

Gulf Coast Fund Responds Another Devastating Hurricane Season



On September 6, 2008, the Gulf Coast Fund's Emergency Response Fund gave its first \$5,000 grant to the United Houma Nation to assist with relief efforts during the 2008 hurricane season.

After two years of relative calm, the Gulf Coast experienced both a costly and deadly 2008 hurricane season. While final touches were being put on Hurricane Katrina commemoration ceremonies, Hurricane Gustav was offshore building strength in the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico. In preparation, state and federal officials hastened efforts to organize mass evacuations, as Gulf Coast communities braced for the storm's effects on their gas lines, power supplies and other vital services.

On September 1, 2008, Hurricane Gustav made landfall on the Texas-Louisiana border killing 43 people and leaving thousands without food, water or shelter. Countless residents were forced to seek assistance at available shelters. Then, less than two weeks later, Hurricane Ike struck the fragile border of Texas and Louisiana. Recorded as the third costliest in U.S. history, this storm caused an estimated \$27 billion in damage and claimed 82 lives.

In immediate response to the destruction, the Gulf Coast Fund for Community Renewal and Ecological Health (GCF), a special project of RPA, created the Gulf Coast Emergency Response Fund. The purpose of the Fund was to quickly distribute disaster relief grants of up to \$5,000 to organizations working in the most vulnerable communities.

On Saturday, September 6, Chief Robichaux officially accepted the first \$5,000 grant from the Fund to address the needs of the members of the United Houma Nation. The grant supported the tribal relief and recovery efforts of 8,000 Houma people in the hard-hit parishes of Lafourche and Terrebonne.

The Emergency Response Fund, initially funded by \$40,000 from GCF, raised an additional \$73,920 in donations. Twenty-three of the grants, totaling \$87,250, have gone to cover emergency community needs in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi. Support included assisting immigrants and the elderly; repairing damaged offices and equipment; providing safety and cleanup kits; and supplying food, clothes and gas.

The Gulf Coast Fund was created shortly after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 and funds community-based organizations in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Texas. Unique among the region's recovery grantmakers, GCF is advised by grassroots leaders working across the Gulf Coast.

– Ezra Vazquez-D'Amico and Takema Robinson

For more information about the Gulf Coast Fund for Community Renewal and Ecological Health, please visit <http://www.rockpa.org/>.