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NOAA Extends Fishing Closed Area to Portion of Loop Current as Precaution
More Than 81 Percent of Gulf Remains Open to Fishing

NOAA has extended the boundaries of the closed fishing area in the Gulf of Mexico into the northern portion of the loop current as a precautionary measure to ensure that seafood from the Gulf will remain safe for consumers. Though the latest analysis shows that the bulk of the oil remains dozens of miles from the loop current, the new boundaries address the possibility that a tendrill of light oil has entered or will enter the loop current.

The closed area now represents 45,728 square miles, which is slightly less than 19 percent of Gulf of Mexico federal waters. This leaves more than 81 percent of Gulf federal waters—or nearly 195,000 square miles—still available for fishing. The closure will be effective at 6 p.m. EDT. Details can be found at <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/>.

The newly closed area is more than 150 miles from the nearest port and primarily in deep water used by pelagic longline fisheries that target highly migratory species, such as tuna and swordfish. Coastal fisheries, such as grouper, snapper and shrimp, will not be affected by the expansion of the closed area.

"The BP oil spill is unprecedented and quickly changing. The administration's response since the beginning has been aggressive, strategic, and science-based," said Dr. Jane Lubchenco, under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "As we expand the fishing closed area, we are doing what science demands of us and are acting with caution to ensure the safety of the seafood Americans will put on their dinner plates. We stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Gulf coast fishermen and their families during these challenging times."

The loop current is an area of warm water that comes up from the Caribbean, past the Yucatan Peninsula, and into the Gulf of Mexico. The current is also known as the Florida current as it flows through the Florida Strait and then into the Gulf Stream as it heads north to the east coast of the U.S. Both the location of the loop current and the location of the oil slick are dynamic. Both move around from day to day. Satellite imagery on May 17 indicates that the bulk of the oil is dozens of miles away from the loop current, but a tendrill of light oil has been transported close to the loop.

The federal and state governments have systems in place to test and monitor seafood safety, prohibit harvesting from affected areas, and keep oiled products out of the marketplace. NOAA continues to work closely with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the states to ensure seafood safety, by closing fishing areas where tainted seafood could potentially be caught, and assessing whether seafood is tainted or contaminated to levels that pose a risk to human health. NOAA and FDA are working to implement a broad-scaled seafood sampling plan. The plan includes sampling seafood from inside and outside the closure area, as well as dockside- and market-based sampling.

"Due to the unprecedented and ongoing discharge of oil, FDA agrees that NOAA's closure of these federal waters is one appropriate public health measure to prevent potentially unsafe seafood from being harvested and reaching consumers," said Dr. Margaret Hamburg,

FDA commissioner. "We understand that it will be necessary to continually evaluate the boundaries as the situation evolves.

"FDA will also continue to work closely with NOAA on future decisions to reopen the closed fishery," she added.

According to NOAA, there are 3.2 million recreational fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico region who took 24 million fishing trips in 2008. Commercial fishermen in the Gulf harvested more than one billion pounds of finfish and shellfish in 2008.

Fishermen who wish to contact BP about a claim should call 800-440-0858.

NOAA will continue to evaluate the need for fisheries closures based on the evolving nature of the spill and will re-open closed areas as appropriate. NOAA will also re-evaluate the closure areas as new information that would change the boundaries of these closed areas becomes available.

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