The Impact of Hurricane Katrina on Mississippi Gulf Coast Libraries
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Abstract
Hurricane Katrina was an equal opportunity destroyer of libraries along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Public libraries, university libraries, and community college libraries, school libraries, and special libraries were destroyed or severely damaged by Katrina’s storm surge and winds. This paper reviews the damage and recovery efforts of libraries in coastal Mississippi.

Jackson County Libraries
Located in the southeastern corner of coastal Mississippi and 50 to 79 miles from where Hurricane Katrina made landfall, Jackson County is home to Jackson-George Regional Library System, the National Marine Fisheries Service Pascagoula Station Library, the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College—Jackson County Campus Library, the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory’s Gunter Library, and several school districts. All of these libraries received flood waters and/or roof and exterior damage resulting in loss of collections, furnishings, equipment, and interruption of services.

Harrison County Libraries
Located in the center of the Mississippi Gulf Coast and home to the largest cities in the area, Harrison County’s libraries received a severe blow from Hurricane Katrina. University of Southern Mississippi—Gulf Coast Library, William Carey University Library, and four public libraries flooded. All continue to operate in temporary locations.

Hancock County Libraries
With its strongest winds and highest storm surge, the eye of Hurricane Katrina made landfall at the Mississippi-Louisiana border. The towns of Bay St. Louis, Waveland, and Pearlington were nearly 100% destroyed. This area of the Mississippi Gulf Coast has been slowest to recover.

Web Sources
http://www.co.jackson.ms.us
http://www.hancocklibraries.info/katrinaphotos.htm
http://www.harrison.lib.ms.us/katrina.htm
http://www.girls.org/

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The main public library in Pascagoula (left) received about a foot of water and the NOAA-National Marine Fisheries Service Library (right) received about three feet of storm surge.

Roof damage at the MGCCC-JC Library (left) wet the walls, ceiling tiles, and carpeting. Librarians moved into the hallway to provide students with library services. At Gunter Library (right) 13 to 15 inches of storm surge three books off the shelves into marsh mud.

The public library in Long Beach (left) shows the marking that recovery workers had searched the building for bodies. The Pass Christian Library was used by as a shelter by town police until the storm surge forced them to relocate.

Biloxi Public Library (left) received 3 feet of storm surge that destroyed a significant portion of a their local history collection. An estimated 12 feet of water washed through the first floor of the public library in Gulfport (right). No library materials were found.

At William Carey University in Gulfport, a four foot wall of water and backup from local storm sewers flooded the library (left). Although the USM Gulf Coast campus suffered a terrible loss from the storm surge, the Library received less than a foot of water. However, staff were not allowed to enter the campus for several weeks which allowed mold to take hold throughout the first floor.

The residents of the Mississippi Gulf Coast thank all the volunteers who came to help and continue to assist with recovery efforts in the days, months, and two years since Hurricane Katrina. Civic clubs, faith based groups, and community service organizations have come to the coast continuously since September 2005. As the area struggles to rebuild and we cope with living in a damaged area, we are grateful for the energy, hope and kindness volunteers have brought to the coast. I offer my sincere thanks to my colleagues in SAIL and IAMSLIC for their personal interest in the recovery of the Gunter Library and the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory.

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