

For Immediate Release

The Billfish Foundation encouraging recreational anglers and boaters to be voices in Gulf Restoration Plan

FT. LAUDERDALE, Fla., -- As the pending Gulf Restoration Plan is being produced The Billfish Foundation is encouraging recreational anglers and boaters, especially those in the Gulf states most affected by the April 20th oil disaster, to urge the government to include the sportfishing segment in the plan.

"Boating and the sportfishing industry employ some 300,000 individuals in the region generating an economic stimulus of \$41 billion dollars annually," said TBF President **Ellen Peel**.

"It includes a wide array of marine related manufacturing, sales, service and diverse support and enhancement businesses ranging from artists to yacht builders and brokers. The coastal towns, individuals and the recreational fishing and boating businesses suffered significant economic losses resulting from the oil disaster. Individuals who normally enjoy the Gulf's beautiful resources have been unable to do so in light of access issues and safety concerns," she added.

"If we are ever going to see positive changes in the Gulf, we must impress upon the Secretary of the Navy, **Ray Mabus**, who is charged with writing the Gulf Restoration Plan, the need to include recreational fishing and boating as a major segment in it. E-mails are urgently needed to be sent to the Secretary at: restoreourcoast@gmail.com," she emphasized.

A draft letter is included on the TBF website billfish.org for anglers to use or compose their own version. She said the critical point is to send it in now and encouraged anglers to pass it on to their friends so sportfishing and boating will be counted in the Gulf Restoration Plan.

The TBF letter in part reads: **The recreational boating and fishing community has a long standing relationship with the offshore energy industry, for large rigs attract big fish and big fish attract anglers. Our industry is comprised of responsible users of the resources who utilize conservation compatible practices. We look forward to the day when we each can return to fishing all the waters of the Gulf, as this is a way of life that has added positive values and benefits to citizens of and visitors to the region.**

(See TBF's website – billfish.org - for the entire draft letter to forward to Ray Mabus, Secretary of the Navy who is charged with writing the Gulf Restoration Plan)

The failure to include a fishery management expert on the team of experts that traveled the Gulf with you for town hall meetings concerns our community for it may indicate a disregard for the recreational fishing and boating industry and each of the interests therein. We hope that you have corrected this oversight and will include our interests as a major sector in the Gulf Restoration Plan.

It is time for a paradigm change in the Gulf so that overfishing is not allowed to leave fish vulnerable to unexpected stresses, like the oil spill. We should strive to make the Gulf a model for a new way to safely and responsibly manage our ocean resources. Anglers want healthy fish stocks, access to resources and strong resulting economies.

To further address the issue of overfishing, TBF recently launched a program called "Gulf Thunder" a campaign uniting strong sportfishing voices against numerous issues including outdated government fishery management strategies and the government's bias in favor of commercial fishing gear and overfishing practices. For more on the TBF campaign please go to <http://billfish.org/1206-gulf-thunder-campaign> or call the TBF offices at 1-800-438-8247.

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