



**NOAA** NATIONAL OCEANIC AND  
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



Contact: Monica Allen  
301-427-8003

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

July 5, 2011

### **Fort Myers Teacher Returns from Gulf of Mexico Groundfish Survey**

Steve Wilkie, a high school science teacher at South Fort Myers High School, returned yesterday after 14 days of assisting scientists surveying groundfish in the Gulf of Mexico.

Wilkie boarded *Oregon II*, a NOAA ship, on June 23 in Pascagoula, Miss. During his 12-hour shifts, Wilkie helped scientists as they cast nets in search of creatures ranging from plankton to shrimp to red snapper to Atlantic angelsharks. Each time the nets were brought back on board – especially the otter trawl, which Wilkie calls “the biggest and baddest nets on the boat” – hours of sorting, counting, and measuring the contents followed. Findings will be used for population assessments and models that improve how Gulf fisheries, including shrimp and red snapper, are managed.

“NOAA has become an integral role in my marine science and environmental science classes at South Fort Myers High School, whether my students are accessing posted expeditions, sea surface temperature data or using our research pontoon boat that was funded by a NOAA grant,” Wilkie said. “It was exciting to explore the Gulf of Mexico’s fish species and I know this project will translate directly into new and exciting hands-on activities and experiences for my students that will only enhance their understanding and appreciation for our marine environment.”

The research mission also examined some of the non-living features of the Gulf, including the “dead zone”, an area of low-oxygen water, that extends from the mouth of the Mississippi River every year. Scientists and crew aboard also kept a wary eye on Tropical Storm Arlene as it headed for the Mexican coast. Wilkie’s blog of his at-sea experience is accessible at <http://teacheratsea.wordpress.com/category/teachers-at-sea/steven-wilkie/>. Photos from his blog are free and available for use by media with proper credit.

“NOAA’s Teacher at Sea program immerses teachers in hands-on research experiences that give them clearer insight into our ocean planet, a greater understanding of maritime work and studies, and increased knowledge of environmental literacy,” said Jennifer Hammond, the program’s director. “Participating in real-world research allows teachers to gain experience actually doing science, which makes a significant impact when they bring back their knowledge to their classrooms, teaching students how the oceans affect their lives.”

Now in its 21<sup>st</sup> year, the program has provided over 600 teachers the opportunity to gain first-hand experience participating in science at sea. This year, NOAA received applications from more than 250 teachers, and chose 33 to participate in research cruises. The educators chosen are able to enrich their curricula with the depth of understanding they gain by living and working side-by-side, day and night, with scientists studying the marine environment.

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Join us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and our other [social media channels](#).