

Unwanted record: Biggest ever dead zone in Gulf of Mexico

August 2 2017, by Janet McConnaughey



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

There's an unwanted record in the Gulf of Mexico: This year's "dead zone," where there's too little oxygen to support marine life, is the biggest ever measured.

Scientists say the oxygen-depleted region is about the size of New Jersey, covering 8,776 square miles (22,720 square kilometers).

Scientist Nancy Rabalais (RAB-uh-lay) has been measuring the area since 1985. She and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration released the latest measurement Wednesday.

Rabalais says the area was actually larger, but the mapping cruise had to stop before reaching the western edge.

Studies based on nitrogen and phosphorus in the Mississippi River had predicted one of the largest dead zones ever.

The nutrients, which get carried down from the river, feed plankton blooms that die and sink. Their resulting decay uses oxygen.

© 2017 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Unwanted record: Biggest ever dead zone in Gulf of Mexico (2017, August 2) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-08-unwanted-biggest-dead-zone-gulf.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--