

PORTRAIT OF A BARRIER ISLAND BEACH

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ABSTRACT

Spanning a period of 11 years, 1,800 transects have been made along a 12-km stretch of beach on Mustang Island, Texas, to observe the seasonal and long-term changes to this barrier island beach bordering the northwest Gulf of Mexico. Documented in the ongoing study are bird populations, human disturbance, beach morphology, local oceanographic and weather conditions, stranded marine mammals, turtles, birds, oil spills, fish kills, effects of severe weather, and occurrence of marine debris and litter. This talk illustrates visually the tremendous impact, both aesthetic and as a danger to wildlife, of marine debris and increasing human usage on this otherwise beautiful beach. Also illustrated are several environmental and other factors that complicate efforts to understand the seasonal and long-term trends in the distribution of marine debris.