MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES
1141 Bayview Avenue, Biloxi, Mississippi 39530

News Release

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12-15-JGL
March 15, 2012 **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

MDMR to Present Science Seminar: Gentle Giants of Mississippi and the Northern Gulf

BILOXI, Miss. – The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) Shrimp and Crab Bureau, along with the Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) will present a free seminar entitled "Gentle Giants of Mississippi and the Northern Gulf" March 22, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., in the first floor meeting room of the Bolton State Building, 1141 Bayview Ave., Biloxi.

The free seminar will begin with a brief overview by NERR Manager David Ruple and continue with presentations on tarpon, whale sharks, sturgeon and manatees in Mississippi and the northern Gulf.

University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast Research Lab (GCRL) Senior Scientist Jim Franks will give a presentation on tarpon, one of the most important game fish species in the Gulf of Mexico. Franks will discuss what important aspects of tarpon's biology and habitat requirements have been revealed by research conducted by the GCRL and funded by the MDMR.

Jennifer McKinney of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries will speak about the whale shark, the largest fish in the ocean. She will provide background information on the biology and ecology of the species, and later share highlights of research conducted in the northern Gulf, including the GCRL whale shark sighting survey, satellite tagging and large feeding aggregations.

GCRL Professor Mark Peterson will provide an overview of Gulf sturgeon, a threatened species, and discuss research from the Pascagoula River, associated areas of the Mississippi Sound and Pearl River and Florida populations.

Lastly, Allen Aven, a Ph.D. student from the Dauphin Island Sea Lab (DISL), will present research on the distribution and ecology of the West Indian manatee. Aven will also share information on the habits of this fascinating animal that have been recently revealed by innovative research conducted by the DISL's Manatee Sighting Network.

Everyone is welcome to attend. Please contact NERR Coastal Training Program Coordinator Avia Huisman at Avia.Huisman@dmr.ms.gov or 228-475-7047 if you have questions about this seminar.

The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources is dedicated to enhancing, protecting and conserving marine interests of the state by managing all marine life, public trust wetlands, adjacent uplands and waterfront areas to provide for the optimal commercial, recreational, educational and economic uses of these resources consistent with environmental concerns and social changes. Visit the DMR online at www.dmr.ms.gov.

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Mississippi Department of Marine Resources Science Seminar:
Gentle Giants of Mississippi & the Northern Gulf

Science Seminar Announcement

Thursday March 22, 2012 ~ 4:00pm - 6:00pm ~ 1141 Bayview Avenue, Biloxi, MS 39530

The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) and the Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) invite you to attend a Science Seminar featuring research on Tarpon, Whale Sharks, Sturgeon, and Manatees in Mississippi and the Northern Gulf.

Agenda

4:00 **Welcome and Overview**– David Ruple, Manager, Grand Bay NERR

4:05 **Tarpon**– Jim Franks, Senior Scientist, USM Gulf Coast Research Lab (GCRL)

4:30 **Whale Shark Research in the Northern Gulf of Mexico**– Jennifer McKinney, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF)

4:55 **Break** (5min)

5:00 **Gulf Sturgeon of Mississippi Sound: Links to Local Rivers, Estuaries and Barrier Islands... and Other States!**– Mark Peterson, Professor, USM Gulf Coast Research Lab (GCRL)

5:25 **Shallow Water Phantoms: Understanding Manatees in the Northern Gulf of Mexico**– Allen Aven, PhD Student, Dauphin Island Sea Lab (DISL)

5:50 **Questions and Wrap-up**

6:00 **Adjourn!**

*****Refreshments will be served*****

Young Tarpon in Coastal Mississippi Estuaries: Seasonal Occurrence and Habitat Use– *Jim Franks, USM GCRL*. The tarpon (*Megalops atlanticus*) is one of the most important game fish species in the Gulf of Mexico. Jim will discuss how research conducted by GCRL and funded by the MDMR is revealing important aspects of the biology and habitat requirements of young tarpon that occur in Mississippi estuaries.

Whale Shark Research in the Northern Gulf of Mexico– *Jennifer McKinney, LDWF*. The whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*) is the largest fish in the ocean. Jennifer will begin by providing background information on whale shark biology and ecology. She will then share highlights from whale shark research in the northern Gulf of Mexico, including the GCRL whale shark sighting survey, satellite tagging, and large feeding aggregations.

Gulf Sturgeon of Mississippi Sound: Links to Local Rivers, Estuaries and Barrier Islands... and Other States!– *Mark Peterson, USM GCRL*. The Gulf Sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus desotoi*) is listed at the state and federal level as a threatened species. Dr. Peterson will provide an overview of the Gulf Sturgeon and discuss research from the Pascagoula River and associated coastal area of the MS Sound. He will also discuss data from the Pearl River and Florida populations.

Shallow Water Phantoms: Understanding Manatees in the Northern Gulf of Mexico – *Allen Aven, DISL*. Little is known of the West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) in the northern Gulf. Allen will discuss research into its distribution and ecology and share research by DISL's Manatee Sighting Network (MSN). Through innovative research and public support, MSN has been able to shed new light on the habits of these fascinating animals.

Questions ? Contact Avia Huisman, Grand Bay NERR Coastal Training Program Coordinator: Avia.Huisman@dmr.ms.gov or (228)475-7047

Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

First Floor Commission Meeting Room
Mississippi Department of Marine Resources
1141 Bayview Avenue, Biloxi, MS 39530

Mississippi Department of Marine Resources Science Seminar:

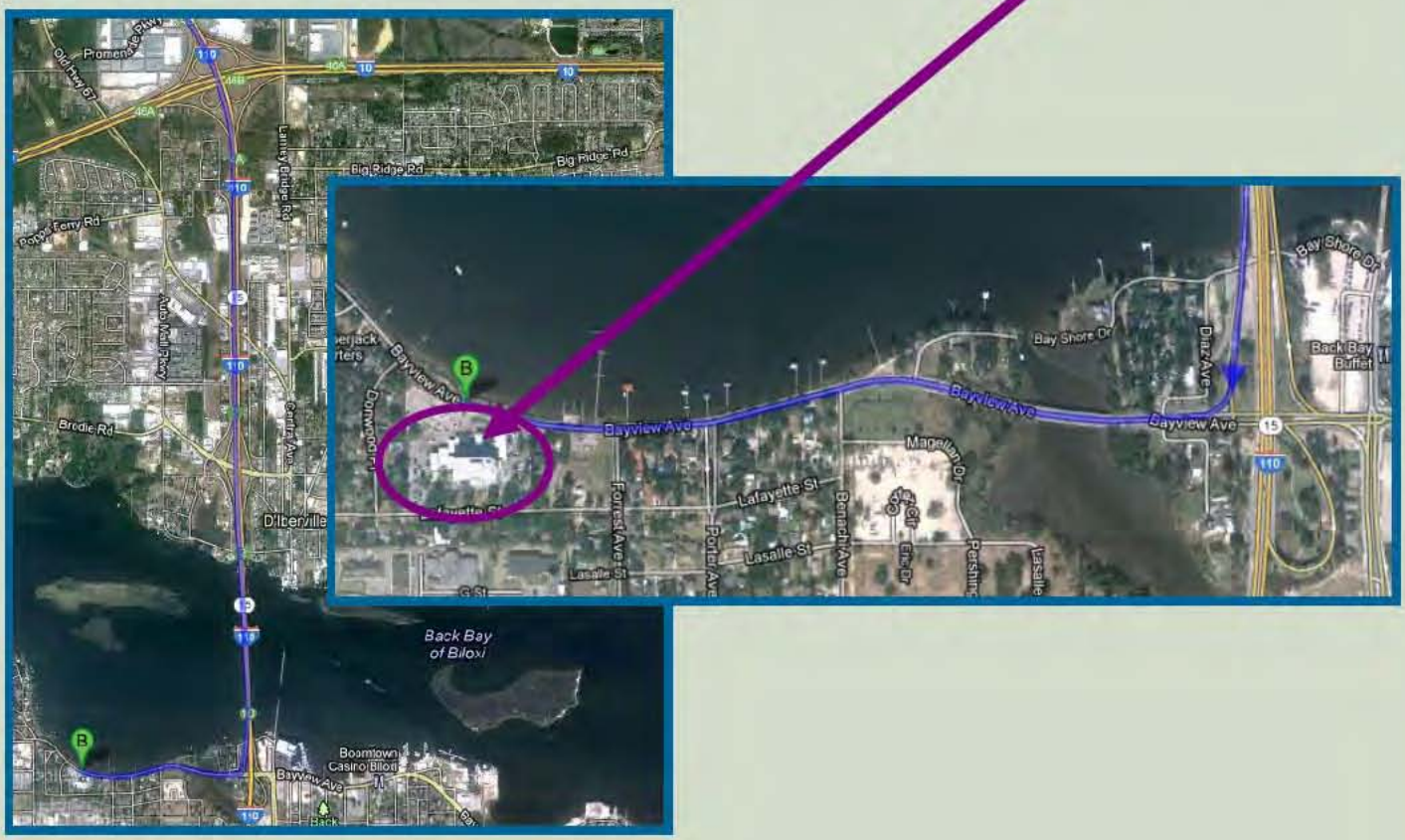
Gentle Giants of Mississippi & the Northern Gulf

First Floor Commission Meeting Room

Mississippi Department of Marine Resources

1141 Bayview Avenue, Biloxi, MS 39530

- From I-10, take Exit 46A (I-110) and head south.
- After crossing the bridge over Back Bay of Biloxi, take Exit 1D for Bayview Ave.
- Keep right at the fork, follow signs for Bayview Ave W, and merge onto Bayview Ave.
- Continue down Bayview Ave for approximately one mile, the MDMR Building will be on your left-hand side.



Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Questions about the Event? **Contact Avia Huisman at: Avia.Huisman@dmr.ms.gov or (228)475-7047**