

Local Ocean Information at your Internet Fingertips

by

Douglas Gregory

UF/IFAS/Monroe County Extension Services

There is a wealth of information available from the internet on our coastal waters in the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. The web site of the Southeast Atlantic Coastal Ocean Observing System (SEACOOS) www.seacoos.org is a great place to get your feet wet.

At the SEACOOS site you can track the weather and ocean conditions along the route of the Explorer of the Seas cruise ship, see the effect of the SE Florida water currents, interactive maps of wind and sea surface temperatures, data downloads, and much more, like a description of how oceanographers track hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico. There are also games and youth activities.

The SE Atlantic Coastal Ocean Observing System is part of a national and international effort to increase the monitoring of our coastal and ocean waters for meteorological and oceanographic conditions.

The purpose of SEACOOS is to expand existing networks of at-sea observing programs to fulfill the oceanographic-related needs of our coastal communities. Foremost among these needs is to improve hurricane predictions and forecasts of coastal storms.

Florida Sea Grant is one of the education partners with SEACOOS to help scientists learn what our coastal communities want from ocean observing platforms such as towers and fixed or drifting buoys.

Life in the Florida Keys is heavily influenced by the surrounding waters. We have the Gulf of Mexico and Florida Bay to the north and the Florida Current (Gulfstream) to the south. Even if you are not a diver, fisherman, or boater your daily activities are directly influenced by the seas around us.

The Keys are fortunate to have six C-MAN (Coastal-Marine Automated Network) stations along our reef tract reporting wind speed and direction, barometric pressure, and water temperature that are critical to planning a dive or fishing trip. Also scattered throughout the Gulf of Mexico are anchored buoys that report on sea conditions and currents through a program called COMPS (Coastal Ocean Monitoring and Prediction System) coordinated through the University of South Florida.

The SEACOOS effort should increase the number of ocean observing stations as well as the type of data collected. An important component of future ocean observations will be for the detection of various pollutants and biological outbreaks, like red tide.

With greater coverage of meteorological and oceanographic conditions, improved storm forecasting will be another benefit of SEACOOS.

The expanded ocean monitoring also will provide critical data for detecting climate changes on ocean characteristics. Marine vessels and other offshore operations benefit from electronic access to the ocean observing stations. The data and historical information from these ocean observing stations are available from the Internet and, in some cases, by telephone.

For more information on our ocean observing systems start with the Web site www.seacoos.org. From this site you can access partnering sites and see the wealth of available data and products.