

Mark your calendars...

- August 3-21—
Freshwater Wetlands
Master Naturalist Pro-
gram (Duval Co.) See
www.masternaturalist.org
to register or for
more information.
- Sept 9-Oct 21: Upland
Habitats Master Natu-
ralist Program (Clay
Co.) See
www.masternaturalist.org
to register or for
more information
- MORE ON PAGE 4....

Summer nears a close...

This summer has found many of us anxiously following news from the Deepwater Horizon site in the Gulf of Mexico. At the time of writing this e-mail, it seems that the leak has been capped, and new oil flows have ceased. However, it is likely that effects of the oil will be felt in and around the Gulf for some time to come. I attended the National Marine Educators' Conference in July, and there were several sessions devoted to oil spills, and the Deepwater Horizon Incident. It was interesting to hear from educators from Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and the Florida Panhandle about their frustration with the way the situation has been portrayed by the media. Several people had witnessed oiled marshes, beaches and/or wildlife, but they stressed that these regions of the Gulf are not totally devastated, but that the damage is somewhat localized. Many people reminded us all that perhaps the best way that the average resident can "help" with the oil spill is to take steps to reduce our individual dependence on fossil fuels... Food for thought... We should also remember that about ten times more oil gets into the oceans each year because of stormwater runoff than does from major spills.



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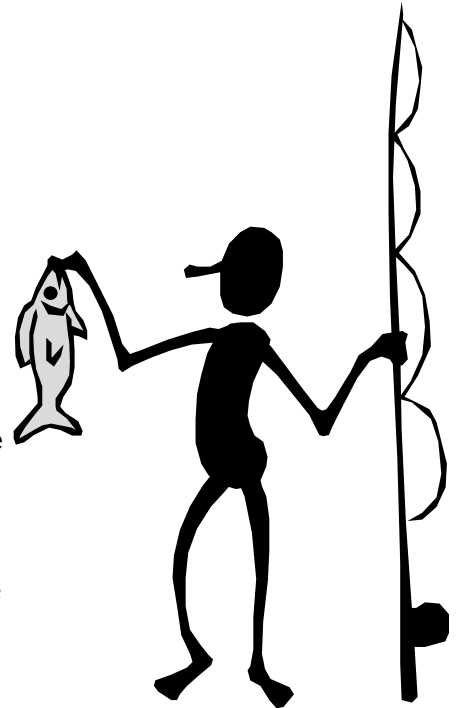
4-H Youth Clean Up "Oil Spills" at Coastal Camp

Twenty 4-H youth participated in oil spill activities during this year's summer 4-H coastal camp which was held June 21-24 at the Whitney Lab. Students aged 8-12 used booms (yarn), sorbents (cotton balls), skimmers (spoons), suction devices (pipettes) and dispersants (detergent) to try to contain and remove a simulated oil spill in a container. They then built remotely-operated vehicles (powered by three small motors with propellers) and used toggle switches to try and steer these vehicles underwater to collect a floating ring. They learned how hard it is to contain and clean up oil spills, and gained a greater appreciation for the difficulties involved in steering an underwater, tethered vehicle. 85% of students were correctly able to explain what dispersants do to oil (they break it into small pieces and make it sink, but do not make the oil go away.)



Fishing Rules Change, and more oil spill info...

About a year ago, a new Florida shoreline fishing permit for saltwater anglers was created. The permit is still required for most Florida adult residents who fish from shore or from a structure attached to shore (e.g. a dock or pier), however it is now available at no cost. You may recall that the reason that the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) created the permit was to prevent Florida residents from having to purchase a more costly federal shoreline fishing permit in the future. The Florida legislature decided earlier this year that the state should still require a state shoreline permit (in lieu of the federal one), but that there should be no charge for that permit. Note that anglers who purchase their permit over the phone or internet will still have to pay a processing fee.



The ongoing oil situation in the Gulf of Mexico has caused the FWC to change some of its fishing regulations. The oyster harvest areas in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties in the western panhandle are now open from July 3 until September 30, as long as the areas are not closed for public health reasons. Under normal circumstances, oyster harvesting is prohibited in all counties in the state during the months of July and August. The closed season in Dixie, Wakulla and Levy counties includes the month June, and includes September for all other Florida counties. Remember that oysters can only legally be taken from areas that are approved for harvest (see www.floridaaquaculture.com for maps of approved harvest areas.) Scallop season in the Gulf was opened early this year, and will run through September 10.

There will be no closed season for blue crab trap harvest in northeast Florida this year. The coastal waters from Nassau to Volusia Counties was scheduled to be closed to trap harvest from August 20-29. These waters will now remain open all year. Similarly, the closures scheduled for southeast, southwest and west central Florida in July and August will be cancelled. At this time, the closures scheduled for January for the St Johns River and panhandle regions have not been cancelled. The cancellation of the crab trap closed seasons is currently **ONLY** for this year. The closures are being waived in order to try and relieve possible economic hardship for fishing communities because of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.



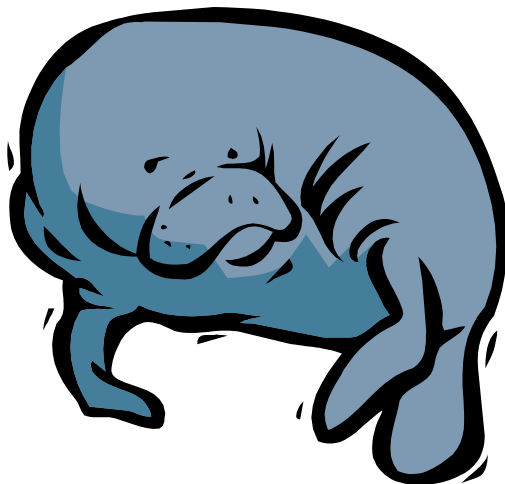
A map showing the current fishing closure area in the Gulf of Mexico can be found at the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region website: <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/>. As of July 22, about one quarter of the Gulf was closed to commercial and recreational fishing.

Protecting yourself and distressed marine mammals

People purchasing seafood from a commercial retailer can feel confident about the safety of that seafood, so there is no reason to avoid purchasing seafood from retailers. People wanting to eat seafood that they have caught themselves should use common sense. If there is obvious oil contamination in the water or on the shoreline, avoid fishing in that area. If the fish that are caught are acting weak, or appear to be behaving strangely, don't eat them. If the meat of the fish or shellfish has a fuel-like odor, it's probably not safe to consume. For more tips about seafood safety and measures that are taken to help ensure seafood safety, check out the link at the University of Florida's Sea Grant website: www.flseagrant.org (under "Florida Oil Spill Resources.")

Many Gulf coast residents and visitors are concerned about potential impacts of oil on marine mammals such as bottlenose dolphins. It is very tempting to try and help a dolphin that appears to be in distress, however the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reminds people that there are several things that should be done to ensure the safety of both the animal and humans. NOAA and its partners ask concerned citizens to follow these rules:

- Report any dead, stranded, or distressed dolphins or other marine mammals to the wildlife hotline at 866-557-1401.
- Do not push the animal back out to sea – this delays examination and treatment, and often results in the animal re-stranding itself in worse condition.
- Do not approach, feed, or swim with the animal.
- Stay with the animal until rescuers arrive, but use caution. Keep a safe distance from the head and tail. Do not pour water over the top of the animal's head, as the animal may drown if water goes into its blowhole.
- Minimize contact with the animal (use gloves if necessary) and avoid inhaling air the animal has breathed out.
- Keep crowds away and noise levels down to avoid causing further stress to the animal. If you can provide shade to a stranded animal, this can be helpful.
- Keep dogs and other pets away from live or dead marine mammals.
- Do not collect any parts from dead marine mammals. This is prohibited under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.





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coastal Florida*

More “Mark your calendars”

- October 8-November 12: Freshwater Wetlands Master Naturalist Program (Volusia Co.) See www.masternaturalist.org to register or for more information.
- October 10-26; Freshwater Wetlands Master Naturalist Program (St Johns Co.) See www.masternaturalist.org to register or for more information.
- October 18-November 6—Coastal Master Naturalist Program (Nassau Co.) See www.masternaturalist.org to register or for more information.
- October 21-23—Florida Association of Science Teachers conference, St Augustine, FL. See www.fastscience.org for exhibitor and presenter information. Registration should be available online by mid-May.
- November 1-5—Exploring our Environment: from the ocean to the river. Adult day camp taught at GTMNERR building in Marineland. See stjohns.ifas.ufl.edu/sea/seagrant.htm for information.

Please check the calendar at <http://calendar.ifas.ufl.edu> for other environmental education programs around the state.

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