



Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium



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Press Release: September 17, 2008

Dolphin SMART Nature tourism initiative helps dolphin-watching tours get SMART

In the early 1990s, you could count the number of tour operators conducting dolphin viewing excursions along Alabama's Gulf Coast on one hand. Today, there are more than 26 tour boats plying the waters and carrying thousands of tourists into the breeding, nursing and feeding grounds of wild bottlenose dolphin. However, coastal businesses recognize the challenge of creating opportunities for the public to enjoy wildlife while maintaining a safe environment. The voluntary Dolphin SMART program will help local dolphin viewing businesses overcome this challenge.



In an effort to promote conservation of wild bottlenose dolphins along Alabama's coast while preserving the integrity of nature tourism, several partners have joined forces to implement a Dolphin SMART program in coastal Alabama. The local Dolphin SMART partners include MASGC, the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR), NOAA Fisheries Service, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS), and the Dolphin Ecology Project (DEP).



The Dolphin SMART program began in the Florida Keys in 2007. It is a voluntary recognition and education program for businesses that seek to responsibly view dolphins in the wild, thereby, promoting their conservation while educating their guests about responsible viewing and its importance. Dolphin SMART was developed by NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary, NOAA Fisheries Service, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, WDCS, and DEP. The emphasis of the program is to teach dolphin basics, expressed as part of their logo: "Dolphin SMART"



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



Fifteen tour operators attended the recent workshop in Orange Beach, Ala., and expressed a strong desire to participate in the Dolphin SMART program. In response to this overwhelming support, ADCNR's State Lands Division Coastal Section committed to help implement the program and will host the first training session on Oct. 6, 2008. Upon successful completion of Dolphin SMART training and a subsequent evaluation, businesses can receive a Dolphin SMART flag and decal to display on their vessel, a logo and advertising statement, public recognition on the Dolphin SMART Web site and local media publicity.

For more information, go to www.dolphinSMART.org or for information about the upcoming workshop, contact Kelly Brinkman at ADCNR at (251) 621-1216.

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**TIDE
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The Dolphin SMART program promotes conservation by educating local nature-based tour operations. This recent workshop was held in Orange Beach, Ala.