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Paul Johnson: Conference will examine the uses of our waters

PAUL JOHNSON • MY VIEW • JUNE 15, 2010

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This oil spill will change Florida's future forever.

Back on Sept. 22, just as the debate on offshore oil and gas leasing and drilling of Florida's state waters was heating up, the *Democrat* published my My View, "Comprehensive Ocean Management is Job One." In it, I called for a comprehensive plan and process, "Marine Spatial Planning," to manage the important and often competing and conflicting ocean uses in our state, while ensuring that the ocean environment is kept healthy and productive.

Fast forward to now, where a lack of proper planning and oversight has resulted in a major environmental catastrophe from an offshore oil and gas well blowout. This was never supposed to happen. In the previous oil and gas debate, such a spill was beyond many of our imaginations or worst nightmares, and few considered the larger geographic scope and/or longer-lasting consequences that this event has caused us to face.

We now watch daily in horror as the Gulf Coast environment we know and love and our way of life and many livelihoods may be coming to an end. We watch and hope for a miracle that will plug the hole so we can begin the long, difficult and expensive process of cleanup and recovery. More than ever data, science, mapping, planning and governance structures are needed to determine priorities for cleaning up the oil, restoring the environment and responding to the economic impacts of the spill, while addressing all of the other interrelated, long-term coastal and ocean resource issues and consequences.

Although we can't help but follow this drama to its unknown and undefined end, there is something that a few of us here in Florida are doing to ensure that we consider things a little differently.

The Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition, a group of organizations working together to conserve, protect and restore Florida's coastal and marine environment, is hosting the "Florida Coastal and Ocean Conference — An Ocean State of Mine," a one-day conference Friday at the Hotel Duval.

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Paul Johnson

IF YOU GO

What: "Florida Coastal and Ocean Conference — An Ocean State of Mine," a one-day conference

When: Friday

Where: Hotel Duval, 415 N. Monroe Street

Cost: \$75 (students \$50)

To register: Go to <http://flcoastalandocean.org/events>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

- Paul Johnson of Crawfordville is director of policy and special projects of the environmental organization Reef Relief, based in Key West, and a Steering Committee member of the Florida Coastal and Oceans Coalition. Go to <http://flcoastalandocean.org> or contact Johnson at paulj488@aol.com.

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