

Unusual tidal flows, low oxygen levels kill 50 million fish near Gulf of Mexico

□ A rare combination of natural forces may have caused the demise of a popular commercial species. It is possibly the largest menhaden kill since the 1980s.

MATAGORDA, Texas (AP) — Unusual tidal flows and resulting low oxygen levels were blamed Monday for killing an estimated 50 million fish in the area where the Colorado River empties into the Gulf of Mexico.

Jack Ralph, field response coordinator for the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, said the kill last Friday and Saturday was caused by a rare combination of natural forces that caused oxygen levels to plummet. "You have a double-whammy," Ralph said. "There was no way for anything to produce the oxygen or anything, so you just had this big festering pit. It was a strange coinci-

dence of events."

Possible man-made causes essentially were ruled out, he said.

"We feel very confident," Ralph said.

Game wardens and biologists from Parks & Wildlife, the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission and the Lower Colorado River Authority continued to investigate the kill Monday.

Biologists who flew over the area, about 100 miles south of Houston, estimated that 90 percent of the fish had washed into the Gulf and were scattered about a mile offshore by Monday morning.

Nearly all the dead fish are menhaden, a 7- to 8-inch fish in abundance on the Texas coast, Ralph said. Also among the dead were some sand trout, speckled trout, eels and flounder.

Ralph said an extremely high tide in the area last week is a major suspect in the kill. The so-called neap tide came into the Colorado River delta and remained for several days.

Normally, the tide would come in and leave in the same day, increasing river and oxygen flow. When the tide remained, oxygen circulation in the river was inhibited, and that was further hampered by a lack of strong winds to stir the waters.

Water samples taken from the river Friday showed oxygen levels as low as one part per million. Fish need between four and six parts per million to remain healthy.

Ralph said some secondary fish deaths probably will be caused by the decomposing menhaden, but the effect was expected to be minor.

It's the largest menhaden kill he could remember aside from a freeze that killed fish from Galveston to Brownsville during the 1980s.

Menhaden, an extremely oily fish, are a popular commercial species used for bait, pet food and fertilizer. The dead fish would have been valued at about \$600,000 based on a current market price of 4.8 cents per pound.

COMMITTEE: Group narrows list to three possible candidates

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in all areas. "It would be exceptional if you find someone equally qualified in all of them," he said.

On-campus interviews with the candidates started two weeks ago and will continue through this week.

Demske said he did not know much about A&M before he was nominated by the committee.

"I've learned a lot more since," he said. "It is certainly a very dynamic institution. It has a commitment to undergraduate programs which many large universities don't have."

Demske said there would not be a shortage of work for him at A&M if he is chosen for the position.

"We're in an age in which we have got to be improving continually or we fall behind," he said. "My style is to try to set some directions and then let the staff who reports to me implement them."

There are many differences between a small university like Miami of Ohio and a large one like A&M, Demske said, but there are some similarities.

"As the chief fiscal officer, you have to set a tone in terms of integrity," he said. "(It's) not just the financial side but a service to the students, faculty and alumni."

Krumm said he is flattered to be one of the finalists.

"A&M is one of the leading institutions in the country," he said. "I've discussed it with a variety of people at the University, and I look at it as a great

opportunity."

Burton said he, like Demske, did not know much about A&M at first, but what he has learned has been exciting.

"I'm not going to say I know everything, because I don't," Burton said. "But I think there is some chemistry there and I could make it work."

Burton said that A&M and ASU are extremely different.

"A&M's research grant is different and I think the students (at A&M) are a lot more committed, because ASU is mostly a commuter school," he said.

Lee said the search committee's work is not over, and it will continue to discuss the candidates with the president.

Lee said Bowen can still consider other applicants.

"He can accept the report, interview these candidates or take other actions," Lee said.

Bowen said he is not rushing his decision so he can ensure that the best possible choice is made.

"I am taking my time, but I don't think it will take much longer," he said. "I don't think it will take longer than a month."

The position of vice president has been vacant since June 1994, when Robert Smith, vice president for finance and administration, was reassigned while being investigated by the Texas Rangers for soliciting gifts as a public servant during contract negotiations with Barnes and Noble Bookstores. He was found guilty of the charges in November 1994.

REGISTRATION

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fee of \$200 is charged.

"We hope we don't [have to charge] one penny of these," Carter said, "and that the students will realize what they have to do now."

Notices will be sent to students and parents to inform them of the upcoming changes for the spring.

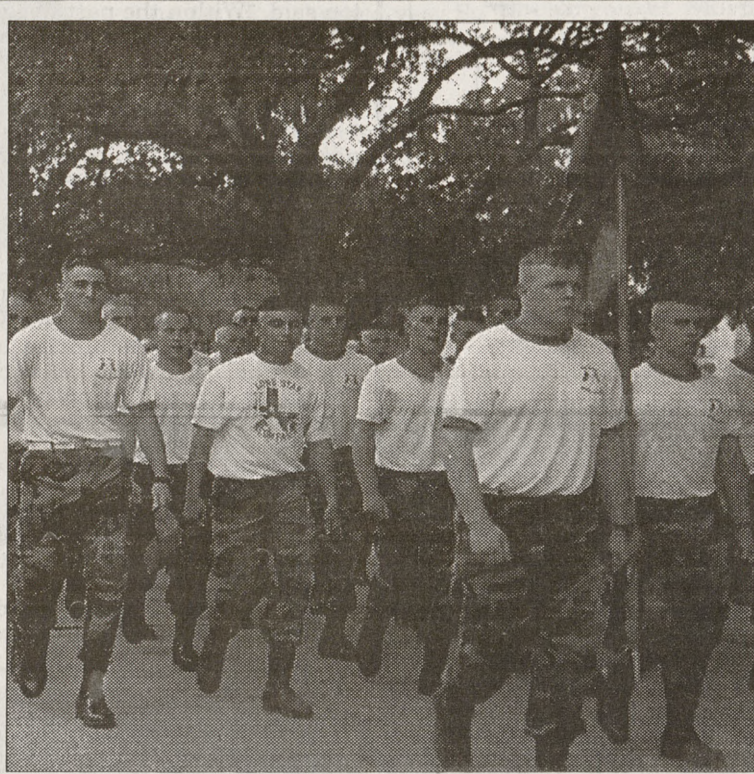
Dropping and adding classes for this fall is under control, Carter said.

"I think everything's running fairly smooth," he said. "There is still a line of people, but of course the class offerings are fewer now."

"If they had registered correctly and paid their fees on time, this wouldn't have been a problem."

Kyran Colbry, a junior history major, said the staff at the Pavilion did a good job handling the situation.

"You have to say something about [those handling the registration]," Colbry said. "They have to deal with [the students] after they have waited for an hour. It can't be fun."



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