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A Blog About Energy and the Environment



August 26, 2010, 7:00 am

After the Leak, Restoring the Gulf Coast

By [JOHN COLLINS RUDOLF](#)



Associated Press In early July, an oil slick made its way into the marshes near Point Lydia in the southeast corner of Biloxi Bay.



Back in June, with oil still spewing from BP's blown-out well, President Obama charged Navy Secretary Ray Mabus with crafting a Gulf Coast restoration plan that would address the short-term impacts of the spill as well as the long-term environmental challenges facing the region. This week, Mr. Mabus, a former Mississippi governor, pledged that the first iteration of that plan would be unveiled soon.

"My task is to develop a road map for recovery once the oil spill is contained and cleaned up once and for all," he wrote in an [editorial](#) for The Times-Picayune of New Orleans on Tuesday. "On behalf of gulf residents, I will deliver that framework for our path forward to the president within the coming few weeks."

The report is already the focus of intense interest, with Gulf Coast politicians and local and national nonprofit groups calling for billions of dollars in funds not just to repair the damage caused by the oil spill, but also to restore coastal wetlands degraded by decades of oil and gas development and the wide-scale engineering of the Mississippi River for flood control and navigation.

This week, a coalition of dozens of environmental and social justice groups, led by Oxfam America, released a [report](#) calling for billions in financing for ecosystem restoration, storm protection and community development along the Gulf Coast.

"On the five-year anniversary of Katrina and the devastating 2005 hurricane season, it's well past time for the nation to commit to a true restoration vision and plan for the central gulf, long the nation's energy sacrifice zone," Aaron Viles, campaign director for the Gulf Restoration Network, which co-authored the report, said in a statement.

Politicians along the Gulf Coast are already jockeying for billions of dollars for coastal restoration projects. In Louisiana, Gov. Bobby Jindal recently [requested](#) that BP advance the state more than \$9 billion so it could

immediately begin projects to mitigate damages to its coast from the spill.

On the federal level, Senator Mary Landrieu of Louisiana has [proposed](#) legislation that would return 80 percent of the fines levied against BP for the spill to gulf states for coastal restoration.

Under the Clean Water Act, BP faces fines of up to \$21 billion for the oil that poured into the gulf, not including fines and penalties for the spill's impact on wildlife and other violations.

So far, however, the Navy secretary has given little indication of his views on where funds for restoration will come from or how they will be spent. But he does acknowledge the rocky road that lies ahead.

“Without question, this is going to be tough,” Mr. Mabus wrote.

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