

Lee County Gets Upgraded Beach Conditions Report™ Mote's Enhanced System will be Rolled Out Tuesday, Aug. 3

Mote Marine Laboratory is enhancing its Beach Conditions Report™ from Lee County beaches thanks to a new grant from the Lee County Tourist Development Council. The grant will pay for the purchase of new PDAs for Mote's beach observers that will allow them to include photos in their reports. The grant will also help Mote expand its Lee County reports to Cayo Costa State Park.

Mote and representatives from the Visitor and Convention Bureau (VCB) will demonstrate the new capabilities at 9 a.m. Tuesday, Aug. 3, at Bowditch Point Regional Park on Fort Myers Beach.

The Beach Conditions Report™ covers 33 beaches along Florida's Gulf Coast from the Panhandle south to Collier County. Reports are provided by specially trained observers and updated twice daily at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. 365 days a year. Each report is time stamped so that the public knows when it was last updated.

Reports are provided by lifeguards, parks personnel and beach patrol officers who use PDAs to upload information directly to the web via special interface designed by Mote. The Reports can be viewed online at www.mote.org/beaches. The public can also sign up there to receive reports about particular beaches via e-mail or call 941-BEACHES to listen to Reports over the phone.

The Beach Conditions Report™ includes several types of information:

- Water color and wind direction
- Surf conditions
- Whether and where algae is present
- Whether dead fish are present
- Whether there is respiratory irritation among beachgoers
- Reports of rip currents (only at beaches with lifeguards)
- Oil spill impacts
- Oil spill impact severity

“Our beaches are one of our state's most important assets. We've seen a drop in vacation inquiries due to the misperception that Florida's beaches are being affected by oil,” said Tamara Pigott, VCB executive director. “We think that Mote's Beach Conditions Report™ provides potential visitors a valuable source of accurate and timely information about our current beach conditions.”

The new funding will help keep the Beach Conditions Report™ up and running and enhance the information it offers, said Dr. Barbara Kirkpatrick, the Mote scientist who created the report in 2006 to help answer the public's questions about red tide along Gulf Coast Beaches. “When we created the report, the public was concerned primarily about red tide and wanted to know whether the beach they were planning to visit was being

affected,” she said. “Today, thousands of people from all over the world are using the Report. Many tourists are using it to monitor the areas where they are planning to vacation, especially in light of the oil spill.”

In April, Mote expanded its Beach Conditions Report to include information about impacts from the oil spill and has been working to increase the number of beaches covered. “We’d really like to expand the reports to all of the state’s 165 major beaches,” Kirkpatrick said. “We’ve been seeking funding to do so, both through private donations and through foundations and state agencies. I think the expansion in Lee County will be a good demonstration for how important this system is to the state’s economy.”

The Lee County Beach Conditions Report covers:

- Bonita Beach Park
- Bowditch Point Regional Park
- Bowman’s Beach, Sanibel Island
- Cayo Costa State Park
- Little Estero Beach
- Lovers Key State Park
- Lynn Hall Memorial Park
- Newton Park Beach

About the Lee County Tourist Development Council

The nine-member Lee County Tourist Development Council (TDC) was established as an advisory board to the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB) by the Lee County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) in 1983 to increase tourism to Lee County. The VCB markets the area as The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel. Funding for the Beach Conditions Report comes from the TDC’s Beach & Shoreline Program.

About Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium

Founded in 1955, Mote Marine Laboratory is an independent nonprofit marine research organization based in Sarasota, Fla., with field stations in eastern Sarasota County, Charlotte Harbor and the Florida Keys. We are dedicated to advancing the science of the sea through the study of marine and estuarine ecosystems, through our public Mote Aquarium and through an education division that provides unique programs for all ages. Mote has seven centers for scientific research focusing on sharks, sea turtles and marine mammals, coral reefs, the study of toxins in the environment and their effect on human health, aquaculture, coastal ecology and fisheries enhancement. Showcasing this research is Mote Aquarium in Sarasota, Fla., open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. 365 days a year. Learn more at www.mote.org.