

Environmental Exchange

A publication of the Citizens' Environmental Coalition

Special Edition:
Earth Day
April 2004

The Houston-Galveston area's most comprehensive coverage of environmental news and events.

Gulf red snapper caught in regulatory limbo

by Erika McDonald
Staff Writer

A federal plan to revive the dwindling population of red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico, which has caused controversy for nearly a decade, may come to a head later this month. The fate of the species currently remains tangled in competing business interests, government regulations, debated scientific data, and conservation concerns. According to the US

Department of Health, unless the snapper population increases by 20 percent, the species will not survive in the wild. Red snapper was classified as severely overfished by Congress in 1997. Under the Magnuson Stevens Fisheries Management Act of 1996, the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council is required to restore snapper to a healthy level within 30 years.

The council's current plan proposes main-

taining a limit set in 1998 on how much snapper may be fished each season, while focusing management efforts on reducing the amount of snapper caught in shrimp trawls. The maximum allowable catch is nine million pounds per year, a ceiling conservation groups would like to see lowered to six million.

More than 50 conservation and social advocacy groups belong to The Gulf Coast

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Hope Against Hope: A Conversation with Jane Goodall

A worldwide speaking tour brings famed primatologist Jane Goodall to Houston in April. Prior to her visit, CEC reporter Erika McDonald spoke with Goodall about her recent travels, the depletion of global natural resources, and why she believes people can save the planet.

I know that you periodically return to Gombe, the site of your original work. What strikes you most about how human activity has impacted chimpanzees there over the years?

Well the huge change that has happened since the early days is that, outside the (Gombe) national park, the forests have now gone. They've been clear cut and there are more people living on the land than the land can support. There are refugees coming in, as well as the typical population growth we've seen around the world since the '60s. So the Gombe chimpanzees are now effectively cut off from others of their kind. Also, there are fewer of them because, for one reason, there has been some poaching as a result of refugees from the Congo who eat chimpanzee meat. Secondly, humans have impinged on their habitat right up to the boundaries of the park, so

we are losing chimpanzees because they catch all known human diseases. There are only about 100 left and that is not a very big population. It's a very small gene pool. So we have to try to create some corridors and buffer zones, and the corridors hopefully will enable the chimps to move out of the park and meet up with other remnant groups around the park.

You recently visited the Goulougo Triangle where scientists are studying a chimp population that has had virtually no human contact. They have, in fact, been described as the last wild chimps on the planet. What differences did you notice between these chimps and the Gombe chimps that might indicate something about how the stress of habitat loss distorts animal behavior and ultimately impacts a species?

The major difference was the feeling of being in that untouched forest and seeing



Photo courtesy of the Jane Goodall Institute
animals who have never been hunted—it's sort of a utopian forest, in a way. There are very few places like that left on the earth. So it makes you feel very determined to save other huge areas of forests and protect the animals there so that they, too, can live without fear. In Gombe, what we are seeing in the south, it seems as a result of recent disease, the entire community may have gone. It's a horrible thing to say and

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Environmental Exchange

The Environmental Exchange is published by the Citizens' Environmental Coalition (CEC), an information clearinghouse and communications network for environmental issues in the Houston-Galveston area. The CEC mission is to improve the quality of life and health in the region through education, dialogue and collaboration. CEC serves the general public by bringing many diverse groups together to build awareness and stimulate discussion about environmental issues in the region. Programs include forums that give a balanced perspective on environmental issues, and information vehicles that enhance understanding.

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Perspectives

Despite misperceptions, Earth Day celebrations really about people



by
David Crossley,
The Gulf Coast Institute

Earth Day has been widely perceived as a time when people who care more about the Earth than about people gather to celebrate some pagan adoration of trees and birds while they denigrate American capitalism and the government they claim is subservient to it.

On the other hand, those of us who celebrate the day see it as a time to teach and learn, and be awash in optimism.

Carl Anthony, an African-American program officer for the Ford Foundation, said recently that the first Earth Day was the last day of the civil rights movement. He said a lot of people thought it might be easier to improve the physical environment than to change people's hearts and minds about their fellow human beings.

But the deepest difficulty is the perception that environmentalists would be just as happy if people would only obliterate themselves and leave the Earth alone. Surely there is a trace of that in the movement, but generally people who care about the environment have motives centered on their own welfare and the welfare of family, friends, and colleagues.

Environmentalism at its best is hugely selfish. In my own environmental meditations, I have thoughts that usually start with shrimp, which I love, and my kids, whom I also love. The shrimp thoughts are about that delicate cauldron of life at the edge of the seas where much of the food chain begins to be visible and delicious to us. We environmentalists tend to know about that chain and all the connections that nurture our lives, including nurturing by beauty and by sound and smells—the visceral thrill of rain and lakes and snow and wind. Through that view, one cannot easily discern which of the species and actors in the world ma-

chine are pointless and unnecessary. One develops a nagging fear that some crucial link could be cut willy-nilly and the whole game would start crashing.

But the world isn't easily brought to its knees. A vast number of species have gone extinct, and the Earth's chemistry, temperature, solidity, and other elements are always changing no matter what. Obviously, the fear should be that we humans will be harmed, might be brought to extinction, not the Earth. The Earth will be fine in the long term.

So it is our health, safety, and welfare we are rightly concerned about. If it takes a spotted owl to catch a rabid rat and that keeps us from being overrun by rabid rats, let's take care of that owl. Every environmental discussion and action should be based on the health, safety, and welfare of people.

Of course, it's true that we would have to make advances in human trust and understanding for people who fear for their lives where snakes are concerned to accept from some other human being the wisdom that the snake, too, is whittling down the world population of rabid rats.

Perhaps we should consider how the words "earth" and "world" differ in our minds. It seems, essentially, that the planet harboring life is Earth, and the world is the amalgam of life and Earth, which includes the intelligence and energy that all living beings possess.

If it had been called World Day from the beginning, it might have been dedicated not only to nature, but to peace, civil rights, and the whole human dilemma. But it probably wouldn't have caught fire the way Earth Day did; in terms of strategy and mission. The correct branding message was chosen for the moment in which Earth Day was launched.

This suggests some consideration may be due about whether the time has come to think more about our world, while we're celebrating Earth.

Visit the Gulf Coast Institute on the Web at
www.gulfcoastideas.org

Historical Survey: Houston Earth Day 101

by Charles Stillman
Contributing Writer

In the late 1960s, Wisconsin Sen. Gaylord Nelson began to raise awareness for audiences across the country concerning environmental degradation. In 1970, Dennis Hays organized the country's first Earth Day. Very little is known of Houston's celebrations prior to the 20th anniversary of Earth Day in 1990, when as many as 40,000 people attended an event in Hermann Park.

That year, the national Earth Day Foundation tapped the CEC to direct Houston's event, which blended entertainment that included bands such as Joe Ely and the Fabulous Thunderbirds with environmental consciousness-raising by speakers such as agriculture commissioner Jim Hightower. Unfortunately, the trash facilities at the park were not sufficient for the crowd and the grounds were littered after the event, an image captured on video and displayed on the local television news. David Gresham, current executive director of the organization, explained that the CEC board in 1990 decided, thereafter, they would leave event grounds cleaner than they had found them.

The following six years, from 1991 to 1996, Earth Day celebrations were held at the Museum of Natural Science and later around the reflecting pool at City Hall.

From 1997-2001, the CEC partnered with local radio station KRBE, which at that time had a listening audience of 700,000 people. The first collaborative year, Top 40 musical acts, such as the Barenaked Ladies and Toad the Wet Sprocket, drew tens of thousands to the event at Buffalo Bayou

Park. Some 20 nonprofit organizations set up booths on a variety of environmental issues. Unfortunately, the environment took a back seat to the entertainment. The message of Earth Day found itself competing with and eventually drowned out by the musical acts. Alesha Herrera, a CEC board member and the current chair of Houston Earth Day, says the board tried to work with KRBE to bring the focus of Earth Day 1998 back to the promotion of environmental awareness and education. She said that on the surface, KRBE seemed very receptive to the CEC's concerns. Yet for the subsequent four years, the KRBE-CEC Earth Day duplicated the crowd-pleasing formula of the 1997 event despite repeated efforts by environmentalists to reorient the celebration. There was also an ongoing dispute about the failure of KRBE to contract with greener vendors. In January 2002, the CEC requested that KRBE either put the Earth back in Earth Day or stop referring to the event as an Earth Day concert. When KRBE balked, the CEC severed its relationship with the station.

The CEC partnered with the Rice University Environmental Club to host the 2002 Houston Earth Day on campus. KRBE partnered with Green Mountain Energy to continue its own Earth Day concert tradition. At Rice, approximately 2,500 people attended the 2002 event.

More than 60 booths were sponsored by local non-profit environmental organizations, green businesses, and other vendors. Local and global environmental issues took center stage as the focus of Houston Earth Day once again became the Earth. The Rice-CEC partnership continues this year.

Other partners for this year's event include the Houston Museum of Natural Science, and Kids on the Bayou. The primary sponsor this year is Marathon Oil, with Waste Management also providing funds for the event.

Despite having returned Houston Earth Day to its roots, the CEC is dependent upon corporate funding for the undertaking. In the late 1990s, CEC's Earth Days were sponsored by Enron. Corporate sponsorship of Houston Earth Day has been criticized by some who see corporations, especially those that seriously pollute, as using their sponsorships to seem more environmentally friendly than they really are. Critics also charge that heavily polluting companies, such as those in the oil and gas sector, would do more public good by upgrading their plants and refineries to reduce harmful emissions than by employing public relations campaigns to promote a green image. Marathon Oil's senior manager of philanthropy and community affairs Jennifer Evans responded to the greenwashing criticism.

"There are some people who will never be satisfied with the commitment or level of commitment of energy organizations like ours," she said. "Marathon has always maintained standards and met acceptable (federal) guidelines."

The most recent data from the EPA's Toxic Release Inventory reveals that Marathon is not the cleanest company in the city. Emissions from its Texas City facility create the second highest cancer risk of all producers of petroleum and coal products in Texas.

On the other hand, Marathon and the event's other sponsor, Waste Management, support the causes of numerous non-profit social and environmental groups that otherwise may be unable to make an impact without corporate financial help. Environmental groups, with funds from industry, are able to educate Houstonians to environmental issues.

Corporations, in turn, are rewarded in the public eye for their support of environmental projects and organizations. In the end, those who benefit from this unlikely arrangement, are those who come to Houston Earth Day and leave with a greater understanding of local ecosystems and the world. ☪



Houston Earth Day 2003. Photo by Ryan McMullan

Goodall

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think, but I am afraid it may be true — which is a real call to action to save what's left. In the north, what we've seen there is that the community gradually gets smaller and, as you get fewer individuals, they become quieter. They don't call as much because they would attract the attention of our main study group and chimps are territorially aggressive. We noticed the same thing when we were working in Burundi. As the chimps got more and more pressure from humans, they became increasingly quiet. You don't hear that beautiful pant-hoot distance call. They just learn to be quiet because they are afraid.

Some scientists have described human activity and its effect on the natural environment as a virus exploiting resources and devastating what's left. Do you see things being as bleak as that? And, what policies or ideas in Western culture, in your mind, are posing the biggest threats to biodiversity?

I do see it as bleak as that, if we continue to exploit the natural world as we are. First, in the developing world, where people are so poor that they have to cut down trees to grow food to feed increasing numbers of people, you have a vicious cycle of population growth and disease, famine, desertification, increased droughts, and floods. That's one scenario. Then if you come to the developed world and the affluent societies everywhere, you find these unsustainable lifestyles. So even though population growth isn't as marked as in the developing world, even though there may be fewer numbers, (affluent) people have a vastly larger impact on the natural world than poor people. So there are these seemingly unanswerable problems if one is to curb human population growth, to reduce the expectations of wealthy people around the world, and to change lifestyles so that people don't always want more than they need. We also have to try to persuade the poor that, while their lifestyles definitely need to be improved, they shouldn't yearn for the standard of living that we have in the West because it's not sustainable. These are really tough problems all of them and, yes, I believe we are at a point where, if we continue in this way much longer, there will be a point of no return.

You talked about how Western culture

has impacted the global environment, but what about the flip side? What does it mean to us in the West when areas rich in biodiversity disappear?

It's a very complex picture and, if people don't understand, they probably aren't interested in understanding. I think you have to try to make it simple. So you pick out a little piece of this huge picture, a particular piece of the puzzle, to explain how life is all interconnected, and if you destroy one piece of the puzzle, then you destroy another and then another.

I heard a wonderful example of this the other day. In Southeast Asia, a virus was threatening the rice crops. So scientists desperately looked through all the seeds in the gene pool of rice that were gathered up in some botanical institution there. They finally found one plant that was resistant to the virus and somehow were able to use it to prevent the virus from spreading. This plant was growing only in one valley, I believe it was in India. Getting hold of that particular plant, they were able to avert massive hunger because, without it, rice crops would have failed. But what they said, which was so chilling, was that three months after they found that plant, that entire valley was flooded by a dam and now (the plant) is gone. Those are the kinds of things that help people understand that global warming, for example, actually is happening, why it's happening, and how damaging it's going to be—not just to the far away places but to them personally.

You mentioned global warming and I'd like to go back to that. The rest of the world seems to be coming around to the concept of climate change. But in the US, the Bush administration has held back and in other areas of environmental policy as well. Pulling the US out of the Kyoto and Montreal Protocols, removing mercury from EPA's classification as a toxic substance...

Well, everything! Endangered species, the whole lot, the destruction of the environment by this administration is absolutely shocking. It's horrendous.

...so decisions are being made that don't reflect what are now vast bodies of scientific evidence. In the case of global warming, we recently saw the administration downplay the dire findings of a leaked Pentagon report it had tried to keep under wraps. Can you talk about the suppression of science and how that has impacted policy decisions and public perception?

Well, there was (an English) woman who

had a high-up job, I think it was at the EPA, and she has just come back to the UK, saying how different it is to come back to a climate where scientists can speak even if the government may not believe them. She said that in the United States, people are afraid of losing their jobs, and you get the scenario where the people who are being paid to make certain studies are being paid by the very industry that is (interested in) proving that it doesn't have a bad impact on the environment. Of course, the connection between government and big corporations is very, very obvious.

The degree to which the suppression of information influences peoples' actions—there are hundreds of people who simply, as you say, don't believe in global warming. They think it's all hyped up. So to suppress information deliberately about the effects of fossil fuel burning, to lie about the effects of oil in the Alaskan wilderness and these kinds of things, makes me shudder.

As far as the extent to which the suppression of information impacts the way politicians think, I don't know. I don't know any more what they think and what they believe and what they say. It's the same old thing isn't it? It has to be that they are living for the moment. It has to be that either they don't care or they don't think even two generations ahead. And I can't understand it. It's so alien to me.

As you tour around the world, your lectures consistently stress individual action as a solution to the loss of biodiversity. What can people in Houston do to minimize their own environmental footprint?

I think one of the big problems today is that thoughtful people who think about what's going on in the world around them either close their ears to it and behave like ostriches with their heads in the sand or they just feel helpless because the problems are so huge. I think the point is, if everybody did all the little things that we know we should do each day—saving energy, saving water, reusing, recycling, and using our shopping behavior to impact the course of business. That's a very, very powerful tool that we have. We don't have to buy products made by child slave labor. We don't have to buy products from an industry that has a bad environmental or social record. In this consumer driven society, that in itself, magnified by the number of people who care, could be huge. You have to help people to understand that what

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A dwindling resource

Marine Biodiversity in the Gulf of Mexico

by Erika McDonald

Though the impacts of human activity on the world's oceans have been known for some time, it is only since the late 1990s that the social, political and economic implications of marine biodiversity have been a part of mainstream dialogue. In 1998, nearly 2,000 scientists from around the globe collaborated on a report, *Troubled Waters*, that detailed global ocean health in light of activities that pollute the water, destroy wetlands, and deplete fish stocks.

For coastal communities, a healthy marine ecosystem is singularly important. World-wide, 80 to 90 percent of the global fish catch takes place along the world's coast-

lines where nutrient-rich, deep-water currents run up against continental margins.

Nutrient-rich conditions that favor fish production along coasts also lead to increased vulnerability to risks posed by human activities. Research shows that the combined effects of overfishing, by-catch, habitat degradation, and fishing-induced food-web changes can alter the composition of entire ecosystems. Fewer numbers of adult fish can mean less genetic diversity among spawning populations and reduced ability to adapt to future environmental changes. Also, disruption of prey-to-predator relationships can increase ecosystem vulnerability to

invasive species.

These effects can be observed first-hand in the Gulf of Mexico. One of the most vital ecosystems in the world, the Gulf, is also home to some of the most heavily fished species. In the US alone, commercial and recreational fishing is a \$50 billion-per-year industry, with the Texas Gulf Coast accounting for roughly one-sixth of that total.

The biodiversity and vitality that makes the Gulf vulnerable to human activity also creates a natural environmental problem. Hypoxia, or oxygen depletion,

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Snapper

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Restoration Network, including the Bayou Preservation Association. Assistant director for the network Jill Jensen, a fisheries biologist, said the council underestimated the importance of limiting the allowable catch.

"That is the opinion of one federal agency with a very loud voice," Jensen said. "We believe that keeping another three million (reproductive) female snapper in the water will significantly impact the snapper's chance for survival."

The council's Stu Kennedy said the plan, though passive in its application, would be effective because it focuses on what he called the real problem, shrimp trawl by-catch. The council estimates that a glut of imported shrimp on the market will force 30 to 50 percent of current commercial Gulf shrimpers out of business. A decrease in trawling, he said, would naturally reduce the amount of bycatch.

The council determined that relying on an anticipated reduction in trawling was preferable to lowering the total allowable catch, which would damage the commercial and recreational snapper industries.

"Even if we reduced the catch to zero, the snapper stock still won't rebuild in the length of time required by the Magnuson Stevens Act, because of shrimp bycatch," Kennedy said.

Jensen argued that representatives of commercial and recreational fisheries who sit on the council were focused on profits rather than biology when it comes to managing red snapper.

"If I make my livelihood off of a product, am I going to recommend setting a limit on that product? That may be a conflict of interest," she said. "In the case of snapper, council members should have done what they have done in some other cases, which is take (an economic) hit for the good of the species."

Bob Zales, who charts a recreational snapper boat in the Gulf said that lowering the catch limit to six million would cost the average fisherman 30 percent of his livelihood. He supported the council's decision to focus efforts on shrimp bycatch reduction rather than reduce the allowable catch.

"Reducing the catch (by three million) would mean commercial (red snapper) fisheries could only operate four months out of the year. They might as well shut down the business," Zales said.

Zales suggested government regulators should consider other factors that affect water quality such as beach run-off that could impact red snapper.

"There some other issues at play here that some people are ignoring," he said. "They come after (fishermen) because we're an easy target."

A biologist who consults with the Texas Shrimpers Association, Benny Galloway,

agreed that shrimp bycatch impacts snapper populations, but he said bad data caused the council to overstate the problem.

"Shrimpers, in their heart of hearts, don't think that the (total allowable catch) is too high; what they want is parity," he said. "Bycatch is a problem, but we have to address it using data that reflect the real world. We have to take protection measures that matter, not ones that look and feel good."

Galloway referred to the findings of a two-year experiment conducted by independent biologists that tested the government's methods for collecting data used to assess snapper declines. Electronic log books and on-vessel observers determined the council's accuracy had been less than 10 percent. This peer review study, published in the *National Journal of Fisheries*, also found discrepancies in the government's estimates of the age composition of snapper caught in shrimp trawls. The study found that more than half of what the council assumed were juvenile or adult snapper were actually younger than one year and had a significantly higher mortality rate. This is important, Galloway said, because reducing bycatch would have limited positive impact on the species if most of those caught were likely to die anyway.

Jensen accused the council of scapegoating shrimpers in the losing effort to save Gulf snapper. For years the shrimping industry has received global attention because of its

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CEC Notes

Series to take dynamic look at local, global issues

This month CEC will kick off an exciting new series, CEC Dialogues, a unique format that goes beyond the traditional lecture to bring together two experts with significantly different perspectives to engage in an unscripted discussion of important issues within their field. The first event focuses on food, an issue of central importance to the world. Jacko Garrett is a rice farmer who founded Share the Harvest Foundation, a southeast Texas collective of rice farmers' who dedicate a portion of their annual harvest to local and international hunger relief programs. Bob Randall, PhD, is the executive director of Urban Harvest, a local gardening co-op, where he works to build communities from the ground up by promoting sustainable urban-land and horticultural practices in growing food and reducing hunger. The event will take place Tuesday, April 20, 7:30-9 pm, at Rice University, Sewall Hall, room 301. For more information, call (713) 524-4232 or email events@cechouston.org.

Coalition Notes

EJ grants now available for local communities

The Environmental Protection Agency's office of environmental justice is seeking grant applications for projects that examine issues related to a community's exposure to multiple environmental harms and risks. The funding is under a program that provides financial assistance to community-based organizations working on or planning to work on projects that address local environmental and public health concerns. To be eligible for the grants, an organization must be made up primarily of members of the affected community. Affected communities are defined as those that are influenced or altered by the environmental problem. Applications must be postmarked by midnight, Friday, April 30. For more information, visit the EPA's environmental justice web site or call (202) 564-0152 or email lewis.sheila@epa.gov.

Park People celebrate East End park upgrades

A community-wide effort to increase green space in the East End includes a project to upgrade and preserve Tony Marron Park, backed by the Park People and other groups. The initiative officially kicked off during a groundbreaking ceremony at the site in February. According to the Park People's Glenda Barrett, the \$1.8 million development has been in the works since 2001. Upgrades to the property will include two adult soccer fields, three children's soccer fields, a picnic pavilion with adobe-style architectural enhancements, and picnic tables. Other amenities to be added include a water-fountain plaza where children may play, walking and bicycle trails, groves of trees, and an open green space.

BPA hosts symposium on water quality, floods

"Backyard, Bayou, and Beyond: A Watershed Management Symposium" will feature wetlands expert John Jacob, Houston Audubon Society's Winnie Burkett, and the Bayou Preservation Association's Kevin Shanley, among other experts on water quality, flooding, and wildlife. The event will take place Wednesday, April 7, 8 am to 5 pm, at the University of St. Thomas, Jerabeck Activity Center, 3800 Montrose. Learn what to do to improve local water quality and reduce flooding. Those attending will receive advice about how to use water more responsibly in their homes, neighborhoods, and commercial districts. For more information, contact BPA at (713) 529-6443 or visit <http://www.urban-nature.org/watershedsymposium.htm>.

Blueprint Houston event focuses on future

Blueprint Houston, a coalition of community groups, business leaders, and individuals, is seeking input on planning for the city's future. "Scenarios for Houston's Future: A Community Discussion" will give the public an opportunity to help shape the direction of civic engagement as it relates to growth and development. The event will take place Thursday, April 22, 7 pm, at the Harris County Department of Education, 6300 Irvington. Attendance is limited to 100 participants. RSVP to hsweetnam@blueprinthouston.org or Callie Bluemer at (713) 522-0590.

Eco Notes

Bayport facility on hold pending judge's ruling

The Port of Houston Authority will hold off constructing a new terminal at Bayport while a federal court decides whether to grant opponents an injunction.

At a four-hour hearing on Feb. 28, attorney Jim Blackburn argued that the Bayport permit, granted in February, violates the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Coastal Zone Management Act. Blackburn represents several cities and environmental groups, including the city of Shoreacres and the Galveston-Houston Association for Smog Prevention, that are suing the US Army Corps of Engineers.

One major point of contention is the construction of another terminal, permitted in April 2003, in Shoal Point. Plaintiffs charged the Army Corps did not consider the cumulative environmental impacts of constructing both facilities. Blackburn also argued that construction at Shoal Point, which environmental advocates consider a less damaging site, would preempt the need for another terminal at Bayport. But port officials have rejected numerous offers from SSA Marine to invest in the Shoal Point Project, saying it would be illegal to spend bond money, approved for Bayport by voters in 1999, outside of Harris County. The port's chief executive Tom Kornegay maintains that the market can support both terminals.

Plaintiffs also allege the Army Corps violated NEPA when it failed to consider the impacts of dredging Galveston Bay to accommodate the larger vessels expected to dock at the terminal. They also claim that the projected destruction of wetlands would violate the Clean Water Act.

A decision from District Judge Vanessa Gilmore is expected May 4.

Study predicts likely increase in pollution from I-10 expansion

Opponents of state plans to increase the number of lanes on the Katy Freeway now have a convincing way of arguing that increased air pollution would result from the

proposed expansion. Dissatisfied with the state's environmental assessment, a chapter of Mothers for Clean Air that will be directly affected by the expansion raised money to hire a Rice University engineer to study pollution levels along six miles of I-10 between Beltway 8 and the 610 loop. MfCA's regional executive director, Jane Laping, said the study estimates there will be a 40 percent increase in particulate matter once the expansion is complete.

"This is very significant because (including Loop 610) increases the area that will be impacted by pollution and also increases the concentrations," she said.

Laping said the study confirmed the group's fears about air pollution and raised new concerns. She said the group was surprised by the high levels of pollution at the 610/I-10 interchange because pollution from loop traffic was not considered in the state's model.

A growing body of evidence linking traffic-related air pollution to adverse health impacts allows these latest findings to be extrapolated to predict an increase in respiratory and cardiovascular disease for residents living along the I-10 corridor. Texas Children's Hospital expert Stuart Abramson, MD, identified the likely health impacts of expanding Katy Freeway, including cardiopulmonary disease, heart attack, and cancer.

Abramson said that even staying indoors does not prevent inhalation of particulate matter, which is often too small to be filtered out by routine air conditioning. But the amount of particulate pollution reaching homes can be reduced. Laping offered some protective advice to Katy Corridor residents, such as planting trees along the freeway side of homes and schools to filter out pollution. She stressed the importance of minimizing the effects on children of diesel particulate matter from school buses by instituting a no-idling policy and purchasing cleaner burning buses.

PIRG report reveals new information about PBDE

The Texas Public Interest Research Group released a report last month detailing the widespread use of a toxic chemical, decabrominated diphenyl ether, more commonly known as deca. Recent studies link the chemical to neurological and reproductive damage and cancer. The chemical is a

type of polybrominated diphenyl ether, a toxin that recently attracted national attention when a study at the University of Texas School of Public Health found high levels in the breast milk of all 52 women tested.

TexPIRG is asking the EPA to ban the manufacturing of brominated flame retardants throughout the US. The chemicals are currently banned by the European Union and the state of California.

UT School of Public Health scientist Arnold Schechter, who conducted the breast-milk study, said he supports a nationwide ban. But he and other researchers stopped short of recommending that nursing mothers stop breastfeeding.

In addition to causing serious health problems on its own, deca has a tendency to break down in sunlight into other PBDEs that are more toxic and more easily absorbed into the body.

Toxic flame retardants are used on a wide range of common household products including furniture, clothing, and electronics. But traces of the chemicals were also found in air and water samples.

Fewer dead, injured turtles stranded on Texas beaches in 2003

Warm weather and conservation efforts accounted for the lowest number of turtle strandings on Texas beaches in the last decade, according to official reports. In 2003, 228 dead or injured sea turtles washed ashore on Texas beaches—the lowest number since 1993, which saw 197 strandings, according to data from the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network. Forty-one strandings were documented at Galveston last year, less than half the number from the year before.

Biologists attributed the declining numbers to such conservation efforts as cleaning up marine trash, which can choke or entangle the turtles, and new regulations requiring turtle excluder devices. A 2000 seasonal ban on shrimping within five miles of the shore was also a factor.

The optimism reflected in the Texas report is unique, however. Other Gulf Coast states saw an increase in strandings over previous years.

—Houston Chronicle

Green Reading

Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, *The Pig Who Sang to the Moon: The Emotional World of Farm Animals*. (Ballantine Books, New York 2003.)

A principal argument of the 20th-century suffrage movement was that women are made for their own happiness. Now, in his new book, the author of *When Elephants Weep* makes the same argument in defense of the natural rights of animals.

I've been a vegetarian since 1985 and have half desired to go vegan since the early 90s, even stuck with it for three weeks, first try, and then never again came that close to succeeding. This in spite of the fact that I've understood for a long time that all animals, including fish, ants, other insects, are more like us than not. But when I finished the opening chapter of *The Pig Who Sang to the Moon*, I became a vegan—not a resolved vegan or a struggling vegan, just a vegan by confirmed preference, as if I'd stopped eating dairy foods many years in the past.

Jeffrey Masson doesn't harangue. He acknowledges but does not press the horrors of factory farming. He simply maintains focus on the communications and behaviors of various "farmed" animals—pigs, chickens, sheep, goats, cows, ducks, both in confinement and in sanctuaries—and step by step opens our hearts.

—Jane Elioseff

Gulf

Continued from page 5

occurs from an over-abundance of vegetation and spawning, and can be potentially devastating to the eco-system. The decomposition of marine algae combined with the stratification of Gulf waters (layering of saltwater and freshwater inflows) limits the supply of oxygen to the bottom, creating an area of hypoxia known as a dead zone. For several months each year, 7,000 square miles of coastal waters, from the mouth of the Mississippi to the upper Texas Coast, are uninhabitable for marine wildlife. The Gulf of Mexico's dead zone is now one of the largest zones of hypoxic water in the world. ●

Snapper

Continued from page 5

impact on commercially viable fish such as snapper and well-loved marine animals such as the sea turtle, both of which are frequently caught in shrimp nets.

"People always think of conservation groups as being against fishermen, but for the most part, the fishermen are following the laws; the problem is (the agency is) making the laws that have failed the snapper," she said. "Snappers are in trouble now as a direct result of government mismanagement."

Jensen accused the agency of dragging its feet on snapper restoration because the importance of the fish to Gulf economics is a politically charged issue.

In addition to lowering the total allowable catch, the Restoration Network wants other changes made to the federal snapper revival plan. Currently, the council has made no effort to reduce the bycatch from other kinds of fishing. Conservation groups also advocate stronger regulations on recreational fishing. The council currently does not monitor the number of snap-

per that die from catch-and-release practices.

Stakeholders will meet in April and August to develop consensus on the council's assessment. Following the meetings, the management plan will be sent to the National Marine Fisheries Service for implementation. ●

Goodall

Continued from page 4

they do each day truly, truly makes a difference. It's a difficult message to get across. It's just this feeling that I'm one person and I really can't make a difference. But we have to get over that. We have to move into the future with what I call people power.

But how do we overcome that feeling of helplessness? What do you say to people who, on Earth Day 2004, can't find much to celebrate?

My reasons for hope are really simple. One is that the human brain is incredible and there are amazing advances made in technologies that minimize environmental impact. That's where the wealthy can lead the way. The wealthy can go and buy cars with the very best kinds of engines, houses

with the best kinds of solar panels and live in this way so that eventually the price will come down and more people can buy into this new technology. Secondly, is this amazing resilience, so that nature, given a chance, can recover from destruction of the most horrific kind and once again become beautiful. That doesn't mean the species that have gone extinct can be brought back. That's the most frightening thing. But an awful lot can be restored. Animal species on the very brink of extinction can be given a second chance. Thirdly, is the tremendous enthusiasm, commitment, and dedication of youth, once they know what the problems are and we empower them to act. Finally, is what I call the indomitable human spirit, the people who tackle impossible tasks and won't give up, and in the end they succeed. I meet these people everywhere and if the media reported more of some of the incredible things that people are capable of, then that in itself would give people hope and they would be more motivated to make a difference themselves. We need to get over this inertia. It's apathy that's destroying the planet now. ●

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