

## NOAA Web Update June 24, 2010

### DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident



**Situation: Thursday 24 June –**

#### **Administration Releases its First Scientific Report on Subsea Monitoring Data**

Yesterday, NOAA, EPA and White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) released the first peer-reviewed [analytical summary report](#) about the subsea monitoring in the vicinity of the Deepwater Horizon wellhead—which contains analysis of samples taken by the R/V *Brooks McCall*, a research vessel conducting water sampling from half a mile to nine miles of the wellhead—part of continued efforts to engage the brightest scientific minds to confront the worst environmental disaster the country has ever faced.

The report comes from the Joint Analysis Group (JAG), which was established to facilitate cooperation and coordination among the best scientific minds across the government and provide a coordinated analysis of information related to subsea monitoring in the Gulf of Mexico. This comprehensive analysis helps define the characteristics of the water and presence of oil below the surface in the area close to the wellhead from May 8-25.

#### **NOAA Response**

NOAA provides coordinated scientific weather and biological response services to federal, state and local organizations. Experts from across the agency have mobilized to help contain the spreading oil spill and protect the Gulf of Mexico's many marine mammals, sea turtles, fish, shellfish, and other endangered marine life. NOAA spill specialists are advising the U.S. Coast Guard on cleanup options as well as advising all affected federal, state, and local partners on sensitive marine resources at risk in this area of the Gulf of Mexico. Overflights are conducted on a daily basis (weather permitting) to provide field verification of model trajectories. NOAA's Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO) is supporting the response work in the Gulf with NOAA-owned ships and aircraft. Currently, NOAA has deployed four NOAA-owned vessels in response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Please see [GeoPlatform.gov/gulfresponse](http://GeoPlatform.gov/gulfresponse) for further information on the federal response to the Deepwater Horizon Incident.

#### **Trajectories**

Moderate SE winds (8-12 knots) are forecast to become E overnight and continue to have an easterly component (E/ESE/ENE) through Saturday. Trajectories indicate westward currents within the Mississippi Bight region will inhibit further movement of the slick to the east. Coastal regions between Ship Island, MS and Freeport, FL are threatened by shoreline contacts within this forecast period. Under persistent easterly winds, the Chandeleur Islands, Breton Sound and the Mississippi Delta are increasingly threatened by shoreline contacts in this forecast period.

OR&R's modeling team continues to generate daily trajectories for the nearshore surface oil. The offshore trajectory maps (showing oil interacting with the Loop Current) have been temporarily suspended because the northern end of the Loop Current has been pinched off into a large eddy (Eddy Franklin) so there is no clear path for oil to enter the Loop Current from the source. Also, there have been no reports of recoverable oil in the Loop Current or Eddy Franklin and the oil has moved to the north and away from the Eddy Franklin. We will continue to monitor the area with overflights, vessel observations, and satellite analysis. When the threat of shoreline impacts to the Florida Keys increases, we will resume producing the offshore trajectory maps.

The Loop Current is an area of warm water that comes up from the Caribbean, flowing past the Yucatan Peninsula and into the Gulf of Mexico. It generally curves east across the Gulf and then flows south parallel to the west Florida coast. An eddy is water that rotates.

### **Closures**

The June 23 closure remains in effect ([see map](#); PDF, 784 K). The federal closed area does not apply to any state waters. Closing fishing in this area is a precautionary measure to ensure that seafood from the Gulf will remain safe for consumers. The closed area now represents 78,597 square miles, which is approximately 32.5 percent of Gulf of Mexico federal waters. This leaves more than two-thirds of Gulf federal waters available for fishing.

Any changes to the closure are announced daily at 12 p.m. Eastern at [sero.nmfs.noaa.gov](http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov) and take effect at 6 p.m. Eastern the same day.

### **Sea Turtles and Marine Mammals (effective June 23, 2010)**

A total of 539 sea turtles have been verified from April 30 to June 23 within the designated spill area from the Texas/Louisiana border to Apalachicola, Florida. Between Tuesday, June 22 and Wednesday, June 23, 4 turtle strandings were verified (one dead in Alabama and three dead in Mississippi). There are now 117 sea turtles in rehabilitation centers. These include 83 sea turtles captured as part of on-water survey and rescue operations, and 34 turtles that stranded alive. A total of 92 stranded or captured turtles have had visible evidence of external oil since verifications began on April 30. These include the 81 captured or collected turtles from on-water operations (75 live turtles, 3 collected dead and 3 found alive that died in rehabilitation), six live stranded turtles (two caught in oil skimming operations), and five dead stranded sea turtles. All others have not had visible evidence of external oil.

Of the 539 turtles verified from April 30 to June 23, a total of 407 stranded turtles were found dead, 42 stranded alive. Four of those subsequently died. Four live stranded turtles were released, and 34 live stranded turtles are being cared for at rehabilitation centers. Turtle strandings during this time period have been much higher in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and the Florida Panhandle than in previous years for this same time period. This may be due in part to increased detection and reporting, but this does not fully account for the increase.

The NOAA Ship *Pisces* reported a dead 25-foot sperm whale on June 15, 2010, that was located 150 miles due south of Pascagoula, Miss. and approximately 77 miles due south of the spill site last week.

The whale was decomposed and heavily scavenged. Samples of skin and blubber have been taken and will be analyzed. The whale had not evidence of external oil. Sperm whales are the only endangered resident cetacean in the Upper Gulf of Mexico.

From April 30 to June 23, 51 stranded dolphins have been verified in the designated spill area. One live oiled spinner dolphin calf was found off Florida on June 23. It died on the scene. Of the total 51 stranded dolphins, 46 dolphins stranded dead, five dolphins stranded alive and three of those have subsequently died. The other two include one in rehabilitation at Audubon Aquarium and one freed from between two oil booms. Visible evidence of external oil was confirmed on five dolphins. However, we are unable at this time to determine whether two of the dolphins were externally oiled before or after death. Since April 30, the stranding rate for dolphins in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and the Florida Panhandle has been higher than the historic numbers for the same time period in previous years. In part, this may be due to increased detection and reporting and the lingering effects of an earlier observed spike in strandings for the winter of 2010.

A stranding is defined as a dead or debilitated animal that washes ashore or is found in the water. NOAA and its partners are analyzing the cause of death for the dead stranded and dead captured sea turtles and the stranded marine mammals.

### **Assessment**

To help determine the type and amount of restoration needed to compensate the public for harm to natural resources as a result of the spill, a [Natural Resource Damage Assessment](#) (PDF, 90 K) will be conducted by NOAA and our co-trustee agencies. Although many agencies are involved in this process, NOAA is a lead federal trustee for coastal and marine natural resources, including marine and migratory fish, endangered species, marine mammals, and their habitats. The focus currently is to assemble existing data on resources and their habitats and collect baseline (pre-spill impact) data. Data on oiled resources and habitats are also being collected.