gulf Coast and give them a unique perspective on the health of the coast, its businesses, and its ecosystems. Of 64 surveyed individuals, half said that walking along the beach or a bridge was a regular activity: 21% said it was a daily activity, and another 29% replied that it was at least a weekly activity.

Tourists identified a number of ways to improve their experience on the water. Ideas regarding access to Mississippi waterways included building more boat launches on the Biloxi River, chartering midnight cruises, and adding more boat slips to marinas.

PROPOSED REGIONAL GOALS AND STRATEGIES



Conserve the Coastal Environment

- Implement policies for increased protection of aquatic species
- Preserve Deer Island in its natural state
- Provide greater public



Build a Resilient Economy

- Organize an eco-tourism council
- Emphasize waterfront development that benefits the economy and community
- Increase waterfront business access points along coastal and intercoastal waterways



Provide Equitable Infrastructure

- Ensure accessible amenities at public waterfronts
- Ensure expansion and connection of the blueway/greenway system
- Encourage and incentivize development codes that conserve energy and reduce water consumption

NEXT STEPS

The Plan for Opportunity partnership will engage residents and communities along the Mississippi Gulf Coast in dialogue about the role water and other elements play in a more vibrant, healthy and prosperous region. You can share your ideas and perspectives by visiting the gulfcoastplan.org and by taking part at festivals and community forums.

The draft plan – to be completed in the fall – will outline specific actions steps, strategies and responsibilities to address the region's needs. Making the plan a reality will take a continuing commitment of the public, private and non-profit organizations working on the Gulf Coast. Every small part contributes to a more successful and livable Gulf Coast region.



"The effort to build a sustainable regional water cycle depends on the individuals involved at each step in the process."

Source: Plan for Opportunity,
Water Stakeholder
Assessment,
May 2012



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gulfcoastplan.org

The **Plan for Opportunity** is a collaborative planning project led by the Gulf Coast Regional Planning Commission that is intended to guide the economic growth and development of the Mississippi Gulf Coast and to improve housing, employment and transportation opportunities throughout the region. The Plan for Opportunity is key to strengthening the economy, improving quality of life for residents, and creating a more sustainable future for the region.

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