

BP Oil Spill Plaintiff

1. View this video to get an overview of the situation.

- http://www.fox10tv.com/dpp/news/local_news/baldwin_county/ag-troy-king-files-suit-against-bp
- <http://video.foxbusiness.com/v/4194418/alabama-ag-on-cleaning-up-oil-spill/>

2. Read the articles below

Fears grow over oil spill's long-term effects on food chain

Workers clean up oil on a beach in Port Fourchon, Louisiana, May 24, 2010.

Photograph: Daniel Beltra/Greenpeace/EPA

As oil continues gushing from the ocean floor into the Gulf of Mexico, with no sign of stopping until a new well is finished this August, scientists, environmentalists and local residents are beginning to reckon with the reality of a massive annihilation of sea creatures and wildlife.

Dead animals are already washing up on shores. Birds have been found dying in pools of oil and dispersant, which have taken over their marshland habitats.



Several species in the Gulf of Mexico are already endangered, including the Kemp's Ridley and Leatherback sea turtles, the Sperm Whale, and birds such as the Piping Plover and the Gulf Sturgeon, according to the Arizona-based Centre for Biological Diversity (CBD).

As a result of the disaster, CBD has already petitioned the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to add the Bluefin Tuna to the endangered species list.

Assistant Professor Michael Blum of Tulane University's Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology warns that some species may be at risk of extinction.

"There are... hundreds of shorebirds and marine mammals that are acutely sensitive to oil. You could potentially lose whole species, have extinction events. Brown pelicans were just taken off the endangered species list. On this threshold, a big dieback and mortality event, they would be pushed back into a situation where they could be endangered," Blum said in an interview.

"A lot of the species of most concern - sea turtles and dolphins - migrate, use our breeding grounds or they're a very important feeding ground," he explained.

While there are no dolphin species whose populations exclusively migrate through the Gulf, Blum said those dolphins not impacted by the Gulf would be in such low numbers that they may not be able to reproduce at an adequate rate to avoid extinction.

The EPA admits the impact of the oil spill - and the unprecedented use of toxic dispersants to break up the oil - on wildlife is unknown. "We're still deeply concerned about the things we don't know. The long-term effect on aquatic life is unknown," EPA Secretary Lisa Jackson said in a conference call with reporters this week.

The agency says will require rigorous autopsies and necropsies to determine whether the animals are in fact dying because of the oil and no other reason. It says soil and air sampling do not show dangerous levels of contaminants so far.

"They're saying it's really not clear - it's a safe thing to say. As a scientist, one doesn't want to overreach and reach erroneous conclusions," Blum said. However, he added, "from a real world perspective, going down, seeing what's happening and understanding the ecology of the system, we're facing immediate effects of exposure."

"Certainly when oil washes up against the shoreline you have immediate toxic effects on almost anything. If you're a fish, you get oil on your gills and can't breathe. If you're a crab, same story. If you're a plant, you get suffocated, it reduces photosynthesis," he said.

Jackson, who has toured the Gulf Coast twice since the disaster began, told reporters, "It's clear oil is piling up in marshes. It's quite a bit." She referred to the oil slick that has been reaching some shores and marshlands as "the goop".

"We're sampling the goop. There's lots of speculation of what could be in this goop, we'll look for dispersant chemicals as well as what else might be in there," Jackson said. "BP has thrust upon us one of the greatest environmental challenges of our time."

The Gulf marshlands are a breeding ground for many animals. Young shrimp, for example, mature in the marshlands, and then migrate to the ocean where they become food for fish. In three or four years, if there are no adult shrimp to migrate out, the entire food chain could be affected.

"Really, there are cumulative effects over time. There's immediate shock to system, immediate toxicity and immediate mortality - birds, dolphins, marine mammals oiled. The mortality is relatively small in comparison to the potential effect that may accumulate over time. Things are not as bad now as they likely will become," Blum said.

Watchdog groups complain that the drilling plans submitted by oil companies like BP to the U.S. government reveal a cavalier attitude towards the risk posed to animals in the Gulf.

"One of the exploration plans I read said, if there is a spill, the wildlife can probably just navigate around it. So the burden is really on the wildlife," said Miyoko Sakashita, CBD Oceans Director.

"Some animals have more keen sense and have stayed away. But there have been studies of sea turtles that go right through it," Sakashita said in an interview. "Even if they can avoid the spill while it's a plume in the water, that removes it from the habitat."

The extent of the impact on Gulf Coast animals will depend on many factors, scientists say. It now looks like the spill will continue until August, although it is not clear whether the spill will continue at its current rate, or spew faster.

It will also depend on whether BP or the U.S. government can keep the oil away from the coast, using techniques like "booming" - the placing of barriers in the water - or possibly using tankers to suck up the oily water, separate out the oil, and return the clean water into the ocean.

Meanwhile, concerned citizens across the U.S. are taking matters into their own hands by sending absorbent materials like human hair and nylon stockings for use in soaking up the oil. Justin Fredericksen, a hair stylist at Mint Salon in Atlanta, got tired of feeling depressed about the disaster and decided to do something: last weekend, he organised local hairdressers to offer free cuts for customers who donate their hair to the cause.

Despite the relief efforts, if a hurricane were to hit the Gulf this storm season - which is predicted to be very active - it would bring much of the oil onto the shore.

Blum says it's easier to separate oil from water than it is to separate oil from the marshlands, which he described as a "sponge". Locals worry a hurricane this season could be the nail in the coffin for marshlands already teetering on the brink of destruction.

• This story is part of a series of features on biodiversity by IPS, CGIAR/Biodiversity International, IFEJ and UNEP/CBD, members of Communicators for Sustainable Development.

EFFECTS OF THE OIL SPILL ON LOCAL AND NATIONAL ECONOMIES

The BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is expected to have different impacts on the local economies of the Gulf States such as Louisiana, Alabama and Florida and the U.S. National Economy. It is thought that the Local economies of Gulf States will be impacted the most, and the impact to these states will be very negative most greatly affecting Tourism and Fishing Industries. Considering the local economies were just recently arriving at pre-Hurricane Katrina income levels again, this spill is another major setback that the industries must overcome to keep business going. However, because of so many imported goods the national economy is not expected to suffer greatly from losses in revenue or goods from industries affected along the Gulf Coast

How did the BP Oil Spill affect the local economy?

Many businesses were finally reaching pre-Katrina sales and revenue levels before the oil spill but those goals have been pushed further away. In a general survey conducted by the GNO Inc. only four percent of companies were worried about physical damage to their business, but 24% and 26% of companies felt that their actual business would be interrupted or outside interest in their business would be interrupted. Also, over half of the participants in the survey said they would need assistance in regaining revenue and business lost during the time of recovery from the oil spill. Damages in different areas will likely be suffered by local communities for years.

Some General Concerns for Local Economies

- Estimates that over 250000 jobs in fishing, tourism and energy industries will be lost
- Fishing industries are concerned with the populations ideas that seafood from the area will be affected resulting in a decrease of buying from the gulf regions
- Tourism industries are worried about the effects on the local environments such as the barrier islands and the marshes that will lead to greatly decreased tourism
- Gulf fishing and tourism industries have produced an average annual income of \$3.5-\$4.5 billion a year for the past few years
- After the spill the annual income was decreased dramatically
 - This is due to the contamination of the seawater and the resulting death of marine life
- The gulf's seafood industry is considered "dead" because people are worried about consuming contaminated food from the region

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS ON SPECIFIC INDUSTRIES?

Fishing

- Louisiana's Fishing Industry is at risk – because of the spill fisherman cannot access key fishing areas

- The National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has banned fishing in 4.5% of the Gulf's federal waters
- The threat is increased if it reaches waterways where marine life hatches and develops – this could affect the industry in the short- as well as long-term
- The fishing industry's retail value of catches is over \$400 million per year and the industry is expected to experience great losses over the next few years due to the oil spill
- The gulf produces 73% of the nation's domestically produced shrimp and 59% of its domestically produced oysters
 - The price for these goods increased 10-20% in the first few months of the spill

Tourism

- Many annual tourists to the Gulf regions have cancelled their vacation because "the sea hasn't been cleaned up and the beaches are no longer safe" – they believe
- The hotels in coastal cities have not received bookings since April 2010
- It may take years to recover from this deficit
- Winds have moved the spill west which keeps it from key tourist areas in Florida, Alabama and Mississippi – but people are still hesitant to book vacations in those areas because of the threat

Shipping

- Ports and shipping lanes have not been greatly affected – however the oil has not reached them
- If the oil were to reach these big shipping lanes and ports they may shut down, especially the port in New Orleans

Energy

- There should be minimal effect on energy because only 2 of 4000 oil and natural gas producers have had to stop production

Commercial Real Estate

- Fewer tourists are going to Gulf areas (Weiss)

Job Creation

- May partly compensate for the spill-related job losses
- Jobs were created for cleanup and containment
- After the initial surge in clean-up jobs there will be few more and the pay would likely be lower than what previously employed people were paid (CBS)
- Many jobs for clean-up are going to out-of-state boat owners

WHY HAS THE OIL SPILL AFFECTED LOCAL MARKETS AND NOT NATIONAL ONES?

- Tourism Spending is moving elsewhere in the United States
- Hotel rooms are going unused by tourists – however this allows clean-up crews to take advantage of unoccupied rooms
- Gulf fishermen have been damaged because of unusable fishing waters
 - This is not seen nationally because commercial fishing from the coast is only a fraction of the US Economy
 - also most fish eaten in the US are imported

- Ten percent of the Gulf region's economy comes from its energy industry – however this is not vital to the nation's energy
- Deepwater drilling may become too expensive for the oil companies and they may relocate to areas abroad which would hurt communities in Texas and Louisiana but not nationally
- Consumers in gulf areas will spend less money because the neighbors who's businesses they used to support have gone under and they don't want to pay "outsiders"

HOW DID THE BP OIL SPILL AFFECT THE GLOBAL ECONOMY?

- Many financial experts estimate that the fuel prices will increase after winter
- However, there will be no major effect on national economy
- The biggest impact will be a negative impact on the local economy – but that is only 1% of national GDP
- The oil spill will result in a negative consumer confidence in the market – due to lower demand businesses will have to decrease the selling price of goods

WHAT THE GOVERNMENT IS DOING TO HELP LOCAL BUSINESSES AFFECTED BY THE OIL SPILL

- Businesses can apply for low interest disaster loans for up to \$2 million in disaster loans
 - This can be used by businesses to pay obligations and cover expenses until they can resume normal operations

More good background information can be found at
<http://www.unc.edu/~asalley/GEOG284/evironeffects.html>