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NOAA Reopens More than 3,000 Square Miles in the Gulf to Fishing

Today NOAA reopened 3,114 square miles of Gulf waters offshore of the western Florida panhandle to commercial and recreational fishing. The reopening was announced after consultation with FDA and under a [re-opening protocol](#) agreed to by NOAA, the FDA, and the Gulf states.

Trajectory models show the area is at a low risk for future exposure to oil, and fish caught in the area and tested by NOAA experts have shown no signs of contamination.

“We are pleased to continue moving forward with reopening portions of Gulf federal waters to recreational and commercial fishing,” said Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. “I’d like to thank everyone for their patience throughout this process, as we work to ensure seafood safety remains our primary objective.”

At its closest point, the area to be reopened is about 55 miles northeast of the Deepwater/BP wellhead. The total area is about one percent of federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico.

Between August 20 and August 24, NOAA sampled the area for finfish such as tuna, swordfish, and mahi mahi. Sensory analyses of 104 samples and chemical analyses of 101 specimens that were composited into nine samples followed the methodology and procedures in the re-opening protocol, with sensory analysis finding no detectable oil or dispersant odors or flavors, and results of chemical analysis well below the levels of concern.

NOAA will continue to take samples for testing from the newly re-opened area, and the agency has also implemented dockside sampling to test fish caught throughout the Gulf by commercial fishermen.

Fishing closures remain the first line of defense to prevent contaminated seafood from entering the marketplace. NOAA continues to work closely with the FDA and the Gulf states to ensure seafood safety. NOAA and FDA are working together on broad-scale seafood sampling that includes sampling seafood from inside and outside the closure area, as well as dockside and market-based sampling.

The closed area now covers 39,885 square miles, or about 17 percent of the federal waters in the Gulf, which was 37 percent at its height on June 2. The boundary of the fishery closure has changed 27 times after it was first instituted on May 2, at which time it covered about three percent (6,817 square miles) of Gulf waters around the wellhead.

On July 22, NOAA reopened 26,388 square miles of Gulf waters off of the Florida peninsula; 5,144 square miles off the Florida panhandle on August 10; 4,281 square miles off western Louisiana on August 27; and 5,130 square miles off the western Florida panhandle, Alabama, Mississippi, and eastern Louisiana on September 2.

NOAA will continue to evaluate the need for fisheries closures and will continue to re-open closed areas as appropriate.

NOAA has a number of methods for the public to obtain information or be notified when there is a change to the closed area:

- Sign up to receive Southeast Fishery Bulletins by email at SERO.Communications.Comments@noaa.gov
- Call 1-800-627-NOAA (1-800-627-6622) to hear a recording of the current coordinates in English, Vietnamese, and Spanish
- Listen to NOAA Weather Radio for messages about the closure
- Receive text messages on your cell phone about changes to the closed area by texting **fishing@gulf** to 84469 (visit <http://www.deepwaterhorizonresponse.com/go/doc/2931/558107> for more information)
- Follow us on Twitter: @usnoaagov to get a tweet when the closed area changes

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