

## New York Educators Help to Restore Gulf Coast Habitats

In February 2011, a group of 14 New York educators traveled to Louisiana to rebuild tidal wetlands and maritime forest communities devastated by recent natural and man-made events.

Larissa Graham, New York Sea Grant Long Island Sound Study Outreach Coordinator, and Meghan Marrero, President of the New York State Marine Education Association, organized the group in response to the oil spill that occurred in April 2010. After talking to various experts and touring the Louisiana coast, the group quickly learned that the oil spill was only one of numerous problems that face the habitats along the Louisiana coast.

Wetlands are an extremely important habitat for thousands of wild animals in the Gulf of Mexico region, but, in Louisiana, wetlands are being lost at a rate of one acre an hour. The New York group volunteered with Louisiana Sea Grant to plant two native wetland plants: more than 320 pots of smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) and to propagate more than 2,700 Gulf Bluestem (*Schizachyrium maritimum*) plants that will be placed at various sites.

Maritime forests are an important habitat that provide food and shelter to neotropical birds as well as other wildlife. Volunteering with the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, the group planted 800 salt matrimony vines (*Lycium carolinianum*), a native shrubbery, in what will one day be a critical part of a maritime forest on a manmade ridge created from dredged spoil.



Group leaders Larissa Graham (right) and Meghan Marrero prepare smooth cordgrass at a local nursery. The NY educators planted more than 350 pots of smooth cordgrass in tidal wetland restoration project areas in Louisiana. Photo: Paul C. Focazio, NYSG

While in Louisiana, New York Sea Grant Web Coordinator Paul Focazio created a blog so that those who could not attend the trip could follow the adventure. Once home, the participants gave presentations to their classes, colleagues, and friends about their experiences.

This trip allowed educators to participate in hands-on habitat restoration projects, and created new environmental stewards who now understand the importance of habitats and are able to protect and restore coastal New York ecosystems.

**Learn more about this  
New York-to-Louisiana learning adventure at  
[www.nysmea.blogspot.com](http://www.nysmea.blogspot.com)**

This project meets the performance measures of Sea Grant's Healthy New York Coastal Ecosystems focus area.

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