

Area covered: **United States GULF OF MAINE**

Title of Forum: ***Protecting our Coastal and Offshore Waters***

Convener: Dr. Susan Shaw, Executive Director
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Date of Forum: November 1, 2002

Place: Blue Hill, Maine

- *Number of Attendees:* 51 representing scientists, state and national agencies, non-governmental organizations, and businesses. Several hundred invitations (mail and email) were sent within region.
- *Media coverage – public education:* Local and regional print and television coverage before and at the event. MERI also used many different organizations' list serve connections, including many that were not Gulf of Maine related.
- *Was there good exchange of information from the general public to scientists and scientists to public?* This was more of a forum of "experts" from the various sectors.
- *As a result of forum, do more public and land-based managers understand concept of the Gulf of Maine watershed than before?* Yes, but most attendees were experts who already had this knowledge.
- *As a result of forum, do more public and land-based managers understand concept of the "water cycle" than before?* Yes, but most attendees were experts who already had this knowledge
- *Any follow-on activities?* Many participants already work together on GOM Council/ GPAC/ Seagrant/NOAA projects but better cross-connections were established among attendees. **There is a full Summary of this Forum available on line at www.meriresearch.org.**
- *How was the matrix completed?* Breakouts by sections of the matrix.

Key Priority Issues Identified For U.S. Gulf Of Maine (see matrix)

The "severe" problems noted that were Gulf wide were:

- (1) Water quality: toxic contaminants in tissue in coastal and estuarine areas; human pathogens associated with sewage, harmful algal blooms in all areas.
- (2) Severely impacted habitats and species: benthic habitat, seagrass, wetlands, breeding and spawning areas due to direct and indirect impacts of coastal development and human onshore and offshore activities.
- (3) Changes in resource use: shifts in targeted species, loss of fisheries diversity, influx of finfish aquaculture, invasive species and impacts from tourism and recreation

Special Note: Those present felt the matrix exercise was a constructive exercise. However, there were several limitations were noted: lack of time; gaps in knowledge; inaccuracies of the process; and incomplete or missing knowledge due to some experts not being at the Forum.

Major Conclusions

- (1) To produce an ecosystem health assessment, scientists need to continue to organize large amounts of historical and recent data across scales and between disciplines and sectors.
- (2) Recognition that "top-down" strategies to protect the Gulf environment will ultimately fail if not accompanied by "on-the-ground" support and resource commitment.
- (3) Need to continue to build multi-sector networks across jurisdictions and increase awareness and participation.
- (4) Need to build political will to support actions at all levels.