Dr. Gibeaut testifies at hearing on erosion

Source: TAMUCC Coastlines

August 2007 - Three TAMUCC faculty members testified at the U.S. House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee's Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans hearing on the impact of erosion on coastal communities held on South Padre Island in July.

Dr. Jim Gibeaut with the University’s Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies made a presentation on the impact of development on North Padre and Mustang Islands which are among the last barrier islands in the world to be developed. Gibeaut told the subcommittee that the Texas coast is eroding in large part due to the fact that sand which was once carried to the ocean by rivers is now being deposited behind dams or in coastal bays and estuaries instead of being carried to the open coast.

Dr. Jennifer Smith-Engle, a professor in the College of Science and Technology, Dr.
Gary Jeffress, director of the Conrad Blucher Institute, and Dr. Stacy Lyle, an assistant professor with the Blucher Institute, provided critical background for remarks on coastal erosion made by Precinct 4 County Commissioner Chuck Cazalas and assisted with his presentation.

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**DR. PAUL MONTAGNA**

**HRI ENDOWED CHAIR FOR ECOSYSTEM STUDIES & MODELING**

Dr. Paul Montagna became HRI’s third endowed chair when he came onboard in 2006 to head up the Ecosystem Studies and Modeling program. Before joining the HRI staff, he worked with the University of Texas Marine Science Institute in Port Aransas. Montagna and his staff are studying how organisms control and regulate marine ecosystems and coastal environments. Much of their research information is used to help guide resource management decisions. Their day-to-day work includes collecting data on bottom-living organisms and on water quality. Using this data, they study the effects of freshwater inflow, water quality and contaminants. Much of Dr. Montagna’s research information is used to help guide resource management decisions.

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**DR. THOMAS SHIRLEY**

**HRI ENDOWED CHAIR FOR MARINE BIODIVERSITY & CONSERVATION SCIENCE**

Dr. Tom Shirley became HRI’s second endowed chair in July 2005, heading the Marine Biodiversity & Conservation Science program. Dr. Shirley has had a productive career conducting research and participating in graduate education in the marine sciences. Dr. Shirley has published extensively and more than 20 graduate students have received their degrees with him as their advisor. Dr. Shirley has described new species of invertebrates from different phyla from around the world, including the Arctic, Antarctic, Gulf of Mexico, Mediterranean, Philippines and Alaska. He has been the principal investigator on 11 manned submersible research projects, has participated in more than 40 research cruises, and has extensive scuba, sub and remotely operated vehicle (ROV) experience. Most recently Dr. Shirley has been exploring assemblages of animals on deep sea corals and seamounts in the Gulf of Alaska and Hawaiian Islands.

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Dr. Greg Stunz became HRI's Endowed Associate Research Professor in the area of Ocean and Human Health in September 2007. Dr. Stunz is an Associate Professor of Marine Biology in the College of Science and Technology. His main research interests are in marine biology with an emphasis in fisheries and marine ecology. More specifically, he is interested in understanding the relative value of habitat for aquatic organisms. Much of his research is directed towards determining temporal and spatial distributions of fishes as well as the causes and consequences of habitat use. His research projects include ecological studies in the Costa Rican rainforests, the rocky intertidal zones of Maine, tropical Caribbean coral reefs, and Gulf of Mexico's estuarine and near-shore waters.