

Gulf of Mexico marsh project to begin

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An unprecedented marsh gardening project spanning two U.S. states is to begin this spring.

Headed by Just Cebrian, senior marine scientist at Alabama's Dauphin Island Sea Lab, the ambitious "greening of the estuaries" in Alabama and Mississippi seeks to establish new, or rehabilitate existing, marsh sites.

Salt marshes and submerged grass beds were once dominant habitats along the Gulf Coast, but due to man-made and natural causes, the habitats have dwindled significantly.

Salt marshes and grass beds provide food and shelter for aquatic organisms, serve as wave attenuators and buffers for erosion control, and are thought to act as natural water purification systems.

Cebrian's research will specifically examine how black needlerush, a dominant plant of coastal salt marshes, can be restored and if restored marshes will act as water cleansing systems.

The project will also determine the optimal conditions that would encourage new growth, least disturb donor sites and best filter water quality.

The Dauphin Island Sea Lab, founded by the Alabama Legislature in 1971, is the state's marine education and research center, located on the eastern tip of a barrier island in the Gulf of Mexico.

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