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Alabama Teacher Sails in Gulf of Mexico Aboard NOAA Ship *Pisces*

When she applied to the NOAA Teacher at Sea program last fall, Melinda Storey, a teacher at Mountain Brook Elementary School in Birmingham, Ala., hoped to experience ocean research first hand. Now onboard the NOAA Ship *Pisces* in the Gulf of Mexico, she's getting that experience and more.

Storey and the *Pisces* scientific crew are surveying populations of coral reef fish 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 Storey is helping to collect could also ultimately help scientists understand the health of reef fish populations in the Gulf at a critical time as the spill continues.

"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."

Storey boarded the research vessel in Pascagoula, Miss., on June 14, and will spend 19 days assisting scientists with the reef fish survey that will help scientists learn reef fish population numbers in the Gulf of Mexico. Storey will write logs that include information about important research of the day, life at sea, interviews with scientists, and photos. The logs are posted on NOAA's Teacher at Sea website at <http://teacheratsea.noaa.gov>.

"It is critical to connect the classroom to the real world," said Storey. "The NOAA experience will allow my students to explore career opportunities, real world scientific data, and become excited about science. I can't wait to blog about my experience at sea and have my students respond daily with their comments."

Now in its 20th 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. They 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>.