

NOAA Web Update July 25, 2010

DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident



Situation: Sunday 25 July —

Admiral Allen Provides an Update on the BP Oil Spill Response

National Incident Commander Admiral Thad Allen provided a briefing to inform the American public and answer questions on the administration-wide response to the BP oil spill. A full transcript is available [here](#).

Admiral Allen discussed the remobilization of response vessels at the well site to resume drilling the relief wells and performing acoustic and seismic monitoring to ensure the integrity of the wellbore—no anomalies have been detected—and reported on reconnaissance flights happening today to search for oil and boom that may have been displaced during the storm.

Allen also provided a revised estimated timeline for the static kill procedure and the relief well—based on a series of recent meetings with the federal government science team, led by Energy Secretary Chu, and BP representatives in Houston.

Preparations Are Made to Resume Relief Well Drilling

After suspending operations and evacuating as a precautionary measure to protect the safety of response personnel and evade the threat of then Tropical Storm Bonnie, *Development Driller II* and *Development Driller III* have returned to the well site and are making preparations to resume drilling the relief wells. Before suspending operations, *Development Driller III* had drilled the first relief well to a depth of 17,864 feet below the Gulf surface and *Development Driller II* had drilled the second relief well—a redundancy measure taken at the direction of the administration—to a depth of 15,963 feet below the surface.

NOAA Response

- 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

Strong winds are expected by late Saturday as Tropical Depression Bonnie moves into the region -- maximum sustained winds are forecast to be 25-35 knots (from the NE then SW). Winds on Sunday - Tuesday are forecast to be SE/ESE/SSE at 10-20 knots. Satellite imagery indicates the surface oil is continuing to break up into numerous patches. However, due to strong and variable winds during this forecast period, the Chandeleur Islands, Breton Sound, the Mississippi Delta and shorelines west to Atchafalaya Bay are threatened by shoreline contacts 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

The new closure announced on July 22 continues to be in effect. NOAA re-opened [26,388 square miles](#) of Gulf waters to commercial and recreational fishing on Thursday. The reopening of a third of the overall closed area was announced after consultation with FDA and under a re-opening protocol agreed to by NOAA, the FDA, and the Gulf states.

Modeling and mapping the actual and projected spill area is not an exact science. NOAA Fisheries Service strongly advises fishermen not to fish in areas where oil or oil sheens (very thin layers of floating oil) are present, even if those areas are not currently closed to 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 23, 2010)

A total of 719 **sea turtles** have been verified from April 30 to July 23 within the designated spill area from the Texas/Louisiana border to Apalachicola, Florida. Seventy-three hatchling turtles were released in Florida from nests that were moved from the northern Gulf of Mexico. There are 209 live sea turtles in rehabilitation centers. These include 166 sea turtles captured as part of the on-water survey and rescue operations, and 43 turtles that stranded alive. A total of 189 stranded or captured turtles have

had visible evidence of external oil since verifications began on April 30. These include 172 that are alive and 17 that are dead. All others have not had visible evidence of external oil.

Of the 719 turtles verified from April 30 to July 23, a total of 483 stranded turtles were found dead, 58 stranded alive. Four of those subsequently died. Eleven live stranded turtles were released, and 43 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 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 23, 69 stranded **dolphins** have been verified in the designated spill area. Of the 69 strandings, five were live strandings, three of which died shortly after stranding, one was released and one is in rehabilitation. Sixty-three dolphins were found stranded dead. Visible evidence of external oil was confirmed on four dolphins. We are unable at this time to determine whether the three 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. This report contains corrections based on new information. The status of one live dolphin was changed from oiled to unoiled based on further evaluation.

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](#).