



Nature Tourism Initiative

Along Alabama's Gulf Coast

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Dolphin SMART Program Grows in Coastal Alabama with Another Participant

GULF SHORES and ORANGE BEACH, Ala. – Bear Point Marina-based Skipper “J” Dolphin Cruises recently became the second nature tour business along the Alabama Gulf Coast to be accepted into the Dolphin SMART program, according to the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS) and its partners. After meeting all of the standards that promote the responsible viewing and advertising of wild dolphins, this coastal business was officially recognized by the program, which is designed to protect wild dolphins.

“We are excited to be a recognized member of the Dolphin SMART Program,” said Sherri Reas of Skipper “J” Dolphin Cruises “We hope that other dolphin watching charters join this program and help us preserve our best assets on the Gulf Coast.”

The first Dolphin SMART training session was conducted in Orange Beach on October 6, 2008. Ten boat tour operators attended.

“This recognition program tells customers and potential customers that Skipper “J” and Sherrie Reas have received training in the natural behaviors of wild bottlenose dolphins and are committed to sustainable viewing practices that will protect and preserve this vital resource,” said Joanne McDonough, nature tourism specialist for the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau. “As nature tourism continues to grow along the Alabama Gulf Coast, balancing the dual roles of conservation and public access is a challenge. The Dolphin SMART program offers an opportunity for Skipper “J” Dolphin Cruises and other boat tour operators to set examples of good stewardship and sustainable wildlife viewing.”

NOAA's Fisheries Service and National Marine Sanctuary Program partnered with the WDCS and Dolphin Ecology Project to establish the program in Key West, Fla., through funding support from NOAA Fisheries and “Protect Wild Dolphins” license plate through Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution. The founding sponsors continue to expand the program in other areas of the southeast United States.

In Alabama, Dolphin SMART is made possible by the founding sponsors and support of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (Coastal Section), the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium.

“The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) is happy to be able to partner with the original stakeholders of the program in order to bring Dolphin SMART to Alabama,” said Kelly Brinkman, Dolphin SMART coordinator for coastal Alabama. “ADCNR is dedicated to conserving Alabama’s land and marine resources and providing public education of those efforts. Through a variety of programs, ADCNR helps to ensure that our natural resources in Alabama are preserved for generations to come. I am confident that the Dolphin SMART program will also be able to meet that goal.”

Also, Courtney Vail, campaigns officer with WDCS, said, “We are excited to welcome Skipper “J” Dolphin Cruises as the second participant in this progressive and positive program to promote sustainable dolphin viewing tourism in Alabama.”

The acronym “SMART” is a reminder of the basic principles of dolphin viewing etiquette:

- Stay at least 50 yards from dolphins
- Move away slowly if the dolphins show signs of disturbance
- Always put your vessel engine in neutral when dolphins are near
- Refrain from feeding, touching or swimming with wild dolphins
- Teach others to be Dolphin SMART.

Skipper “J” Cruises is recognized as a Dolphin SMART program participant and thus will display the current calendar year flag and decal with the Dolphin SMART logo on their vessel. They also can use the Dolphin SMART logo in their advertising and are listed on the Dolphin SMART web site as a current participant. Each year, the charter will be evaluated to ensure it is continuing to meet program standards.

The WDCS is an international charity dedicated to the conservation and welfare of whales, dolphins and porpoises worldwide.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management and enforcement.

For more information about Dolphin SMART, visit www.dolphinmart.org, or call program coordinator Kelly Brinkman at 251-621-1216, ext 232.

Nature tourism business owners who would like more information or assistance may contact Joanne McDonough at 251-974-4634 or jmcdonough@gulfshores.com. Additional online resources may be found at www.agccvb.org/business-of-nature.

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On the Web:

Dolphin SMART at www.dolphinmart.org

Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society at www.wdcs-na.org

NOAA at <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>

Alabama DCNR at www.outdooralabama.com

AL Gulf Coast CVB at www.gulfshores.com

Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium at www.masgc.org

About the Nature Tourism Initiative:

In 2007, the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium and the Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center joined forces to oversee the development of the Nature Tourism Initiative. This project is designed to evaluate the nature-based businesses in Baldwin and Mobile Counties (in Alabama) and provide resources to meet their needs. Charged with this mission, Joanne McDonough's task is two-fold: (1) to work with local businesses and communities to provide a quality nature experience for the guests (2) while also encouraging good stewardship and sustainability of the area's natural resources. Current partners include the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau and the National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration. For more information, visit www.agccvb.org/business-of-nature.