GULF RESTORATION SCIENCE WORKSHOP:

Actions to Promote Coordinated, Science-based Restoration

August 12-13, 2013, Long Beach, MS; Hardy Hall,
University of Southern Mississippi, Gulf Park Campus,
730 East Beach Boulevard, Long Beach, MS 39560
http://bit.ly/gomurcrestoreworkshop

Deepwater Horizon spill contolled burn (Getty Image)

PURPOSE:

The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill (DWHOS) in 2010 was the largest, most expensive and complex spill in U.S. history, further confounded by decades of degradation of Gulf of Mexico coastal and marine environment from a variety of human-induced and natural stress factors. To help address the complex task of restoring the Gulf environment, the RESTORE Act settlement of damages requires that restoration efforts be based on "the best available science." The Act does not provide a roadmap for how the many restoration science programs accomplish this mandate. With support from the Walton Family Foundation, the Gulf of Mexico University Research Collaborative (GOMURC) coordinated a workshop in August 2013 with participants from DWHOS-funded restoration programs, scientists and managers intended to recommend ways to integrate "best available science" (BAS), and promote program engagement with the environmental science and management communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

"Best Available Science" program tasks include:
- Provide coordinated science-based framework for decision-making (e.g., science plans);
- Provide scientific support for successful implementation of restoration projects (e.g., research, technology and monitoring);
- Develop required tools, models, methodologies, and protocols;
- Communicate scientific analyses and uncertainties to inform decision-making.

Priority actions to help integrate BAS in DWHOS ecosystem restoration programs include:
- Establish science staff and advisory bodies to assist program management with science-related tasks, e.g., science plans (project, program, Gulf-wide) and independent peer review to guide all phases of restoration (planning, implementation and evaluation);
- Support mechanisms that encourage integration, communication and collaboration among restoration science programs, e.g.: conceptual models that identify knowledge gaps, and coordinate program roles; unified data management policies, plans and gateway for data and synthesis products;
- Build on existing regional capabilities to enhance and sustain Gulf-wide, long-term, coastal and ocean observing system to support both project and ecosystem-level monitoring;
- Engage and educate constituents through dedicated organizational elements and plans; and support for face-to-face, virtual, and printed materials that explain clearly the importance of science to successful Gulf-wide restoration.

Previous and on-going regional programs, such as Exxon Valdez and Greater Everglades restoration programs learned much from trial and error. Gulf restoration should benefit from these lessons that led to dedicated science organizations and plans, commitment to observations and modeling required for local to ecosystem scale monitoring, and engaged constituents committed to a healthy Gulf ecosystem.

Full report on-line at http://bit.ly/gomurcrestoreworkshop.

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