NOAA Web Update June 28, 2010
DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident

Situation: Monday 28 June –

NOAA NRDA - Natural Resource Damage Assessment (effective June 26, 2010)

NOAA's Damage Assessment Remediation and Restoration Program (DARRP) continues to coordinate data collection efforts with natural resource trustees in five states (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Texas), the Department of Interior (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and Bureau of Land Management) and with BP (the Responsible Party or RP). Multiple agencies from each state are engaged. The trustees are collecting pre-assessment information on potential impacts to fish, shellfish, marine mammals, turtles, birds, and other sensitive resources, as well as their habitats, including wetlands, beaches, mudflats, bottom sediments, corals, and the water column. The trustees are also assessing any lost human uses of these resources, for example, fishing, hunting, and beach recreational closures. Pre-oiling (baseline) and oiled environmental conditions are being documented for water, sediment, various habitats and biota, from Texas to the Florida Keys. Currently, over three dozen teams are active in the field on a daily basis, conducting surveys and collecting samples. Highlights of some of these activities include—

- More than 20 offshore research cruises have been conducted or are currently underway to characterize surface and sub-surface oil and baseline and impacted biological communities.
- NRDA teams are working daily in the near-shore coastal waters to document the presence of surface and sub-surface oil and to collect oil samples for fingerprinting to confirm the origin of the oil. Multiple shoreline and SAV (submerged aquatic vegetation) assessment teams are conducting initial injury assessment studies at more than 50 shoreline sites a day to collect ephemeral data on the degree and extent of habitat oiling.
- More than 1,200 linear miles of shoreline have been surveyed and nearly 8,300 NRDA samples have been collected to date.
- Marine mammal and turtle overflights have been conducted since the first days of the spill to establish baseline populations and more recently to document the presence of marine mammals and turtles in impacted areas, as well as to locate stranded animals.
- Teams of natural resource economists have deployed throughout the Gulf Coast to quantify the lost human uses due to the spill. They are conducting beach overflights and counts, as well as boat ramp intercept surveys in LA, MS, AL, and FL that will be used to calculate human use losses such as lost beach days and boat and shoreline fishing trips.

For additional information, see the Deepwater Horizon DARRP Web page.

NOAA Response

New Fact Sheet: *What to Expect in South Florida from the Deepwater Horizon/BP Oil Spill*

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 for further information on the federal response to the Deepwater Horizon Incident.

Trajectories

Winds are forecast to continue to have an easterly component (ESE/SE) through Wednesday at speeds of 12-23 knots. This will result in the northern edge of the slick continuing to move northwest threatening the barrier islands of Mississippi/Alabama and the Florida Panhandle west of Freeport, Florida. The Chandeleur Islands, Breton Sound and the Mississippi Delta are also threatened by shoreline contacts in this forecast period. An overflight today observed significant amounts of oil south of the Delta extending towards Barataria Bay. Some of this oil may begin moving westward, threatening shorelines as far west as Caillou Bay.

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

NOAA has expanded the closed fishing area in the Gulf of Mexico to include portions of the oil slick moving beyond the area's current northern boundary, off the Florida panhandle's federal-state waterline. This boundary was moved eastward to Cape San Blas. (See map.) This federal closure does

not apply to any state waters. Closing fishing in these areas is a precautionary measure to ensure that seafood from the Gulf will remain safe for consumers. The closed area now represents 80,228 square miles, which is approximately 33.2 percent of Gulf of Mexico federal waters. This leaves more than 66 percent 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 and take effect at 6 p.m. Eastern the same day.

Sea Turtles and Marine Mammals (effective June 27, 2010)

A total of 580 **sea turtles** have been verified from April 30 to June 27 within the designated spill area from the Texas/Louisiana border to Apalachicola, Florida. Between Saturday, June 26, and Sunday, June 27, 6 turtle strandings were verified (one live externally oiled from Louisiana, two dead from Louisiana, one dead externally oiled from Alabama, another dead from Alabama and one dead from Florida). In addition, 7 live oiled turtles were captured as part of the on-water search and rescue operation by the Unified Command. There are now 135 sea turtles in rehabilitation centers. These include 98 sea turtles captured as part of on-water survey and rescue operations, and 37 turtles that stranded alive. A total of 110 stranded or captured turtles have had visible evidence of external oil since verifications began on April 30. All others have not had visible evidence of external oil.

Of the 580 turtles verified from April 30 to June 27, a total of 430 stranded turtles were found dead, 45 stranded alive. Four of those subsequently died. Four live stranded turtles were released, and 37 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, Mississippi, 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. There are no records of stranded whales in the Gulf of Mexico for the month of June for the period 2003-2007.

From April 30 to June 27, 55 stranded **dolphins** have been verified in the designated spill area. One dead dolphin stranding was verified on June 26. Of the 55 strandings, five were live strandings, three of which died shortly after stranding, one was released and one is in rehabilitation. Fifty dolphins were found stranded dead. Visible evidence of external oil was confirmed on five dolphins, two live and three dead stranded animals. We are unable at this time to determine whether three of the dead stranded 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 (Document format: PDF, size: 90.8 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. For additional information, see the Deepwater Horizon DARRP Web page.