

GULF SCIENCE MONITOR

SHARING SCIENCE FROM THE GULF OIL SPILL RESPONSE

Issue 7 - November 18, 2010

Subsurface Monitoring Unit strategy document available

In early August, Admiral Thad Allen directed the Unified Area Command (UAC) to carry out a comprehensive subsurface oil monitoring program to inform ongoing emergency response clean up actions. The goals were to find any remaining recoverable oil and identify any additional response requirements that may be necessary to address remaining subsurface oil. The UAC did this in close collaboration with independent and academic scientists. Throughout late summer and fall, scientists and responders designed and executed the work in an adaptive manner, updating and adjusting sampling plans and priorities based on the latest available information and needs.

The final *Strategic Plan for Sub-Sea and Sub-Surface Oil and Dispersant Detection, Sampling, and Monitoring* outlines the steps taken to integrate agency, academic, and private scientific efforts in sampling, detection, analysis and reporting of results. It outlines sampling plans; enables additional sampling based upon initial findings; supports timely sharing of data and knowledge among government, scientific and public parties; and involves government, academic and private researchers in monitoring and data interpretation. The full strategy document is available online -- [Click here](#).

The sampling plans were completed in late October. Now the Operational Science Advisory Team (OSAT), which provides scientific analysis and advice to Federal On-Scene Coordinator Admiral Zukunft, is analyzing the results. Based on the OSAT's recommendations, Admiral Zukunft will make decisions about further response, cleanup or sampling. This subsurface monitoring program also lays the foundation for additional research into the spill's long-term impacts on the health of the Gulf. Federal and state natural resource trustee agencies continue to monitor and evaluate the impacts of the spill and, through the damage assessment process, are determined to hold the responsible parties accountable for restoring the damage done to the environment.



99.6% of federal Gulf waters now open to fishing

On November 15, NOAA **reopened** an additional 8,403 square miles of the currently closed federal fisheries area in the Gulf to commercial and recreational fishing. With this reopening, 99.6 percent of federal waters in the Gulf are now open. Only a 1,000 square mile area directly around the wellhead remains closed. "This is the first reopening where we have added a supplemental test to detect dispersants in seafood, and all the samples passed," said Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D., NOAA Administrator. "This is yet another indication that our Gulf seafood is safe for consumption."



NOAA completes second phase of Gulf Mussel Watch study



In **May**, NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (**NCCOS**) began a two-part **Mussel Watch** study in the Gulf to support the NRDA process. Initially, researchers collected **baseline** shellfish, sediment, and water samples before oil reached the shoreline. They sampled at 60 locations along the Gulf of Mexico from the Florida Keys to Brazos River, Texas. In the second phase, researchers returned to the same locations to collect "after oiling" samples. They will compare the new data against the baseline data to assess any contamination in oyster tissue, sediment chemistry and toxicity.

Mussel Watch partners include NOAA's **Fisheries** Laboratory in Pascagoula, Miss., Florida's Mote Marine Laboratory, Louisiana State University, and TDI-Brooks International, Inc. Mussel Watch represents the longest running continuous contaminant monitoring program in U.S. coastal and Great Lakes

waters.

NOAA Administrator describes scope of damage assessment and restoration efforts

In a recent article in the **Birmingham News**, NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco wrote about the scope of ongoing natural resource damage assessment (NRDA) and restoration work on the spill, which marks the largest data collection effort ever conducted for a damage assessment. "Neither legal nor scientific processes excel when they are rushed," she said. "In fact, careful, often-painstaking deliberation is required in order to return the best of each. This means that the NRDA process may well take years to complete."

Dr. Lubchenco invited Gulf Coast residents to participate in the upcoming series of **public meetings**, which will explain the damage assessment and restoration processes and gather broad input from fishermen, academic scientists, environmental groups and the public. "Only by combining our visions and strengths will the Gulf fully regain its vitality," she said.

Useful Links

- RestoreTheGulf.gov
- GeoPlatform.gov
- [NOAA Mission Log](#)
- [Damage Assessment](#)
- [National Oceanographic Data Center \(NODC\)](#)
- [Seafood Safety](#)
- [NOAA Science Missions & Data](#)



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