MASGC educates students, teachers and public; grows coastal volunteer base

RELEVANCE:

Stewardship is important to the future of the nation’s national resources. Even though the public has a general sense that the world’s coasts and oceans are important, the public does not know the coast’s and ocean’s connection to the nation’s well-being. Our global, national, regional and local citizens are not adequately aware of the importance of the Gulf of Mexico as a national treasure in terms of its value to tourism and recreation; oil and gas production; seafood production; shipping and transportation; and other ecosystem services. Educational programs for students, teachers and volunteers lead to individuals being more likely to support coastal industries and management of Gulf resources.

RESPONSE:

Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant educational programming supports K-12 student and teacher education, volunteer stewardship programs and education of the public in both states through supporting the Environmental Studies Center, Dauphin Island Sea Lab’s Discovery Hall Programs and The University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast Research Lab’s Marine Education Center. These learning programs include field-trip experiences, camps, exhibitry, professional development workshops, science fairs and more. Also, math- and science-based aquascience courses in area high schools receive technical support from MASGC. MASGC trains volunteers through the Mississippi Master Naturalist certification program, which helps to create a strong volunteer base for schools, communities and organizations. After training workshops for the Oyster Gardening program, volunteers grow oysters for restoration efforts in Alabama. MASGC also helps organize the Mississippi Coastal Clean-Up volunteer event. In addition, MASGC sponsors scholarships for high-school students to attend a camp in Alaska that focuses on oil-spill response and ocean science. Other MASGC-funded projects support Knauss fellows and university students.

RESULTS:

- MASGC-supported programs taught more than 108,439 K-12 students, K-12 teachers and members of the general public about hurricanes, oil spills, ecology, coastal habitats, restoration, climate change, coastal geology and the pressures coastal ecosystems face from urban development, habitat loss, pollution and more.
- Oyster gardening volunteers produced 17,500 oysters that were used to restore 3,500 m² of reef in 2010, and Master Naturalists volunteered 700 hours of training involving 2,749 coastal residents.
- The MASGC-sponsored Mississippi Coastal Cleanup had nearly 2,000 volunteer participants who collected 1,433 bags (140,163 pounds) of trash along the Gulf Coast, barrier islands and waterways.
- In 2010, seven university students and fellows who were supported by MASGC funding entered the workforce in coastal and marine science, management or policy workforce.
- MASGC has sponsored six scholarships to help students attend the Ocean Science Leadership Expedition in Alaska.

Scholarship recipients attend a leadership science camp in Alaska, where they learned about ecosystems, oil spills and the ocean.

Master Naturalist volunteers receive 40 hours training and commit to volunteering 80 hours per year.