



# NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND  
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



Contact: Linda Joy  
Monica Allen  
301-713-2370

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
June 23, 2010

## **Mississippi Teacher Sails In Gulf of Mexico Aboard NOAA Ship *Oregon II***

When she applied to the NOAA Teacher at Sea program last fall, Mechelle Shoemake, a teacher at South Jones Elementary School in Ellisville, Miss., hoped to experience ocean research firsthand. Now onboard the NOAA Ship *Oregon II* in the Gulf of Mexico, she's getting that experience and more.

Shoemake and the *Oregon II* scientific crew are surveying populations of groundfish (or species that inhabit the bottom of a body of water) in the Gulf as part of a mission planned prior to the BP Deepwater Horizon oil catastrophe. A newly added part of the mission will support NOAA's seafood safety assessments in the Gulf. The crew will be catching fish to be analyzed for oil contamination.

The data that Shoemake is helping to collect could also ultimately help scientists understand the health of groundfish populations in the Gulf at a critical time as the spill continues.

Shoemake, who teaches fourth-grade math, science, and social studies, will board the research vessel in Pascagoula, Miss., on Wednesday, June 23, for the 13-day cruise. Shoemake will write logs that include information about research activities, life at sea, interviews with scientists, and photos. Her logs will be posted on NOAA's Teacher at Sea website at <http://teacheratsea.noaa.gov>.

"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."

"I am thrilled to be part of this opportunity that will allow me to participate in real-world scientific research and to experience life at sea," said Shoemake. "Through the NOAA Teacher at Sea program, my students will not only be able to learn first-hand about exciting research projects at sea, they will be witnesses to them, and on some level, participate in them. Making their learning relevant through my own hands-on experiences is vital to getting students excited about science."

Now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year, the program has provided nearly 600 teachers the opportunity to gain first-hand experience participating in science at sea. This year NOAA received more than 250 applications. The agency selected 35 individuals to participate in cruises. According to Hammond, educators can enrich their curricula with a depth of understanding made possible by living and working side-by-side, day and night, with those who contribute to the world's body of scientific knowledge.

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. Visit us at <http://www.noaa.gov> or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/usnoaagov>.

