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# Gulf of Mexico Program

Office of Public Affairs ♦ Bldg. 1100, Rm. 220F ♦ Stennis Space Center, Miss. 39529-6000  
(228) 688-1159 ♦ Fax: (228) 688-2709 ♦ E-Mail: hines-smith.terry@epa.gov ♦ www.epa.gov/gmpo

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **MISS. DMR WINS 1<sup>ST</sup> PLACE GULF GUARDIAN AWARD FOR DERELICT CRAB TRAP REMOVAL PROGRAM**

STENNIS SPACE CENTER, Miss. – The Gulf of Mexico Program recently announced that, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources will receive a first place Gulf Guardian Award for 2003 in the Government Category for their Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program. The award will be presented to DMR representatives at the Southern States Environmental Conference and Exhibition scheduled Sept. 23-25, in Biloxi.

Four years ago the Gulf of Mexico Program developed the Gulf Guardian awards as a method of recognizing and honoring the businesses, community groups, individuals, and agencies that are taking positive steps to keep the Gulf healthy, beautiful and productive. The Gulf of Mexico Program began in 1988 to protect, restore, and maintain the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem in economically sustainable ways. Award entries were received from Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. A first, second, and third place award are given each year in six categories – individual, business, youth and education, nonprofit organizations, government, and partnership efforts.

“Our oceans and coasts are precious resources,” said Jimmy Palmer, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Regional Administrator in Atlanta. “Coastal and marine waters provide some of the most diverse and biologically productive habitats on the planet,” he added. “This year’s Gulf Guardian Award winners are doing their part to keep these valuable resources healthy and productive.”

“Derelict crab traps can pose a serious navigational hazard to boaters and may be a danger to marine and aquatic life. The closed crab season allowed us to remove these traps from Mississippi’s marine waters and collect valuable data about the quantity and type of marine life that may become ensnared in these abandoned traps,” said DMR Executive Director William Walker. “Our Shrimp & Crab Bureau staff have logged countless hours over the last four years removing and recycling derelict crab traps. It is gratifying to see their efforts recognized with a Gulf Guardian Award.”

Initiated in late 1999 jointly with the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, the derelict crab trap removal program was set up to address the problem with derelict crab traps in the Mississippi Sound. A derelict trap is defined as a trap that is un-buoyed, unmarked, and not actively fished. These traps are lost due to many factors including floats that are cut by boat propellers, caught in shrimp trawls, and storms. Since the start of the project, DMR has removed 3,600 traps in the waters of the Mississippi Sound by agency efforts alone, and with the help of volunteers during the first ever Mississippi closed season for crab traps, another 1,454 lost traps were retrieved in only five days. Traps are recycled at a local scrap metal facility.

The Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program was funded in part by the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality through the Mississippi Coastal Impact Assistance Program. CIAP is a federally sponsored program that provides money for the state and counties to address statewide coastal issues.

Gulf of Mexico Program Office Acting Director Bryon O. Griffith said, "Our 2003 Gulf Guardian Award winners are to be commended for taking action to preserve and restore the Gulf of Mexico." "One out of every six jobs in the United States is marine-related, generating \$54 billion in goods and services annually. Protecting these waters makes sense economically, aesthetically, and environmentally. Acting as one community to protect our one and only Gulf of Mexico is essential to our way of life and our standard of living."

For a list of all the Gulf Guardian Award winners for 2003, visit the Gulf of Mexico Program web site at <http://www.epa.gov/gmpo> and click on the Gulf Guardian Award button on the left.

The Gulf of Mexico Program is underwritten by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is a non-regulatory, inclusive consortium of state and federal government agencies and representatives of the business and agricultural community, fishing industry, scientists, environmentalists, and community leaders from all five Gulf States. The Gulf Program seeks to improve the environmental health of the Gulf in concert with economic development.

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*Editor's Note: For more information about the Gulf Guardian Awards and the Gulf of Mexico Program, call Terry Hines Smith at 228-688-1159. For more information about the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources and the Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program, call Lauren Thompson at 228-374-5000.*