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NOAA Reopens More than 5,000 Square Miles in the Gulf to Fishing

NOAA today reopened to commercial and recreational fishing 5,130 square miles of Gulf waters stretching from the far eastern coast of Louisiana, through Mississippi, Alabama, and the western Florida panhandle. The reopening was announced after consultation with FDA and under a [re-opening protocol](#) agreed to by NOAA, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and the Gulf states.

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

“This is a significant area of importance to fishing and tourism,” said Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. “The Gulf seafood taken from these waters is safe to eat, and today’s re-opening announcement is another signal to tourists that the northern Gulf is open for business.”

At its closest point, the area to be reopened is about 54 miles north of the Deepwater/BP wellhead. The entire area is heavily fished by fishermen targeting snapper, mackerel, and shrimp. In addition, the area off the Florida panhandle currently open only to finfish fishing will be opened to all fishing.

The total area is about 4 percent of federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico and 21 percent of the current closed area, as last modified on August 27.

The Mariner Energy oil rig fire off of the Louisiana coast is about 250 miles from today's reopening.

Between July 27 and August 11, NOAA sampled the area for both shrimp and finfish, including mackerel and snapper. Sensory analyses of 123 samples and chemical analyses of 183 specimens that were composited into 27 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. The agency 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 43,000 square miles, or about 18 percent of the federal waters in the Gulf. The boundary of the fishery closure has changed 26 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. As oil continued to spill from the wellhead, the area grew in size, peaking at 37 percent (88,522 square miles) of Gulf waters on June 2.

On July 22, NOAA reopened 26,388 square miles of Gulf waters off of the Florida Peninsula; on August 10, reopened 5,144 square miles of Gulf waters off the Florida panhandle; and on August 27, reopened 4,281 square miles of Gulf waters off western Louisiana.

NOAA will continue to evaluate the need for fisheries closures and will 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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