

NOAA Web Update June 27, 2010

DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident



Situation: Sunday 27 June –

BP Continues to Optimize Oil Recovery Rates from its Leaking Well

Under the direction of the federal government, BP continues to capture some oil and burn gas at the surface using its containment dome technique—collecting oil aboard the *Discoverer Enterprise*, which is linked by a fixed riser pipe to the wellhead, and flaring off additional oil and gas on the *Q4000*, which is connected to the choke line. BP has finished installing the first free standing riser, which has greater survivability than a fixed riser and will be connected to a third vessel arriving at the site of the wellbore next week, the *Helix Producer*—a redundancy measure also taken under the direction of the federal government.

Progress Continues in Drilling Relief Wells; Ranging Process Continues

The *Development Driller III* continues to drill the first relief well to a depth of approximately 16,400 feet (11,100 feet below the sea floor). The *Development Driller II* has drilled the second relief well—a redundancy measure taken at the direction of the administration—to a depth of more than 12,000 feet below the Gulf surface.

BP continues the “ranging” process—which involves periodically withdrawing the drill pipe and sending an electrical signal down to determine how close they are getting to the wellbore.

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 (SE/ESE) through Tuesday at speeds of 5-15 knots. This will result in the northern edge of the slick moving northwest threatening the barrier islands of Mississippi/Alabama and the Florida Panhandle east to Freeport, Florida. The Chandeleur Islands, Breton

Sound and the Mississippi Delta are also threatened by shoreline contacts in this forecast period. West of the Delta, the shoreline between Barataria Bay and Terrebone Bay are threatened as Saturday's overflight reported brown bands of oil south and west of Southwest Pass.

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](#)). 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 26, 2010)

A total of 567 **sea turtles** have been verified from April 30 to June 26 within the designated spill area from the Texas/Louisiana border to Apalachicola, Florida. Between Friday, June 25, and Saturday, June 26, 8 dead turtle strandings were verified (three from Alabama, 3 from Mississippi, two from Louisiana). In addition, four live, oiled turtles were captured as part of the on-water search and rescue operation by the Unified Command. There are now 127 sea turtles in rehabilitation centers. These include 91 sea turtles captured as part of on-water survey and rescue operations, and 36 turtles that stranded alive. A total of 101 stranded or captured turtles have had visible evidence of external oil since verifications began on April 30. These include the 89 captured or collected turtles from on-water operations (91 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 567 turtles verified from April 30 to June 26, a total of 425 stranded turtles were found dead, 44 stranded alive. Four of those subsequently died. Four live stranded turtles were released, and 36 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 26, 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](#) (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.