



NOAA

**NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION**
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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**NOAA Ship *Delaware II* to Collect Tunas, Swordfish, Water Samples
on Deepwater Horizon Spill Study**

NOAA vessels also focus on reef fish, shrimp, marine mammals and the loop current

NOAA ship *Delaware II* departs Key West, Fla., today to collect tunas, swordfish and sharks, to gather data about the conditions these highly migratory species are experiencing in waters around the Gulf of Mexico spill site.

During the two-week mission, the research vessel will use longline fishing gear to capture the fish, and assess their environment using sophisticated water chemistry monitoring instruments. Researchers will only retain the fish needed to get enough samples for the study. Every effort is made to release any animals caught but not needed for sampling. Some may also be fitted with satellite tags to help determine how much time these highly migratory animals spend in oiled and unoled waters.

These fish, and other prized Gulf seafood species, are the focus of NOAA's response mission to help assess the safety of seafood for consumers, and to lay the groundwork for measuring the long-term effects of the Deepwater Horizon/BP oil spill on commercially important fish and shellfish.

Two other NOAA ships, *Pisces*, one of NOAA's newest research vessels, and the ship *Oregon II*, are in the midst of surveys of reef fish, bottom-dwelling fish, and shrimp in the eastern and western Gulf of Mexico to sample for seafood and water quality and species abundance as part of the oil spill response.

"These vessels are providing a variety of seafood and water samples from locations throughout the Gulf—nearshore and offshore, shallow water and deep, oiled and unoled," said Dr. Steven Murawski, who is leading NOAA's science response to the spill. "This is baseline information we need to measure any effects on seafood attributable to the spilled oil and to make sure our fishery closures are effective and in place for as long as they need to be, but no longer."

The seafood samples will be analyzed by scientists in NOAA labs in Pascagoula, Miss., and Seattle for levels of oil and dispersants and to document the movements of fish from oiled to unoled waters, to compare against guidelines for re-opening fishery closure areas, and to provide baseline information so that changes in the ecosystem owing to spilled oil can be measured.

A fourth NOAA ship, the *Gordon Gunter*, is also in the Gulf, surveying marine mammals through August 5. Researchers are taking biopsy and water samples for analysis, and placing satellite tags on some animals to learn more about how they move between oiled and unoled waters. The ship is also placing underwater listening devices on the ocean floor in the survey area. These will be left for up to four months, recording the vocalizations of marine mammals so researchers can better understand which species are present.

These missions build upon research conducted in the vicinity of the spill by NOAA ship *Thomas Jefferson*, and a previous mission by NOAA ship *Gordon Gunter* from May 27 through June 4. Teams from NOAA, universities, marine science institutions, and other federal agencies collected water samples and employed advanced methods for detecting submerged oil while gathering oceanographic data in the area.

A sixth NOAA survey vessel, *Nancy Foster*, departs Miami next week for a mission to better understand the loop current and how it may change over time, as well as to sample planktonic animals potentially affected by the spill.

Also, specialized NOAA aircraft operating out of Alabama, Florida, and Louisiana continue to support the Deepwater Horizon response.

NOAA's fleet of ships and aircraft is operated by the NOAA Office of Marine and Aviation Operations.

Other ships are also supporting NOAA in the Gulf:

- The charter ship *Beau Rivage* is in the closed fishing zone in the eastern Gulf, using bottom longline gear to catch fish for seafood safety samples.
- The NOAA Mississippi lab vessel *Gandy* is conducting a vertical line survey in the eastern Gulf, collecting seafood safety samples.
- The NOAA Mississippi vessel *Caretta* will be geared up this week for trawling and plankton work in the oiled area off Mississippi.
- Several for-hire recreational charters are collecting seafood safety samples in both the open and closed areas off Clearwater, Fla.

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Visit us at <http://www.noaa.gov> or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/usnoaagov>.