



**OFFICE OF GEORGE W. BUSH**

**DALLAS**

**REMARKS BY MRS. LAURA BUSH AT THE STATE OF THE GULF  
SUMMIT**

**Houston, Texas**

*Wednesday, December 7, 2011*

*As delivered*

“Thank you, Dr. Earle, for that kind introduction. You all are familiar with Dr. Earle's work for our oceans. The national marine monuments she just described were instigated largely by her.

Thanks to you all for your warm welcome. I am happy to be here in Houston for the 2011 State of the Gulf Summit. I also want to thank Dr. Killebrew from Texas A&M - Corpus Christi and Dr. McKinley from the Harte Research Institute.

As I reflected on what to talk about today I was reminded of how much the Gulf of Mexico has been a part of my life for my whole life. The first family vacation I remember was to Galveston where my mom and dad and I stayed at the old Breakers Hotel. I remember walking into the Gulf with my father and looking for seashells with my mother. And I remember how surprised we all were later when some of my seashells walked off.

When I was a young teacher in Houston I went often to Galveston to a friend's beach house. George and I honeymooned on Cozumel and then had family vacations to South Padre and to Rockport. We spent seven spring breaks, from the girl's first grade to the seventh grade, on the gulf coast of Florida, where the Texas Rangers baseball team had spring training at Port Charlotte. And the week after Christmas this year, like we have for many years, we'll join the whole Bush clan on the Florida Gulf Coast. And then, because we are retired, George and I will spend the month of January there.

I also remember many trips to the Gulf after the hurricanes from Florida to Texas and seeing cities like Waveland and Pass Christian totally destroyed from the storm surge. We know that the hurricanes were not only devastating to our communities on land, but that they wreaked havoc on the marine habitats as well.

So I'm happy that this Summit is taking place, and I appreciate the chance to speak to you about caring for the Gulf and caring for all of our oceans.

I understand, like all of you, the pressures on the Gulf of Mexico. The Gulf region remains one of the fastest developing areas in the world. The Gulf of Mexico is a dynamic marine and coastal environment used by tens of millions of people for diverse purposes. And anyone from Midland, Texas, like I am, knows the pressures of oil and gas development and production on the Gulf of Mexico. And we know that the health of the Gulf is clearly linked to the health of the economy and the community of all these coastal neighbors. Clean and healthy marshes, beaches, and bays mean abundant fisheries, protection from storm surge and hurricanes, and a vibrant tourism economy. Vital commerce and industry and rich coastal and marine ecosystems have coexisted for generations in the Gulf.

Whether you live in Key West, Mobile, Biloxi, New Orleans, Galveston, Corpus Christi or somewhere in between, every community along the Gulf depends on a healthy and sustainable ecosystem for their future existence and prosperity. The same, of course, is true for our international neighbors on the Gulf. And we all have a shared responsibility to the conservation of the Gulf of Mexico.

Last year's oil spill from The Deepwater Horizon, has given us an opportunity to reevaluate our marine conservation efforts in the Gulf and to forge cooperative efforts to preserve its ecosystem for generations. While the full impact of the spill on the Gulf's diverse ecosystems will not be known for some time, scientists tell us that a spill of this magnitude would have profound effects on the healthiest natural communities. Such effects in Gulf coastal habitats are greatly magnified by the decades of degradation that preceded it.

The Conservation of the Gulf of Mexico requires understanding the differing perspectives on the goals and methods of conservation.

In his Ocean Action Plan, President Bush committed the federal government to work regionally through partnerships with state governments. So in support of that approach, the five U.S. Gulf states formed the Gulf of Mexico Alliance. We've seen the benefit of the Alliance in helping respond to the recent Gulf tragedies. It is partnerships like the Alliance that we can use to meet existing and future challenges in the Gulf.

We know that protecting our oceans will become even more important in the coming years. Nearly half of the world's population lives within 60 miles of an ocean, and that percentage is projected to grow as more people settle in coastal communities.

When George was President, we worked with Dr. Earle and many others to conserve marine habitats and resources. President Bush organized the first ever Cabinet Committee on oceans, which subsequently completed more than 80 tasks to improve ocean conservation. Among these was the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which governs ocean fishing.

In 2007, after months of consultation between all of the stakeholders, especially the government of the State of Hawaii, George designated the remote Northwestern Hawaiian Islands as a National Marine Monument. I traveled with the Secretary of the Interior, the Head of NOAA, and my friend Regan Gammon, who was the citizen chair of the National Park Foundation, to Hawaii to christen the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands as

the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. The name was adopted after consultation with native Hawaiian elders...and it suggests the abundance and timelessness of life on the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

Midway Island lies in the heart of the waters protected by the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Decades earlier Midway had been the scene of one of the most decisive battles of World War II in the Pacific. Six months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, America's navy won a hard fought victory at Midway.

Today marks the 70th anniversary since the attack on Pearl Harbor. The guns are silent now on Midway, and the island is home to less than 100 people and about 400,000 pairs of Laysan albatross.

The morning we visited Midway Island, I walked along the shore stepping carefully around albatross nests. Albatross can nest on the ground because they have no natural predators and the little baby albatross wait in their nests for their parents to feed them after fishing. The adult albatross skim the water for squid, but sadly over 3,000 miles from the West Coast and the Continental United States, plastic debris floats on the water, and the adult albatross eat the plastic and then feed it to their babies. We saw the carcasses of baby albatross and when we opened them up we saw the little carcasses were filled with cigarette lighters and toothbrushes and plastic bottle caps.

Ocean currents in the Pacific have created a plastic garbage dump estimated to be twice the size of Texas. Most of the contents float just under the swells of the waves, where bits and pieces are ingested by birds and marine life.

The Department of the Interior, NOAA, and other U.S. agencies are working to mitigate this plastic debris and prevent new trash from accumulating. But so much more work needs to be done.

We are at risk of permanently losing vital marine resources and harming our quality of life. Overfishing and degrading our ocean waters damages the habitat needed to sustain diverse marine populations. And of course, the most vital function our oceans serve is that of climate regulator - producing oxygen, reducing pollution, and removing carbon dioxide.

Protecting our world's oceans saves the world's most beautiful and important natural resources.

In 2009, shortly before he left office, George designated three more national marine monuments: the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, the Rose Atoll, and the Pacific Remote Islands. With Papahānaumokuākea, these four sites encompass more than 350,000 square miles – larger than all of the United States' national parks and wildlife refuges combined. These four national marine monuments support vast numbers of fish and birds, breathtakingly beautiful coral habitat, and an abundance of sharks, which is a mark of the health of these ecosystems.

These monuments remain open to shipping and other uses that allow the economies and cultures of nearby states and American territories to prosper. And they remain a wild resource, a place where scientists can make new discoveries and where a variety of species can thrive.

Countries around the world are following our lead. The United Kingdom, Australia, Chile, and others have expanded their protection of marine areas in their territorial waters.

Since returning home to Texas, I have been working with a group of committed conservationists to build a broad, state-wide effort to “Take Care of Texas.” We will be partnering with individuals, communities, and organizations to conserve our natural heritage and make our state a better place to live.

The George W. Bush Presidential Center in Dallas is home to one of our very first partnerships. Thanks to help from the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, we are landscaping the grounds of the Presidential Center entirely with native plants. We hope to showcase the beauty of native landscapes made possible through collaborative conservation. And once complete, the Center will offer Dallas residents and visitors 14 acres of parkland to enjoy in the middle of the city.

We hope this is just the beginning of many collaborative programs that help all Texans “Take Care of Texas.” We will develop partnerships to enable private landowners to improve the natural resources on their land. And together we can advance wetland restoration projects along Texas rivers to filter water, capture floods, and provide natural habitats for wildlife. And we know this work will ultimately help care for the Gulf since so many of our rivers eventually feed into the Gulf of Mexico.

And we want all Texans of all ages to understand their impact on our land, water, and wildlife.

From our experience with national marine monuments in the Pacific and with marine sanctuaries and national wildlife refuges and parks, we know that conservation and economic development are not mutually exclusive. Quite often they can be mutually reinforcing.

From the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary in the deep waters off of Texas to the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and the Florida Everglades National Park, marine sanctuaries and parks attract visitors and give Gulf residents a great sense of pride in where they live. And instead of impeding commercial activity, they demonstrate that economic growth can occur in ways that don’t compromise our most important and treasured ecological areas.

We should consider a similar approach to establish a national marine monument or sanctuary along what some call the “Islands of the Stream.” A string of underwater mountains run along the outer Gulf shelf, and a number of them rise to peaks near the surface of the water – creating a series of coral reef communities which track closely with the flow of the Gulf Stream. The Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary includes a number of these areas. These “Islands of the Stream” ring the Gulf, creating what I like to envision as a “Coral Necklace.” From the Flower Gardens, the underwater mountain chain runs east to the Florida Keys Sanctuary and up along the southeast coast of the United States. South of the Flower Gardens, the coral necklace continues to the waters of Mexico, Honduras, and Belize.

These areas represent just a fraction of one percent of the continental shelf in the Gulf, but by conserving these jewels of the Gulf with reasonable protections, we can address other uses of the Gulf with greater confidence – whether that is recreational fishing and diving or energy development which allow local economies to prosper.

We know from experience with other national marine monuments that cooperation between the federal, state, and local government, the private sector, and native peoples is required. Building that kind of consensus takes work. But we can trust that a cooperative approach to conservation has longer lasting benefits. When we do more to preserve our marine resources and wildlife habitats, we have a firm foundation to provide better access for all people to enjoy our beautiful Gulf of Mexico.

Thanks to all of you here today, for your commitment to the Gulf of Mexico - because your efforts can help ensure that we save this dynamic environment for generations to come.

Thank you.”

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