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Environmental News from Florida's capital by Bruce Ritchie

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Oil spill shows need for coastal and oceans planning, experts say

Coordinated federal coastal and ocean planning would have allowed Florida to play a greater role in decisions that may have averted the oil spill disaster in the Gulf, ocean experts said Friday.

The Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition held a one-day conference in Tallahassee that was sponsored by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Florida Ocean Alliance.

Keynote speaker Larry Crowder, a professor of marine biology at Duke University, said without broader planning for various ocean uses such as tourism, shipping, fishing, energy development and protection of resources, federal agencies are alone in driving the decision-making.

"Right now we are making decisions for any federal or state activity one sector at a time," he said. "What this (planning) would do is put all the sector activities in a larger context where the larger society answers those questions: Do we want to have to have oil and gas, do we want to have wind power or aquaculture and if so, where?"

The House Select Policy Council on Strategic and Economic Planning in April heard a similar argument for "marine spatial planning" when it was holding hearings on possible legislation to allow oil drilling in state waters. House leaders pushed for \$250,000 in the 2010-11 state budget for the research.

Planning can help avoid conflicts between human uses of oceans and coastlines while protecting the natural resources that are key to the economy, Crowder said.

John Ogden, professor emeritus at the University of South Florida College of Marine Sciences, said lack of coordinated planning led to fragmented decision-making in the BP oil spill and that it wasn't just an accident. "BP was allowed to do what it did, take the risks that it did and essentially gamble on the future of the Gulf of Mexico without anybody knowing about it," he said.

The conference participants recommended establishing a framework for oceans and coastal data collection and planning in Florida, said Gary Appelson, policy director of the Sea Turtle Conservancy and a conference steering committee member. The

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