

NOAA Web Update July 3, 2010

DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident



Situation: Saturday 03 July –

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. The collection capacity is expected to increase to an estimated 53,000 barrels per day once the third vessel, the *Helix Producer*, begins bringing additional oil up through the kill line—a redundancy measure taken at the administration’s direction.

Progress Continues in Drilling Relief Wells; Ranging Process Continues

The drilling of relief wells continues and has not been interrupted by elevated sea states. The *Development Driller III* has drilled the first relief well to a depth of approximately 17,400 feet below the Gulf surface. The *Development Driller II* has drilled the second relief well—a redundancy measure also taken at the direction of the administration—to a depth of more than 13,800 feet below the 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

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

Trajectories

Moderate NE winds on Saturday are forecast to become SE by Saturday night and continue to have a southerly component through next week with speeds from 9-14 knots. Due to the northwest movement of the slick over the past several days, the coastlines of Mississippi, Alabama, and the Florida Panhandle west of Pensacola continue to be threatened by shoreline contacts. The Chandeleur Islands, Breton Sound, and the Mississippi Delta also continue to be threatened. To the west of the Delta, overflights on Friday observed only scattered sheens offshore west to Caillou Bay; no oil was observed offshore of Atchafalaya. However, models suggest more oil may be moved west of the Delta threatening shorelines as far west as Caillou Bay within this forecast period.

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 June 28 closure remains in effect. ([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 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 July 2, 2010)

The Unified Area Command continues to build a sea turtle observer program for all on-water oil clean up operations. The observers will primarily focus on controlled burn and skimmer fleet operations. The command's Wildlife Branch is working now to determine when, where, and how observers can be best positioned to reduce risks posed to sea turtles by oil containment and clean-up activities. In addition, the Wildlife Branch will begin to train additional sea turtle observers this weekend.

Throughout the spill, 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 598 sea turtles have been verified from April 30 to July 2 within the designated spill area from the Texas/Louisiana border to Apalachicola, Florida. (One dead and one live stranded turtle from Alabama, both oiled, and one live debilitated loggerhead recovered offshore by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries). There are 147 sea turtles in rehabilitation centers. These include 100 sea turtles captured as part of the on-water survey and rescue operations, and 47 turtles that stranded alive. A total of 115 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 598 turtles verified from April 30 to July 2, a total of 436 stranded turtles were found dead, 55 stranded alive. Four of those subsequently died. Four live stranded turtles were released, and 47 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.

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 no 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 July 2, 56 stranded dolphins have been verified in the designated spill area. Of the 56 strandings, five were live strandings, three of which died shortly after stranding, one was released and one is in rehabilitation. Fifty one 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](#).