

Louisiana has two Gulf Guardian Award winners for 2022

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Division announced Andrew Barron of the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP) and St. Tammany Parish Government & Pontchartrain Conservancy were two of the winners of Gulf Guardian Awards for 2022. Barron, senior water quality resources manager and quality assurance manager for BTNEP, has developed projects in water quality, culture, education, and economic development in the in the south Louisiana coastal area. St Tammany Parish Government and Pontchartrain Conservancy won the award for its Home System Inspections project to improve beaches, living marine resources and water quality in the Gulf.

Barron, who has been with BTNEP for 14 years, is a prominent scientist who has devoted 25 years to water quality research and education. He is well respected in the science community for his work with the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP). "Most of our nation's waterways are impaired at high levels due to improperly treated wastewater coming from individual home sewage systems," Barron said. "Home sewage assistance programs are absolutely critical if we want to restore our waterways for human and fisheries health."

St. Tammany Parish Government and the Pontchartrain Conservancy (PC) worked in partnership to improve watersheds in the parish through a cooperative approach. PC was tasked with conducting door-to-door inspections in the Ozone Woods Subdivision. The PC team inspected home wastewater systems in the project area and provided homeowners and residents with instruction and education on proper operation and maintenance. By the completion of the project, 347 onsite wastewater systems (ATUs) and 82 septic tanks became compliant or functional as a result of the inspection program, EPA said.

"The work of protecting and improving the Gulf of Mexico goes far beyond the coast, touching most of the Central U.S. through the Mississippi River basin," said Regional Administrator Earthea Nance. "This year's Gulf Guardian Award winners reflect the diverse ways people can help, and their passion for making a difference. Congratulations to the awardees and for all they do to protect this precious natural resource."

"The Gulf of Mexico is a vulnerable ecosystem that requires innovative approaches and proactive measures to protect this national resource. Over the past two years, the Gulf Guardian award winners have continued to think 'outside of the box' during challenging circumstances due to COVID-19. These Gulf Guardian Awards are an important way to recognize the valuable efforts of all their hard work to protect the environmental health of the Gulf of Mexico," said Marc Wyatt, Director, Gulf of Mexico Division.

The Gulf of Mexico Program initiated the Gulf Guardian awards in 2000 to recognize and honor the businesses, community groups, individuals, and agencies that are taking positive steps to keep the Gulf healthy, beautiful and productive. First, second and third place awards are given in seven categories: individual, business/industry, youth environmental education, civic/nonprofit organizations, cultural diversity/environmental justice, partnership and bi-national efforts. EPA said.

The Gulf of Mexico Program began in 1988 to protect, restore, and maintain the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem in economically sustainable ways. The Gulf of Mexico Program is underwritten by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is a non-regulatory, inclusive consortium of state and federal government agencies and representatives of the business and agricultural community, fishing industry, scientists, environmentalists, and community leaders from all five Gulf States. The Gulf Program seeks to improve the environmental health of the Gulf in concert with economic development, EPA said.