NOAA Web Update June 22, 2010
DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident

Situation: Tuesday 22 June –

Under the direction of the federal government, BP continues to capture some oil and burn gas at the surface using its containment dome technique. In addition to the oil collection aboard the *Discoverer Enterprise*, which is linked by the riser pipe to the wellhead, and the *Q4000*, which continues to flare off additional oil and gas being brought up through the choke lines—a method that was also put in place at the government's direction. In the last 24 hours 25,836 barrels of petroleum was recovered, a new daily record. In recent days, favorable weather conditions have allowed responders to conduct successful controlled burn operations. As part of a coordinated response that combines tactics deployed above water, below water, offshore, and close to coastal areas, controlled burns efficiently remove oil from the open water in an effort to protect shoreline and wildlife. In total, 275 burns have been conducted to remove more than 9.32 million gallons of oil from the water.

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. Please see GeoPlatform.gov/gulfresponse for further information on the federal response to the Deepwater Horizon Incident.

Trajectories

Winds are forecast to be predominantly onshore (SE) through Wednesday at speeds of 5-12 knots, then become ENE on Thursday. Trajectories indicate developing westward currents within the Mississippi Bight region will begin to inhibit further movement of the slick to the east. Coastal regions between Horn Island, Mississippi and Panama City, Florida are threatened by shoreline contacts within this forecast period. Under persistent SE winds, the Chandeleur Islands, Breton Sound and the Mississippi Delta are also threatened.

OR&R's modeling team continues to generate daily trajectories for the nearshore surface oil. The offshore trajectory maps (previously displayed on this page, 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

Today, NOAA made no changes to the current fishery closure. This current closure (see map) became effective on June 21. All commercial and recreational fishing including catch and release is prohibited in the closed area; however, transit through the area is allowed. The closure measures 86,985 sq mi (225,290 sq km) and covers about 36% of the Gulf of Mexico exclusive economic zone. The majority of federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico are open to commercial and recreational 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 21, 2010)

A total of 527 sea turtles have been verified from April 30 to June 21 within the designated spill area from the Texas/Louisiana border to Apalachicola, Florida. Between Sunday, June 20 and Monday, June 21, 13 turtle strandings were verified (ten dead in Mississippi, 2 dead in Alabama, and one dead in Louisiana). Ten live turtles were collected during offshore bird and turtle surveys by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Two of those were visibly oiled. There are now 116 sea turtles in rehabilitation centers. These include 83 sea turtles captured as part of on-water survey and rescue operations, and 33 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 527 turtles verified from April 30 to June 21, a total of 396 stranded turtles were found dead, 41 stranded alive. Four of those subsequently died. Four live stranded turtles were released, and 33 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** 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. Sperm whales are the only endangered resident cetacean in the Upper Gulf of Mexico.

From April 30 to June 21, 50 stranded **dolphins** have been verified in the designated spill area - no change from June 20. Of the total 50 stranded dolphins, 46 dolphins stranded dead, four dolphins

stranded alive and two of those have subsequently died, one on the beach and the other euthanized. The other two include one in rehabilitation at Audubon Aquarium found Saturday and one freed from between two oil booms. Visible evidence of external oil was confirmed on three 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

NOAA's Damage Assessment, Remediation, and Restoration Program (DARRP) is conducting a Natural Resource Damage Assessment (PDF, 89 K). 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.