



CTA-057-Restoring GOM-GOM

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Vic Ferguson

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FORWARD: This article is a good description of what is happening around the world, and in our back yard. Uncontrolled coastal development/construction, oil and gas activities, etc are two of the largest problems in coastal management. As it happens here, it will happen elsewhere. The worst cast already exists somewhere in the world.....

"We all should realize that there is a problem with our oceans and should be addressed globally, it's our ocean to save.....Executive Director WFCRC

Beyond BP: Restoring Our Gulf of Mexico in the Era of Climate Change



Posted On April 20, 2016 by [Bethany Kraft](#)

The future of the Gulf is being shaped every day. Six years after the explosion of the *Deepwater Horizon* oil rig, which took the lives of 11 workers, the grand experiment in the Gulf of Mexico continues to unfold in a unique crucible of complex science and complicated politics.

Over \$25 billion in [settlements finalized](#) from BP and other parties is earmarked for environmental and economic recovery in the Gulf . While it not nearly enough to fully restore the Gulf, if invested wisely, it is enough to catalyze a transformation in working with nature to enable coastal communities to thrive.

The Gulf of Mexico became an immense emergency room during the hours, days and weeks following the explosion on April 20, 2010. Unprepared for the previously unthinkable worst case, first responders triaged the situation with the controversial use of dispersants applied a mile below the sea's surface. Scientists grappled with the appallingly large knowledge gaps about the Gulf environment and how it would respond to a huge volume of oil. Across the coast, we rallied with coastal communities to respond to the worst environmental disaster in U.S. history, straining the capacity of our nation's disaster response system.



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Six years on, we recognize a unique opportunity born from tragedy that is much bigger than the Gulf itself. It is the nation's first real test case for whether and how we can best restore natural resources at a scale large enough to slow or even reverse the rate of environmental decline. Many places around the country and the globe struggle with environmental degradation exacerbated by development, loss of ecological connectivity and function, and the expected impacts of sea level rise. These places can benefit from the hard lessons we have learned in the Gulf.

By using the restoration funds as a down payment on the larger goal of ecosystem resilience, the Gulf can serve as an example to others grappling with climate change and restoration. This funding represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for ecosystem restoration in a region that has suffered decades of degradation without major federal investments, earning it the name "the national sacrifice zone." The reality is that 31 states across the U.S. send their pollution downstream into the Gulf, including ["dead zone"-causing pollution](#) from farms in the Midwest. Yet the Gulf provides a large part of the seafood we eat, as well as the oil and gas we use. For all that we as a nation rely on the Gulf, we fail to invest the resources to fix it.

The Gulf of Mexico is now on course, for better or worse, to be the leading example of restoring a large ecosystem and the resulting economies that are based on often conflicting uses. However, our needs in the Gulf of Mexico, like many other regions of the world, far outstrip the available resources. We will have to work smarter rather than harder, and adopt a creative and innovative approach to defining the problem and implementing the solution. For ecosystem restoration to fulfill its promise as a key component of responding to climate change, we need a far more comprehensive approach to designing, funding and implementing restoration.

As restoration work gets underway in the Gulf, a number of [guiding principles](#) are critically important in driving the successful investment of billions of dollars. Some of these lessons are being learned the hard way, as state and federal officials grapple with requirements to think comprehensively while being responsive to both local needs and political pressures.

These principles include: transparency and public engagement, the consolidation of multiple restoration activities under one governing body, restoration objectives that take into account the anticipated impacts of climate change, fostering a culture of innovation and adaptation, and recognizing that restoration must be coupled with better policy decisions around development and extractive activities. Collectively, these efforts represent a replicable, scalable structure that can be adapted to restoration efforts in different ecosystems and management frameworks.

If the previous century was characterized by the loss of habitat and ecosystem services that communities rely on to thrive, then the next must be defined by a commitment to working with nature. This partnership will restore ecological functions, stabilize our fisheries and our shorelines and help us adapt to a changing climate.



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*The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing"....**Edmund Burke***