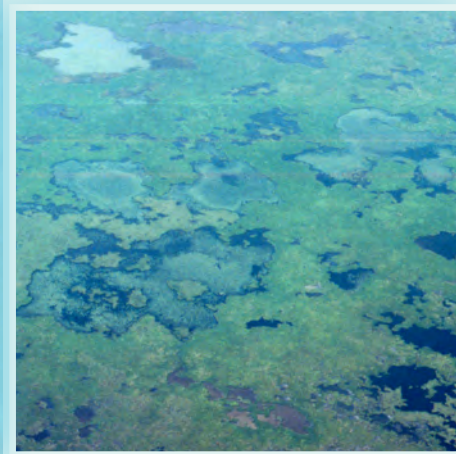


Gulf of Mexico Program

Seagrass Status and Trends in the Northern Gulf of Mexico: 1940–2002



Scientific Investigations Report 2006-5287

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 855-R-04-003

U.S. Department of the Interior
U.S. Geological Survey

Cover: Background, seagrass through surface of water (Tommy Michot, U.S. Geological Survey). Left, seagrass sampling (Tommy Michot, U.S. Geological Survey). Center, oblique aerial photograph of seagrass (Tommy Michot, U.S. Geological Survey). Right, manatees in seagrass habitat (Sirenia Project, U.S. Geological Survey).

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Edited by L. Handley, D. Altsman, and R. DeMay

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DIRK KEMPTHORNE, Secretary

U.S. Geological Survey
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Suggested citation:

Handley, L., Altsman, D., and DeMay, R., eds., 2007, Seagrass Status and Trends in the Northern Gulf of Mexico: 1940-2002: U.S. Geological Survey Scientific Investigations Report 2006-5287 and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 855-R-04-003, 267 p.

Preface

The Gulf of Mexico Program (GMP) is a network of citizens dedicated to promoting the economic health of the region by managing and protecting the gulf's resources. Although administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the GMP engages many organizations across the Gulf of Mexico coastal region to implement and lead restoration and conservation projects that are environmentally and economically sound. The GMP includes representatives from State and Federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, the scientific community, business and industry, and an organized citizens group. These members are appointed by the five State governors along the gulf coast. The GMP focuses on three ecological issues: (1) public health, (2) excess nutrient enrichment, and (3) habitat degradation and loss, including the introduction of nonindigenous species.

The GMP has long recognized that seagrasses, estuaries, and coastal wetlands are vital in providing food and shelter for plants and animals, improving water quality, sediment filtration, and flood and erosion control. In 1999, the GMP's Habitat Focus Team set a goal to restore, enhance, or protect 20,000 acres of important coastal habitats of the gulf by 2009. The Habitat Team, recognizing that seagrass beds are some of the most productive habitats in nearshore waters, set a goal to produce this summary report on gulfwide seagrass status and trends. The purpose of the summary report is to provide current baseline information on the status of seagrasses in the Gulf of Mexico.

To produce this report, the GMP's Habitat Team formed a subcommittee, consisting of over 30 gulf coast seagrass scientists and environmental managers. Committee members provided data on seagrass maps, seagrass status and trends, causes of change in seagrass acreage, monitoring activities, and restoration efforts important to seagrass areas along the gulf coast. The U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) National Wetlands Research Center provided extensive support in the production of data, maps, writing, and editing for this summary.

Lastly, *Seagrass Habitat in the Northern Gulf of Mexico: Degradation, Conservation, and Restoration of a Valuable Resource*, written in lay terms and developed for the general public, legislators, and Gulf of Mexico stakeholders, is meant to be a companion to this summary report. For example, nomenclature of seagrasses in the summary report follows this outreach document. Additional information will be available on the USGS National Wetlands Research Center's Web site at <http://www.nwrc.usgs.gov> and the GMP Web site at <http://www.epa.gov/gmpo/>.

Acknowledgments

The U.S. Geological Survey, National Wetlands Research Center, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Gulf of Mexico Program partnership would like to thank the following scientists and environmental managers for reviewing the Gulf of Mexico seagrass status and trends. Your dedication, time, and expertise are greatly appreciated.

Ron Boustany, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Dr. Ken Dunton, University of Texas

Dr. Steve Jordan, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Dr. Michael Lewis, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Randy Roach, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Frank Sargent, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Southwest Florida Water Management District

Dr. Judy Stout, University of South Alabama

Dr. Sandy Wyllie-Echeverria, University of Washington

Dr. Judy Stout, University of South Alabama

Captain David Yeager, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program

Personnel from the USGS National Wetlands Research Center who played a key role in the production of this document included

Pete Bourgeois, cartography

Helena Schaefer, peer review coordination

Blaire Hutchison, data compilation

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