



PRESS-REGISTER

Needed: big hip-waders

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SOMEONE'S GOING to need big hip-waders to fill David Yeager's shoes when he steps down as head of the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program.

Capt. Yeager, who served 30 years with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Corps before becoming director of the estuary program in 2000, will leave the position in July.

Under Capt. Yeager's leadership, the program grew to maturity.

Started in 1995, the program was established to help local communities protect and restore the Mobile Bay ecosystem. It is one of 28 estuary programs across the United States.

Capt. Yeager's approach was to complete a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan before taking action. That brought unwarranted criticism from some who wanted the estuary program to do more, more quickly.

Others thought the plan was unrealistic.

But the plan was approved by the federal government, and consequently the program has become eligible for millions of dollars in funding.

Because the extensive planning is complete, more than \$51 million in federal funding through the Coastal Impact Assistance Program has been designated for Mobile and Baldwin counties and for other areas of coastal Alabama under the Energy Policy Act of 2005.

Beyond the estuary program, Capt. Yeager has been a tireless and productive leader for environmental protection in south Alabama.

He is associate director of the Coastal Policy Center at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, sits on the board for Baldwin County United, and has chaired a medley of committees, councils and other organizations dedicated in one way or the other to protecting and improving the Mobile Bay and coastal environment.

Fortunately for the estuary program, Capt. Yeager has agreed to stay on part time as a contractor to advise and assist the new director, who will be selected after a national search for candidates.

Capt. Yeager can leave the directorship knowing that he has helped place the estuary program on solid ground. The extensive work done to create the conservation and management plan will be a road map into the future.

South Alabama will likely see a protected and improved Mobile Bay because of Capt. Yeager's leadership.

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