

NOAA Web Update June 25, 2010

DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident



Situation: Friday 25 June –

Fifth NOAA Ship Adds to Ongoing Research Efforts in the Gulf Coast

NOAA Ship *Delaware II* departed Key West, Florida, to collect tunas, swordfish, and sharks and compile data about the conditions these highly migratory species are experiencing in the Gulf of Mexico. During its two-week mission, the research vessel will use longline fishing gear to capture the fish, and assess their environment using sophisticated water chemistry monitoring instruments.

Two other NOAA ships—*Pisces*, one of NOAA's newest research vessels, and the ship *Oregon II*—are in the midst of surveys of reef fish, bottom-dwelling fish, and shrimp in the eastern and western Gulf of Mexico to sample for seafood and water quality and species abundance as part of the oil spill response. For a complete list of vessels involved in NOAA's ongoing efforts to engage the best scientific minds to monitor water quality and ensure the health and safety of seafood, see this [NOAA News article](#).

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 five 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/BP Incident.

Trajectories

Winds are forecast to be predominantly easterly (E/ESE) through Sunday at speeds of 7-15 kts. The northern edge of the slick continues to move northwest, threatening the barrier islands of Mississippi/Alabama and the Florida Panhandle east to Freeport. Under these persistent easterly winds, the Chandeleur Islands, Breton Sound, and the Mississippi Delta are also increasingly threatened by shoreline contacts in this forecast period. Models suggest westward currents developing south of the Delta may begin moving oil west towards Terrebonne 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

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 and take effect at 6 p.m. Eastern the same day.

Sea Turtles and Marine Mammals (effective June 24, 2010)

A total of 549 **sea turtles** have been verified from April 30 to June 24 within the designated spill area from the Texas/Louisiana border to Apalachicola, Florida. Between Wednesday, June 23, and Thursday, June 24, 7 turtle strandings were verified (one live in Florida, one dead oiled in Alabama and another dead in Alabama, three dead from Mississippi and one dead from Louisiana). Three live, oiled turtles were captured as part of the on-water search and rescue operation by the Unified Command. There are now 121 sea turtles in rehabilitation centers. These include 86 sea turtles captured as part of on-water survey and rescue operations, and 35 turtles that stranded alive. A total of 96 stranded or captured turtles have had visible evidence of external oil since verifications began on April 30. These include the 84 captured or collected turtles from on-water operations (78 live turtles, 3 found alive that died in rehabilitation, and 3 collected dead), six live stranded turtles (two caught in oil skimming operations), and six dead stranded sea turtles. All others have not had visible evidence of external oil.

Of the 549 turtles verified from April 30 to June 24, a total of 413 stranded turtles were found dead, 43 stranded alive. Four of those subsequently died. Four live stranded turtles were released, and 35 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. 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 24, 52 stranded **dolphins** have been verified in the designated spill area. One decomposed dolphin was reported from Louisiana. Of the 52 strandings, five were live strandings, three of which died shortly after stranding, one was released and one is in rehabilitation. Forty-seven 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](#) (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.