



Inventory and Monitoring Program

Background

The Gulf Coast Network (GULN) is one of 32 networks included in the Servicewide Inventory and Monitoring (I&M) Program. The network approach facilitates collaboration, information sharing, and economies of scale in natural resource monitoring. The eight network parks distribute across six ecoregions of the south-central and southeastern U.S.: the East Central Texas Plains (SAAN), Western Gulf Coastal Plain (PAAL, PAIS, BITH), Mississippi Alluvial Plain (VICK, JELA), Mississippi River Loess Plain (VICK, NATR), Southern Coastal Plain (GUIS), and Southeastern Plain to Interior Plateau (NATR). The combination of upland, alluvial, and shoreline physical landscapes occurring in conjunction with the convergence of temperate and subtropical climates across the region creates enormous diversity in ecosystems and makes the region, the GULN, and its parks a center of biodiversity of great national value and interest.

The primary role of the Inventory and Monitoring (I&M) Program is to collect, organize, and make available natural resource data and to transform data into information through analysis, synthesis, and modeling.

The primary goals of the I&M Program are to:

- Inventory the natural resources under National Park Service stewardship to determine their nature and status.
- Monitor park ecosystems to better understand their dynamic nature and condition and to provide reference points for comparisons with other, altered environments.
- Establish natural resource inventory and monitoring as a standard practice throughout the National Park system that transcends traditional program, activity, and funding boundaries.
- Integrate natural resource inventory and monitoring information into National Park Service planning, management, and decision making.
- Share National Park Service accomplishments and information with other natural resource organizations and form partnerships for attaining common goals and objectives.



GULN parks include a variety of natural and cultural resources.

Inventories

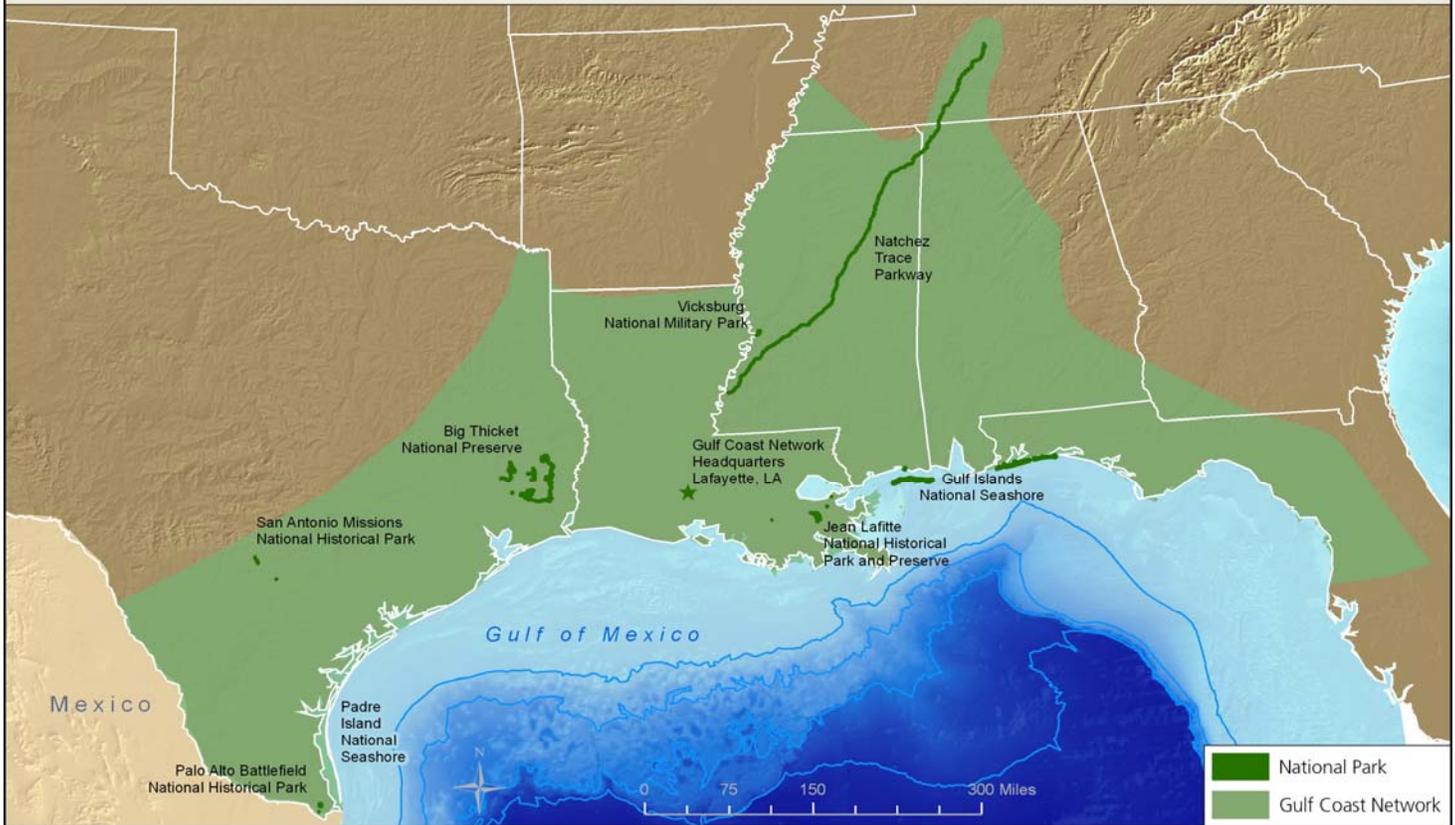
Natural resource inventories are being conducted in Gulf Coast Network park units for a range of natural resources, including the presence and distribution of vertebrate animals and vascular plants, vegetation communities, soils, and geologic features.

The Inventory and Monitoring Program provides guidance, funding, and technical assistance for parks to complete a set of 12 "basic" natural resource inventories. These basic inventories are common to all parks with significant natural resources, and are intended to provide park managers with the minimum information needed to effectively manage the natural resources of their park.

- Natural Resource Bibliography
- Base Cartography Data
- Air Quality Data
- Air Quality Related Values
- Climate Inventory
- Geologic Resources Inventory
- Soil Resources Inventory
- Water Body Location and Classification
- Baseline Water Quality Data
- Vegetation Inventory
- Species Lists
- Species Occurrence and Distribution



Gulf Coast Network Parks



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Vital Signs

Vital signs are a subset of physical, chemical, and biological elements and processes of park ecosystems that are selected to represent the overall condition of park resources.

GULN High Priority Vital Signs:

- Weather & Climate
- Coastal Dynamics
- Surface Water Quality
- Terrestrial Vegetation
- Estuarine Submerged Aquatic Vegetation
- Amphibians & Reptiles
- Bird Communities
- Adjacent Land Use

The network developed a monitoring plan tailored to the needs of the parks by defining network goals and objectives, identifying and prioritizing potential vital signs, and selecting a modest set of vital signs for long-term monitoring. Vital Sign selection was driven by landscape-scale issues of common concern among network parks. Criteria included ecological significance, management relevance, and legal mandate.

Data Management

Data and information management is a hallmark of the I&M Program. The GULN has developed and implemented a comprehensive data management system that protects and enhances the long-term value of monitoring data. This includes making a sustained and substantial investment in database design, data archiving, and in reporting data and derived information.

Results of inventories and monitoring are used in resource condition assessments and park planning documents, and are provided to managers, planners, interpreters, scientists, and the general public through numerous approaches such as websites, technical reports, resource briefs, journal publications, and oral presentations.

Contact

Martha Segura
GULN Program Manager

ph: (337) 291-2113
martha_segura@nps.gov

National Park Service, Gulf Coast Network
646 Cajundome Blvd Suite 175
Lafayette, LA 70506

Website: <http://science.nature.nps.gov/im/units/guln/>