

GCAGS 75th Anniversary. What Next?

By Charles A. Sternbach



THE 75TH GCAGS ANNIVERSARY

Congratulations to the New Orleans Geological Society, Lafayette Geological Society, and the Baton Rouge Geological Society. These three societies hosted GeoGulf2026, a historic milestone on March 23-25, 2026, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Kudos to Mark Wojna (General Chair), James Willis (President and Technical Program Chair), and the entire GeoGulf2026 Team. Attendees enjoyed an excellent technical program, outstanding field trips and short courses, strong sponsorship, motivating luncheons, energizing exhibits, and an inspiring Honors and Awards Ceremony.

WHAT NEXT?

With the successful conclusion of GeoGulf2026, we turn attention to GeoGulf2027, planned for April 18-20, 2027, at the Norris Center in Houston. We congratulate newly seated GCAGS officers Bryan Guzman (President) and Mike Erpenbeck (Treasurer) not

only for their new roles but also for their long-term stewardship of GCAGS. I am honored to serve as GeoGulf2027 General Chair on the GCAGS Board, and I look forward to working with Bryan and Mike. I also chair the GCAGS Continuity Committee.

Geogulf2026 invited me to speak at the GCAGS 75th Anniversary luncheon on March 24 in Baton Rouge. Following the GCAGS Historian, Jeff Spencer, and GCAGS Transactions editor James Wilis, I spoke about the value of GCAGS to the global geoscience community, AAPG, and its affiliated societies, such as HGS. Here are some highlights and future thoughts.

GCAGS FERTILE CRESCENT

The area represented by the GCAGS and its 13 affiliated societies possesses unique resources, both above and below ground (**Figure 1**). This abundance comes with responsibility.

United We (the 13 GCAGS Affiliated Societies) Explore the Gulf Coast and Beyond

"From the Many, One"

Recent and near-term Milestones

- 2023 HGS 100th
- 2026 GCAGS 75th
- 2029 STGS 100th
- 2031 ETGS 100th



Figure 1. The GCAGS's 13 affiliated societies, shown in order of formation (from top left).

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Below-ground resources. Industry has already produced more than 140 BBOE with an estimated ultimate recovery of 210 BBOE from conventional resources from fields in the Gulf Coast Super Basins. With new ideas, improved technology, and unconventional reservoirs, much more awaits discovery. Our geological architecture, comprising prolific petroleum systems buried beneath a thick pile of passive margin sediments and a mobile salt layer, guides our exploration workflows toward trap identification and seismic imaging.

Above-ground resources. The US Gulf Coast is the only AAPG Section with a major offshore producing area. We alone publish an annual Transactions issue that contributes to the global scientific literature. Our AAPG Gulf Coast Section, geographically coincident with GCAGS, uniquely combines capital, global corporate headquarters, a vibrant service sector, technology pioneers, world-class universities, and independents in collaborative relationships. GCAGS and HGS are pipelines of future members and leaders for AAPG.

To those to whom much is given, much is required. Here is our plan to fulfill this challenge.

GEOGULF2027 HOUSTON APRIL 18-20, 2027

The theme of the meeting will be “United We Explore,” and we are proactively engaging “Next Generation Leaders”. We encourage you to attend GeoGulf2027 in Houston, submit a technical paper, chair a session, and get involved. For our early career members, this is a great opportunity for you to “build your brand”.

THE TECHNICAL PROGRAM

The two-day Technical Program, session chairs, and presenters are the heroes of every GeoGulf conference. We thank Linda Sternbach for serving as Technical Program chair in 2015, 2019, and 2023 (a three timer!). In 2027, we will welcome Ted Godo as Technical Program Chair. Ted’s long-standing technical contributions and many outstanding articles as HGS Bulletin Editor demonstrate his broad and deep talents for Gulf Coast geoscience. We also welcome David Tett and Jon Rotzien as General Vice Chairs. Both bring a strong operational and technical background.

In addition to the three traditional rooms dedicated to Gulf Coast geoscience, we plan to add a fourth room. The “Inspiration Room” will be dedicated to sessions and programs featuring exemplary operators (deepwater, shelf, and onshore), special panels on LNG, CCUS, and Next Gen wildcatters, and topics of interest to independents (SIPES).

THE EXHIBITS

Inspired by the success of the GeoGulf2026 Exhibits, we plan to expand the Exhibit Hall in 2027 with an energizing experience for more vendors, prospect presentations, and posters.

(Contact: Ceri.Davies@viridiengroup.com).

SPONSORSHIP

We will offer sponsors opportunities and highly visible recognition for their support. Jeff Lund, who served as Sponsorship and General Vice Chair in 2023, continues as GeoGulf2027 Sponsorship Chair. (Contact: jeff.lund@corridoroilandgas.com)

THE LUNCHEONS

Bill Armstrong of Armstrong Oil and Gas, Denver, will honor us as All-Convention Speaker on Monday, April 19, 2027. Bill and other legendary wildcatters from the Gulf Coast will energize our “United We Explore” theme. We also plan to have a “Technology Tuesday” luncheon on seismic imaging advancements that will literally help us see the future more clearly.

A PIVOTAL MOMENT

GeoGulf’s last visit to Houston in 2023 was a critical moment in GCAGS’ history. Many excellent conferences from 2010 to 2020 struggled financially with expenses and overhead. And then, COVID-19 hit. These troubled times could have been an extinction event. In 2022, GCAGS took a gap year, regrouped, and did not hold a conference. Then, in 2023, GeoGulf2023 emerged with a plan.

COMMENTS FROM MIKE ERPENBECK (GCAGS PRESIDENT, 2023)

“In 2023, the Convention team, led by Charles Sternbach (General Chair), significantly changed GeoGulf’s traditional practices. For the first time, the venue was not the large convention center nor the extended banquet facilities of a large hotel. Houston’s Norris Center accommodated the expected attendance figures without a contractual minimum block of hotel rooms to fill. We invited out-of-town attendees to secure their own lodging (a practice already widely adopted at recent conventions) with many fine hotels nearby.

Another cost-saving initiative was securing all aspects of interacting with the venue without the services of a third-party convention coordinator. Using low-cost web portals eliminated the costs of expensive third-party registration management, payment processing, and related services, resulting in a new, lower-cost regime. We are taking measures to pass these and other best practices to future local host societies.”

As a result, the GeoGulf2023 surplus reversed a trend of GCAGS decline. The 2023 profits enabled GCAGS to increase its revenue sharing with HGS, to sponsor the HGS 100th Anniversary Gala, create the mural “100 years, 100 presidents”, and underwrite the HGS 100th Anniversary Special Issue of the Bulletin. GCAGS also wisely invested its surplus.

Planning Ahead: GeoGulf Operational Model Upgrade

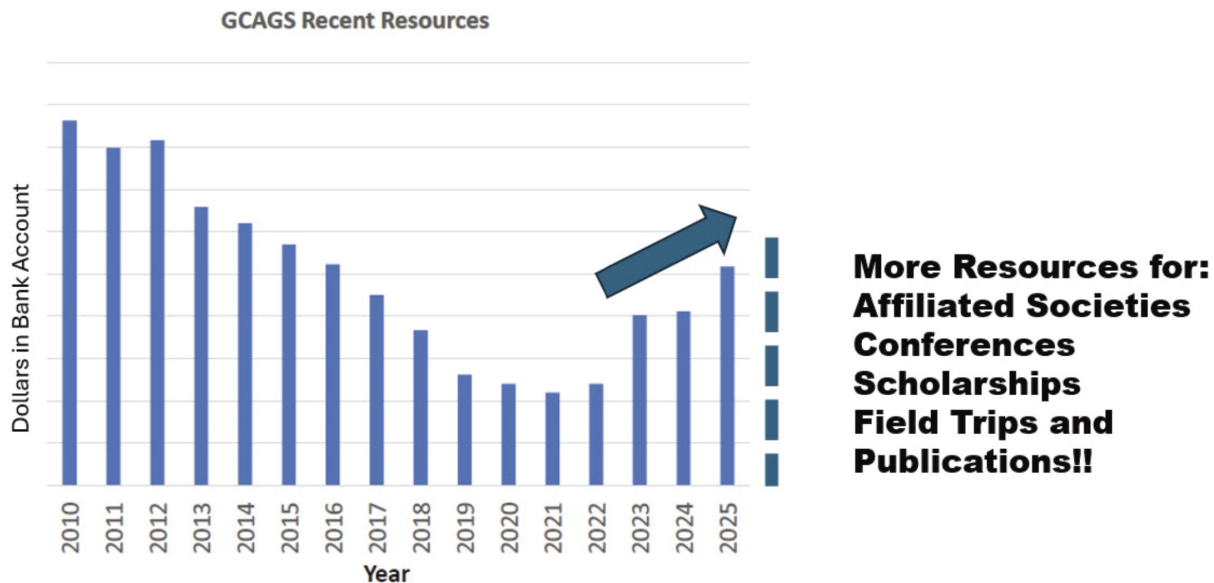


Figure 2. GCAGS Bank account resources begin a sustained increase in 2023. There was no GeoGulf in 2022.

Kudos to GCAGS leaders who proactively shared best practices for 2023, 2024, 2025, and 2026. Miraculously, they achieved stronger financial outcomes despite reduced incomes (**Figure 2**). GCAGS now shares surpluses that didn't exist before with host and affiliated societies to support quality technical programs, publications, field trips, short courses, scholarships, and outreach benefiting all GCAGS members and the Gulf Coast geoscience community.

THE ROAD MAP AHEAD

In March 2026, the GCAGS Continuity Committee laid out a roadmap for the next few years (**Figure 3**). Planning gives us time to engage future leaders and to celebrate important milestones in GCAGS fellowship. Both STGS and ETGS will be celebrating their 100th Anniversaries in 2029 and 2031 (respectively). Organizations celebrate what they value, and we value each other.

Looking Forward to a Bright Future

- 2023 Houston HGS 100th Anniversary
- 2024 San Antonio
- 2025 Nacogdoches- Stephen F. Austin University
- 2026 Eastern Gulf NOGS, Baton Rouge, Lafayette,
GCAGS 75th Anniversary March 23-25, 2026

What Next?

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- 2027 Houston **APRIL 18-20, 2027**, Norris Center
 - 2028 Austin (Bureau of Economic Geology, AGS)
 - 2029 San Antonio STGS 100th Anniversary,
 - 2030 open
 - 2031 Nacogdoches Stephen F Austin University
We Celebrate East Texas' Society 100th
Anniversary



Figure 3. Recent GCAGS GeoGulf Conferences, date and location, including those proposed for the future.

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Linda and I have often been asked by newly elected society leaders, “How do you motivate volunteers?” It’s simple: plan, organize worthwhile programs, and communicate a positive vision. Our experience shows that the best mentors are servant leaders who work with and alongside volunteers. The shared goal is constant: pack the house, make money for the host organization, and leave a legacy.

Houston will be ready in 2027. In the years ahead, GeoGulf conferences will return to Houston, beginning in the 2030s. That is the responsibility we bear for Gulf Coast abundance and the important role we must play. We plan to be ready. ■



Left to right, Charles Sternbach (GeoGulf2027 General Chair), Linda Sternbach (GeoGulf2027 Advisor, previous Technical Program Chair 2015, 2019, 2023), Mike Erpenbeck (GCAGS Treasurer), and Ceri Davies (GeoGulf2027 Exhibitor Chair).



Welcome to Stephanie Frelinger (GeoGulf2027 Short Course and Field Trip chair)!



Left to right, Mike Hudec, Ted Godo (GeoGulf2027 Technical Program Chair), and Charles Sternbach.

GEOGULF2027

H O U S T O N
18-20 APRIL 2027

CALL FOR PAPERS

Areas: Gulf of Mexico, onshore, offshore, Mexico, and Caribbean

- Cretaceous and Jurassic Plays, onshore and offshore
- Frio, Vicksburg, Wilcox, Yegua, Miocene, and Pleistocene trends
- Geology and Geophysics, Field studies, Case studies, look-backs
- Source Rocks, Basin History, Geochemistry
- Structural Geology, Gulf Opening, Salt Tectonics
- Seismic Technology, Modeling, Inversion, Direct Detection
- Data Analytics, Virtual Reality, Computer Applications
- Remote Sensing Technology, Gravity Magnetics
- Environmental Studies, Near Surface Mapping, Remediation
- Gulf Coast Carbon Capture and Sequestration, Minerals, Geothermal
- Resource Assessment and Energy Economics of the GOM

DEADLINE: DECEMBER 1, 2026

Submit abstract via a Google Form at: <https://forms.gle/KQbeDpXsX6v1FU4g9>

Longer submissions (full papers or extended abstracts) after abstract acceptance are welcome.

Contact Program Chairs, Ted Godo (geodogexploration@gmail.com) and

James Willis (jjwillis11@hotmail.com) for more information.

