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COMMERCE SECRETARY ANNOUNCES \$128 MILLION COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT TO ASSIST GULF STATES RECOVER AND MONITOR FISHERIES

During a visit to New Orleans today, U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez announced the award of \$128 million for the five Gulf Coast States to respond to the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Specifically, these funds will be used by the states to assist in the restoration of oyster beds and shrimp grounds rehabilitation as well as monitoring the recovery of the Gulf fisheries.

These funds are part of a cooperative agreement awarded by the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) through the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

"I want to thank Senators Thad Cochran and Richard Shelby for their leadership to secure these funds to help in the recovery of Gulf fisheries," said Secretary Gutierrez. "Commercial oyster and shrimp operations in the Gulf of Mexico are vital economic components in the region and I am pleased NOAA is able to play a significant role in their recovery."

Secretary Gutierrez made the announcement at Galatoire's Restaurant in the French Quarter of New Orleans as he challenged investors from all over the country and world to come and invest in the region stressing that New Orleans and the Gulf Coast are open for business."

Since the devastating impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, NOAA Fisheries Service has worked closely with its Gulf coast partners to help ensure the recovery and restoration of affected fisheries. Through this award, NOAA and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission will coordinate activities with the states of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida.

These states have committed to plans to restore oyster beds and shrimp grounds, and monitor the recovery of Gulf fisheries. The \$128 million will be utilized as follows: \$51 million will be allocated for oyster restoration, \$38 million on oyster bed and shrimp ground rehabilitation, and \$38 million directed toward cooperative research and monitoring activities. A partial list of projects by state include:

- Mississippi - Oyster reef restoration, enhancement and monitoring; shrimp and blue crab habitat restoration, enhancement and monitoring; and artificial reef restoration (\$38 million)
- Alabama - habitat mapping, oyster grounds restoration, oyster, shrimp and fish nursery restoration, and cooperative research (\$30 million)
- Louisiana - reseeded and restoration of oyster grounds, rehabilitating oyster bed and shrimp grounds, debris removal, cooperative research to monitor recovery (\$53 million)
- Texas - habitat mapping, restoration and debris removal (\$3 million)
- Florida - oyster reef habitat restoration; develop scientific protocol for assessing resource damage and recovery (\$4 million)

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On the Web:
NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>
NOAA Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>