

## NOAA Web Update July 8, 2010

### DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident



**Situation: Thursday 08 July —**

#### **Protecting Wild Dolphins During the Gulf Oil Spill**

NOAA has received calls from concerned citizens to help coastal populations of bottlenose dolphins. NOAA is working closely with its state and local partners to assess and respond to distressed dolphins or dolphins found in areas affected by oil from the Deepwater Horizon/BP spill event.

While this event presents an enormous challenge to many aquatic animals across the region, there are steps the public can follow to help.

NOAA and its partners ask concerned citizens to follow these rules:

- Report any dead, stranded, or distressed dolphins or other marine mammals to the wildlife hotline at 866-557-1401.
- Do not push the animal back out to sea – this delays examination and treatment, and often results in the animal re-stranding itself in worse condition.
- Do not approach, feed, or swim with the animal.
- Stay with the animal until rescuers arrive, but use caution. Keep a safe distance from the head and tail.
- Minimize contact with the animal (use gloves if necessary) and avoid inhaling air the animal has breathed out.
- Keep crowds away and noise levels down to avoid causing further stress to the animal.
- Keep dogs and other pets away from live or dead marine mammals.
- Do not collect any parts from dead marine mammals. This is prohibited under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

[Read more](#)

#### **NOAA Response**

New Fact Sheet: [What to Expect in South Florida from the Deepwater Horizon/BP Oil Spill](#) (Document format: PDF, size: 399.9 K).

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 six 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**

Winds are forecast from the southeast and will decrease in magnitude by Thursday to 5-10 knots (kts), then become weak (<5 kts) and variable Friday and Saturday. Remote sensing imagery and overflight observations have indicated scattered areas of potential oil remaining in Chandeleur and Mississippi Sound, which will continue to threaten the coastlines of Mississippi and Alabama west of Mobile Bay. Models continue to indicate winds and currents are moving oil from the source region, west around the Delta, and then to the north. There may be potential new shoreline oiling in the area between Barataria Bay and Caillou Bay, Louisiana. No oil has been observed west of Caillou Bay since Monday. However, models indicate that any oil in this region would be subject to rapid westward movement by strong coastal currents which could continue to result in scattered tarball impacts to Texas.

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**

There is no change to the fisheries closure area today. The July 4 closure ([see map](#)) remains in effect. 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 new closure measures 81,181 sq mi (210,259 sq km) and covers about 34 percent of the Gulf of Mexico exclusive economic zone. This leaves more than 65 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](http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov) and take effect at 6 p.m. Eastern the same day.

## **Sea Turtles and Marine Mammals (effective July 7, 2010)**

### ***Sea Turtles:***

The Unified Area Command continues to build a sea turtle observer program for on-water oil cleanup operations. The observers will primarily focus on controlled burn operations.

Federal and state biologists have been surveying for and rescuing oiled sea turtles offshore using small vessels carrying trained sea turtle collection teams. If sea turtle observers can improve the sighting and collection of sea turtles prior to burn and skimming operations, then this is another way to reduce risks posed to turtles by the oil spill. In offshore waters, both free-floating patches of sargassum seaweed and spilled oil tend to accumulate in convergence zones, places in the ocean where strong opposing currents meet. Sea turtles, especially juveniles, use these areas for food and cover. Burn operations sometimes occur there because of aggregated oil. Burn operations are managed by the Unified Area Command and are not to occur if wildlife are spotted prior to ignition. Burns can be stopped immediately by allowing fire-resistant boom surrounding the operation to open and the oil to spread too thin to support combustion. For more on the United Area Command observer program, go to <http://www.deepwaterhorizonresponse.com/go/doc/2931/734531/>.

A total of 606 sea turtles have been verified from April 30 to July 7 within the designated spill area from the Texas/Louisiana border to Apalachicola, Florida. There are 146 sea turtles in rehabilitation centers. These include 100 sea turtles captured as part of the on-water survey and rescue operations, and 46 turtles that stranded alive. A total of 116 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 606 turtles verified from April 30 to July 7, a total of 445 stranded turtles were found dead, 54 stranded alive. Four of those subsequently died. Four live stranded turtles were released, and 46 live stranded turtles are being cared for at rehabilitation centers. This report contains some corrected numbers from earlier reports. 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.

### ***Whales:***

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. There are no records of stranded whales in the Gulf of Mexico for the month of June for the period 2003-2007.

### ***Dolphins:***

From April 30 to July 7, 58 stranded dolphins have been verified in the designated spill area. Of the 58 strandings, five were live strandings, three of which died shortly after stranding, one was released and

one is in rehabilitation. Fifty-three 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 [DARRP Deepwater Horizon Web page](#).