**HRI Initiatives for a Sustainable Gulf of Mexico**

The Economic Value of a Healthy Gulf of Mexico. There are many different human activities taking place in the coastal zones of the Gulf of Mexico. Some of these activities, such as recreation and commercial fishing, rely directly on the presence and quality of natural habitats whereas others, such as oil and gas production and shipping, occur in the coastal zone simply because that is where the resource is. During the next three years, HRI will develop data and procedures for mapping ecosystem services of coastal habitats and assigning socio-economic values to these resources. This effort will lead to better management policy by providing information on the costs, benefits, and trade-offs of activities affecting the health and sustainability of the Gulf.

Coping with Hurricanes and Sea Level Rise. Sea level is rising along most of the Gulf coast and we are likely entering a period of more frequent and intense hurricanes. This is occurring at the same time coastal populations are increasing compared to other regions. During the next three years, HRI will conduct pilot studies on the biophysical and socioeconomic impacts of sea-level rise, coastal erosion, and hurricanes. HRI will offer alternatives to policy developers and decision-makers for how to develop the coast with a goal of maintaining long-term resiliency.

A Framework for a Sustainable Gulf of Mexico. HRI hosted the first Gulf summit to focus attention on the economic and ecological health of the Gulf of Mexico. The successful summit established a baseline to evaluate future success but faltered in efforts to continue the process. HRI will reenergize the concept by re-instanting the four working groups established for the summit: Environment, Governance, Economics, and Resiliency, within the next twelve months. The charge for the workgroups would be to: Identify emerging conservation issues affecting the sustainability of the Gulf and develop an ongoing evaluation tool for the Gulf with which we can regularly assess progress towards sustainability.

Building International Partnerships and Breaking Cultural Barriers. If we are to address critical conservation and economic issues for the Gulf as a whole we will have to reduce both language and cultural barriers. One of the most effective ways to do so is with exchange programs that help build and support governance frameworks. They need to be real exchange programs. All too often we in the USA tend to think only in terms of bringing individuals here and not so much as going to Mexico, or wherever. That is a real mistake. We each have much to offer, both intellectually and culturally, that is important to our overall chances of success. We will find that we have much in common. HRI is in the process of developing and implementing a student exchange program between the USA and Mexico within the next twelve months that includes: signing a formal agreement with University Veracruzana to include exchange programs and joint research; Initiating a graduate level exchange program with at least ten students
(five from Mexico and five from the USA) by August 2009; and over the next two years using the Furgason Fellowship funding of $1.5 million as a basis to raise an additional $1.5 million in Mexico to underwrite a post-doctoral exchange program.

Science for Citizens. Over the next ten years we have many important decisions to make that will affect our economic and environmental future in the Gulf of Mexico. HRI's goal will be to use the best available technology to make our science available to the broadest array of individuals and organizations that are addressing these conservation issues. Our first priority will be environmental water needs for Texas. We will build web-based systems that will incorporate the best available science into an array decision-making tools that will be accessible by both citizens and decision-makers. The specific focus being the watershed based, citizen committees, designated by the Texas legislature to determine the instream flows for rivers and freshwater inflows for estuaries needed to protect their ecological health. If all have equal and ready access to the best available science upon which to make these important decisions, debate can be better focused on policy alternatives, rather than debates about science. If we can accomplish this, it will be a model that will be the foundation of how HRI will deliver science into the whole array of decision-making processes that affect conservation.