



MEDIA RELEASE

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For more information:

Chris Smith (504) 884-4008

Aaron Viles (225) 615-0346

LESSONS FROM THE SCHOOL OF BIG STORMS
Hurricanes past teach us how to prepare for the future

NEW ORLEANS – The severity of hurricane seasons in the present and future can be minimized if the lessons of hurricane seasons past are heeded, two environmental groups conclude in a new report released to coincide with the start of Hurricane Season 2006.

The Gulf Restoration Network and the Sierra Club Gulf Coast Environmental Restoration Task Force have collaborated to produce *The School of Big Storms: The High Cost of Compromising Our Natural Defenses and the Benefits of Protecting Them*.

The report examines the layers of protection nature provides – from barrier islands to natural flooding cycles – and what hurricanes of the past have taught us about the consequences of compromising and undermining natural systems.

“We hope to avoid making the same bad mistakes over and over that put our communities at greater and greater risk,” says Cynthia Sarthou, executive director of the Gulf Restoration Network. “If we allow the continued destruction of our natural barriers, such as coastal wetlands and barrier islands, then we take away nature’s ability to protect us by reducing the strength and impact of hurricanes.”

“*The School of Big Storms* provides examples of lessons that, when heeded, will benefit all communities on the Gulf Coast,” says Leslie March, author of the report and member of the Sierra Club Gulf Coast Environmental Restoration Task Force. “The lessons are a guide for public officials, government agencies and citizens living along the Gulf Coast. If we can learn

from the lessons that past hurricanes have taught us, we will protect our natural coastal environment and the people and communities that live here.”

The lesson learned from Mississippi involves the Chandeleur Islands. These barrier islands along the Mississippi Coast act as shock absorbers, reducing the size of the waves created by hurricanes. All of the barrier islands on the Mississippi coast were severely damaged during the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons. Their ability to rebuild is threatened because of dredging for navigational channels. Also, recent interest in opening oil and gas exploration near the islands may cause more damage to the islands. The lesson learned: barrier islands should be protected because their ability to protect the mainland far outweighs all other considerations.

Examples of other lessons from *The School of Big Storms* include:

- Allowing development in the flood plain or upriver from a flood-prone area only puts more people at risk.
- Developing plans to reduce flooding impact are only successful when they are not weakened as a result of political pressure.
- Allowing navigational projects or development that destroys natural storm barriers will only worsen the impacts from hurricanes.
- Encouraging development that is set back from the water front will protect communities.
- Exempting development from building codes or other storm protection requirements only weakens a community’s defenses.
- Protecting the natural habitat for endangered species along the coast also will protect communities.
- Strengthening oil and gas critical infrastructure will help protect people and the environment.

Copies of *The School of Big Storms* are available at _____ . The report can be viewed at

<http://healthygulf.org> or www.sierraclub.org.

The Gulf Restoration Network is a diverse network of individuals and local, regional and national groups committed to uniting and empowering people to protect and restore the resources of the Gulf Coast region. Founded in 1994, GRN has members in all five Gulf Coast states. GRN plays a pivotal role in providing members with the technical assistance, Gulf-wide strategic collaboration, and campaign support needed to successfully address environmental threats in their communities. For more information, visit: <http://healthygulf.org>.

The Sierra Club's 750,000 members work to protect communities and the planet. The Club is America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The Gulf Coast Environmental Restoration Task Force is made up of volunteers and staff from the Lone Star (Texas), Delta (Louisiana), Mississippi and Alabama chapters of the Sierra Club representing more than 20,000 Sierra Club members. For more information, visit the organization's website: www.sierraclub.org.