



November 17, 2008

For Immediate Release

Media Contacts:

Kelly Brinkman of ADCNR: 251-621-1216 or Kelly.Brinkman@dcnr.alabama.gov

Courtney Vail of WDCS: 480-747-5015 or courtney.vail@wdcs.org

Joanne McDonough of AL Gulf Coast CVB: 251-974-4635 or jmcdonough@gulfshores.com

Kim Shumack of AL Gulf Coast CVB: 251-974-4625 or media@gulfshores.com

Dolphin SMART Program Recognizes First Participant in Coastal Alabama

L.A. Watersports Tours Commits to Responsible Viewing of Wild Dolphins

Orange Beach AL – The Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS) and its partners today recognized L.A. Watersports as the first charter operator in Alabama to be accepted into a new program designed to protect wild dolphins.

L.A. Watersports, which operates out of Orange Beach, officially joined the Dolphin SMART program after successfully meeting standards that promote responsible viewing of wild dolphins.

“We are thrilled to be a part of the Dolphin SMART program,” said Bill Mitchell of LA Watersports. “We would do anything to help keep the dolphins happy because people love to see happy dolphins.”

The first Dolphin SMART training session was conducted in Orange Beach on October 6, 2008. Ten boat tour operators attended.

“This is a milestone for the Nature Tourism Initiative that was launched in Baldwin and Mobile counties in May 2007,” said Joanne McDonough, nature tourism specialist for the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau. “As nature tourism continues to grow along the Alabama Gulf Coast, balancing the dual roles of conservation and public access is a challenge. The Dolphin SMART program offers an opportunity for L.A. Watersports and other boat tour operators to set examples of good stewardship and sustainable wildlife viewing.”

Staff from NOAA Fisheries Service worked with NOAA’s National Marine Sanctuary Program, the WDCS and the Dolphin Ecology Project to establish the program in Key West, Fla., through support from NOAA Fisheries and “Protect Wild Dolphins” license plate funds through Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution. The program is made possible in Alabama through the support of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (Coastal Section), the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center.

“The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) is happy to be able to partner with the original stakeholders of the program in order to bring Dolphin SMART to Alabama,” said Kelly Brinkman, Dolphin SMART coordinator for coastal Alabama. “ADCNR is dedicated to

conserving Alabama's land and marine resources and providing public education of those efforts. Through a variety of programs, ADCNR helps to ensure that our natural resources in Alabama are preserved for generations to come. I am confident that the Dolphin SMART program will also be able to meet that goal."

Also, Courtney Vail, campaigns officer with WDCS, said, "We are excited to welcome L.A. Watersports as the first participant in this progressive and positive program to promote sustainable dolphin viewing tourism in Alabama."

The acronym "SMART" is a reminder of the basic principles of dolphin viewing etiquette:

- Stay at least 50 yards from dolphins
- Move away slowly if the dolphins show signs of disturbance
- Always put your vessel engine in neutral when dolphins are near
- Refrain from feeding, touching or swimming with wild dolphins
- Teach others to be Dolphin SMART.

L.A. Watersports can easily be identified as Dolphin SMART by displaying a flag and/or decals on their vessel featuring the Dolphin SMART logo and current calendar year, as well as the use of the Dolphin SMART logo in their advertising. Each year, the charter will be evaluated to ensure it is continuing to meet program standards.

The WDCS is an international charity dedicated to the conservation and welfare of whales, dolphins and porpoises worldwide.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management and enforcement.

For more information, visit www.noaa.gov, or call program coordinator Kelly Brinkman at 251-621-1216, ext. 232.

xxx

On the Web:

Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society at www.wdcs-na.org

NOAA at www.noaa.gov

Alabama DCNR at www.outdooralabama.com

AL Gulf Coast CVB at www.gulfshores.com

Auburn University www.aces.edu/dept/fisheries/aumerc