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Gulf of Mexico Program

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AU SCHOOL OF FORESTRY WINS 3RD PLACE GULF GUARDIAN AWARD

STENNIS SPACE CENTER, Miss. – The Gulf of Mexico Program recently announced that, Auburn University's School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences will receive a third place Gulf Guardian Award for 2003 in the Civic and Nonprofit Organization Category for the Sustainability of Natural Resources Across the Urban-Rural Interface: An Integrated Approach. The award will be presented to Auburn 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.”

“We are very excited about receiving the Gulf Guardian Award and believe that our assessment of socioeconomic and environmental effects of urban sprawl will aid in understanding how to protect the Gulf from the impacts of rising human populations,” said Dr. Graeme Lockaby, project manager.

The project was initiated in 2000 in response to threats posed to water quality, forest land, and other natural resources by very high rates of land development in the southeastern United States. The study is situated within the basin of the Chattahoochee River, an input source to the Gulf of Mexico through the Florida Panhandle and uses a creative approach to link the economic drivers of development to water quality impacts. Approximately 30 Auburn University faculty and students are involved along with participants from Oregon State University, the U.S. Forest Service, the city of Columbus, Ga., and several citizens groups.

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 Sustainability of Natural Resources Project, call Graeme Lockaby at 334-844-1054.