

The Deepwater Horizon Story

from the deep

A VIEW FROM THE DEEP

One of the laboratories where Dr. Lovelace might go is to that of Dr. Lori Schwacke, Chief of Oceans & Human Health Branch of the NOAA/NCCOS Hollings Marine Laboratory, who is researching the health of bottlenose dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico following the *DWH* oil spill. Schwacke said the dolphin health assessments in the aftermath of the *DWH* were only possible because of the long-term research her team had been conducting to understand the health of marine mammals in coastal waters, and the factors that influence their health.



Lori Schwacke, Ph.D.

Though her group also does research with other marine animals, dolphins hold a particular allure for her.

“These dolphins are top level predators in coastal ecosystems in the Gulf, and the loss of a top level predator can have cascading effects within that ecosystem. Also, the health of the dolphins reflects the condition of the broader ecosystem. Our dolphin health research is critical so that we are not only prepared to assess the impacts of events, such as the *DWH* spill, but also so that we can understand effects of more gradual, but long-term environmental changes.”

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Dr. Lori Schwacke



Dr. Jean Hermann takes a dental x-ray of a dolphin onboard the RV Megamouth during dolphin health assessments in Barataria Bay, Louisiana.