

# Breton National Wildlife Refuge

## *and the 2010 Gulf Oil Spill*

photo: USFWS



Protective boom surrounds an island at Breton NWR.

photo: USFWS



Oil on beach at part of Breton NWR.

photo: Byron Fortier



Brown Pelicans loafing just off the beach at Breton.

photo: USFWS



Brown Pelicans nesting.

### Refuge Facts

- Established in 1904 through executive order of President Theodore Roosevelt; second-oldest refuge among the over 540 in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Only refuge visited by Roosevelt, in 1915.
- Acres: 13,000 in St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes. Wilderness designated 1975, 5,000 acres.
- Largest tern colony in the nation. Important area for Reddish Egrets. Nesting habitat for various other colonial seabirds. Large non-breeding concentration of Magnificent Frigatebirds. Concentration of Redhead Ducks with a few Canvasbacks and scaups.
- Refuge consists of barrier islands located in the Gulf of Mexico off the southeast coast of Louisiana.
- Largest nesting colony of Brown Pelicans in the southeast region. Pioneering research underway to study bird movements, distribution, and breeding ecology.

### The Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill

On April 20, 2010 a drilling rig explosion led to uncontrolled leaking of oil into the Gulf of Mexico in the vicinity of Breton NWR. The federal government, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, along with state and local governments and private citizens, are working to limit the impacts to coastal ecosystems along the northern Gulf of Mexico.

### Questions and Some Answers

*What are the public use impacts of the spill at Breton NWR?*

The refuge is closed to all public use at this time. Increased disturbance and visitation can jeopardize nesting success of the Pelicans and Terns. The air space above the refuge has aircraft restrictions.

### What are the immediate threats to the Refuge and its wildlife?

Beached oil or oil sheen on the water can impact wildlife. Oil on the birds can decrease their feathers' waterproofing and even small amounts if ingested can kill the birds. Brown Pelicans are especially at risk because they dive into the water for fish and can easily get coated with oil.

Oil on the eggs of nesting birds can coat and suffocate the developing chicks inside - even a light coating of oil can kill developing eggs. The nesting season for pelicans and terns is from March through August. Oil suspended in the water can kill both fish and aquatic vegetation. Oil on the island vegetation can kill it, decreasing habitat and increasing erosion of the islands.

### What are some tools that the refuge is using to deal with the oil spill?

Staff continuously monitor for presence of oil. Both hard and soft boom is used to keep oil away from the islands. Absorbent boom is used to collect oil that reaches land. The booms require constant maintenance and repair and do not work well in rough waters.

### What are the long-term impacts of this spill?

We do not know for sure, but if the oil kills large amounts of the little animals found at the bottom of the food chain, the animals that photosynthesize and are food for the larger fish who are then food for birds and other animals, then the long-term impacts could be great.

If the suspended or surface oil repeatedly contaminates areas the impacts may be great. The overall impact will depend on the amount of oil and the length of time over which contamination occurs. Oil left on beaches for an extended time is harder to clean and causes greater damage.

## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

### Is there anything you can do to help?

At this current time there is not much an individual person can do to help at Breton NWR. What you can do is stay engaged and informed. Refuge Friends organizations are mobilizing to assist with support on the spill. Contact a local bird rehabilitator and offer assistance. Be prepared to be asked in the future because your help will be needed long term.

### Oiling Impacts on Refuge

- Beached oil or oil sheen on the water can impact wildlife. Even a light coating of oil can kill developing eggs.
- Small amounts of oil can kill shorebirds when ingested.
- Oil left on beaches for extended time is harder to clean and causes greater damage.
- Oil suspended in the water can kill both fish and aquatic vegetation.

### Oil Spill Management Tools

- Both hard and soft boom is used to keep oil away from the islands
- Absorbent boom is used to collect oil that reaches land.
- Staff continuously monitor for presence of oil.
- Booms require constant maintenance and repair.
- Booms do not work well in rough waters.

### Public Use Impacts

- The refuge is closed to all public use at this time
- The air space above the refuge has aircraft restrictions
- Increased interest and visitation can jeopardize nesting success of the Pelicans and Terns.

*When is the nesting season for the pelicans and terns?*

The nesting season is from March through August.

### Hotlines

To report oiled or injured wildlife:  
866/557 1401

Media inquiries:  
Joint Information Center:

713/323 1670 and 713/323 1671

To report claims related to damages:  
800/440 0858

To volunteer: 866/448 5816

For more information about the Service's response and our resources at risk:

<http://www.fws.gov/home/dhoilspill>

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