

**Memorandum of Understanding**  
**Between**  
**Gulf of Mexico Alliance**  
**and**  
**Gulf of Mexico Coastal Ocean Observing System—Regional Association**

**PURPOSE:**

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) constitutes agreement by the undersigned representatives of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA) and Gulf of Mexico Coastal Ocean Observing System—Regional Association (GCOOS-RA), hereafter referred to as “the Parties,” confirming their commitment to collaborate on matters of critical importance to the Gulf of Mexico environment.

**RATIONALE:**

The shorelines, ecosystems and marine life of the Gulf of Mexico are critically important to the economy and quality of life of the people who live along its coasts. For those States within the United States that share a coastline along the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf States), these coastal regions and territorial seas host nationally important ecosystem services that support economically valuable resources, for example, mineral and energy industries, tourism, fishing and seafood industries, and many natural areas of critical importance to wildlife and natural resources. Collectively these resources generate over \$2.1 trillion to the nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and millions of jobs. Importantly, they are home to some of the most sensitive coastal and marine ecosystems in the world that are subject to stress from a variety of natural and human-induced disturbances. It is critically important that marine and other environmental data (including model output) in the estuarine and U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone of the Gulf of Mexico be collected, integrated and shared openly with all stakeholders including the public, the private sector, scientists, and federal and state partners. We wish to ensure that the GOMA and the GCOOS-RA work in full cooperation toward these ends.

## **COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES:**

Pursuant to the MOU purpose, the Parties hereby agree to engage in collaborative activities, including but not limited to:

- **Develop and support Gulf of Mexico regional initiatives**

GOMA welcomes collaboration in refining and advocating the Alliance's regional initiatives and Priority Issues (<http://www.gulfofmexicoalliance.org/initiatives/initiatives.html>). Example activities may include: share GOMA priorities with GCOOS-RA participants and stakeholders; participation of GCOOS-RA representatives on Priority Issue Teams; GOMA nominations to serve on GCOOS-RA Board, Councils, Committees, or Task Teams; inclusion of GOMA initiatives into GCOOS-RA initiatives.

Promote regional activities with Mexico (with emphasis on the Gulf of Mexico Large Marine Ecosystem project) and the Caribbean countries (with emphasis on the Caribbean Coastal Ocean Observing System) to exchange information and sharing of data products and of educational and outreach materials.

- **Facilitate educational opportunities that mutually benefit GOMA partners and GCOOS-RA stakeholders**

The GCOOS-RA is committed to education and outreach by providing a dedicated amount of its budget to staff and resources in this area. GCOOS-RA activities offer opportunities for education and training related to GOMA's mission and the needs of state and federal agency partners. Example activities may include collaboration on creating professional development programs for educators and engagement of citizens in a monitoring system for the estuarine and near shore waters of the Gulf. Already GOMA's Environmental Education Network and the GCOOS-RA's Educational and Outreach Council are represented and have held meetings at the same times and venues.

- **Identify observations and data products needed from the U.S. coastal estuaries, rivers and EEZ**

The GCOOS-RA attempts to identify observations and data-based products needed by stakeholders in the Gulf States, including government agencies, the private sector, educators, researchers, non-governmental organizations and the general public. The purpose is to meet those needs as resources become available. GOMA has embarked on a course to determine the needs for such information by the five Gulf States. Therefore, GOMA can be viewed by GCOOS-RA as a "super stakeholder."

- **Collaborate on efforts required for observing systems in the Gulf of Mexico**

There are many groups around the Gulf of Mexico aspiring to develop portions of a full Gulf coastal ocean observing system. The GOMA and the GCOOS-RA will work together to avoid duplication in observing system assets and data management for observations. Collaborative efforts will minimize duplicity of efforts and maximize the regional extent of observations.

- **Promote Gulf-wide information integration and sharing of data and products**

Many entities are actively collecting data sets and derivative products that potentially impact GOMA priority issues. A primary objective of the GCOOS-RA is to gain access to these data and products, to integrate the data, to produce additional products, and to freely share the data and products in easily accessible forms with all interested users. For example, to this end, the GCOOS-RA and the Gulf of Mexico Research Institute (GoMRI) share data management personnel and capabilities. GOMA can help in the identification of additional observations and products and their providers that can be secured, integrated and shared by the GCOOS-RA data management effort.

#### **PARTIES' MISSIONS:**

GOMA (source-- <http://www.gulfofmexicoalliance.org/index.php>):

The GOMA is a partnership of the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, with the goal of significantly increasing regional collaboration to enhance the ecological and economic health of the Gulf of Mexico. Supported by 13 federal agencies, academia, businesses and non-governmental organizations in the region, GOMA has identified as part of the Governors' Action Plans six priority issues that are regionally significant and can be effectively addressed through increased collaboration at local, state, and federal levels. In addition, GOMA partners are engaged in regional initiatives such as

the Mississippi River-Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force (Hypoxia Task Force), the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force, and National Ocean Policy issues.

The six priorities represent focus for action through the Alliance:

- **Water Quality:** to help ensure healthy beaches and safe seafood in our coastal areas
- **Habitat Conservation and Restoration:** advance conservation and restoration of coastal habitats and ecosystems throughout the Gulf and associated watersheds
- **Ecosystem Integration and Assessment:** improve accessibility and awareness of the extensive data available throughout the Gulf region
- **Nutrients & Nutrient Impacts:** to make communities more resilient in order to sustain and grow the region's economic prosperity
- **Coastal Community Resilience**
- **Environmental Education:** to provide educational programs to improve the nation's understanding and appreciation of the Gulf and its abundant natural and living resources.

Each priority identifies long-term goals for the region, a number of actions to achieve those goals, and challenges facing the Gulf.

GCOOS-RA (source—GCOOS-RA MOA, [http://gcoos.org/?page\\_id=2201](http://gcoos.org/?page_id=2201)):

The GCOOS-RA Corporation is one of eleven regional associations that are building regional coastal ocean observing systems along the coasts of the United States and its territories, as part of the United States Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS®), as such system is defined and authorized by The Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System Act of 2009 (the "Act"). The system being built by the GCOOS-RA will provide data, information and products on a non-discriminatory basis to the Gulf of Mexico "stakeholder" community that includes, but is not limited to, the private sector, governmental agencies at all levels, academia and researchers, non-governmental organizations, and the general public. There are more than 100 members of the GCOOS-RA.

The GCOOS-RA is committed to (1) freely providing integrated, remotely-sensed and

*in situ* information about the United States waters and related ecosystems of the Gulf of Mexico for use by managers, mariners, military, industry, researchers, educators and others seeking to understand this coastal environment, manage ocean and littoral resources, and/or develop commercial uses of marine resources, data and information; (2) developing new sensor technologies; (3) stimulating innovation and supporting commerce; and (4) planning and implementing the Gulf of Mexico component of the IOOS®.

The GCOOS-RA shall pursue its purpose, all on a non-profit basis, as follows:

- a. Lead the planning, development, implementation, operation, management, and evaluation of a sustained, integrated regional coastal ocean observing system for the waters of the United States Gulf of Mexico that extend from the heads of estuaries and tidally influenced waters to the limits of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone. This observing system is known as GCOOS.
- b. Determine the needs and priorities for data, information, and products by stakeholders that use, depend on, study and/or manage coastal and oceanic environments and the resources of the Gulf of Mexico and evolve the GCOOS to adapt new needs of user groups and to include the timely incorporation of new technologies and understanding based on these needs.
- c. Promote the development, assessment, and dissemination of data and data products that meet the needs of end users to the extent that is feasible with available resources and freely distribute existing products, encourage the preparation and distribution of additional products, and prepare and distribute products. These activities may be accomplished, in part, through associations with other entities.
- d. Seek new resources that will allow additional routine observations and/or products to help meet the needs of the stakeholder community.
- e. Inform and/or advocate through education and outreach for the regional, national, and global ocean observing system and the application of scientific assessments using environmental data to meet societal needs; these activities may be accomplished, in

part, through associations with other entities.

**SUNSET AND MODIFICATION:**

The Parties agree that, on or before December 31, 2016, the GCOOS-RA Executive Director and GOMA will meet and determine whether the MOU purpose is being met, whether modifications to this MOU are appropriate, and whether the MOU should continue.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the Parties have caused this MOU to be executed:

Lama W. Bowie 6/16/2014  
Name, GOMA Executive Director Date

J. Smith 6/18/2014  
Name, GCOOS-RA Board Chair Date