



OIL SPILL SCIENCE

SEA GRANT PROGRAMS OF THE GULF OF MEXICO

WHERE DID THE OIL GO? A DEEPWATER HORIZON FACT SHEET

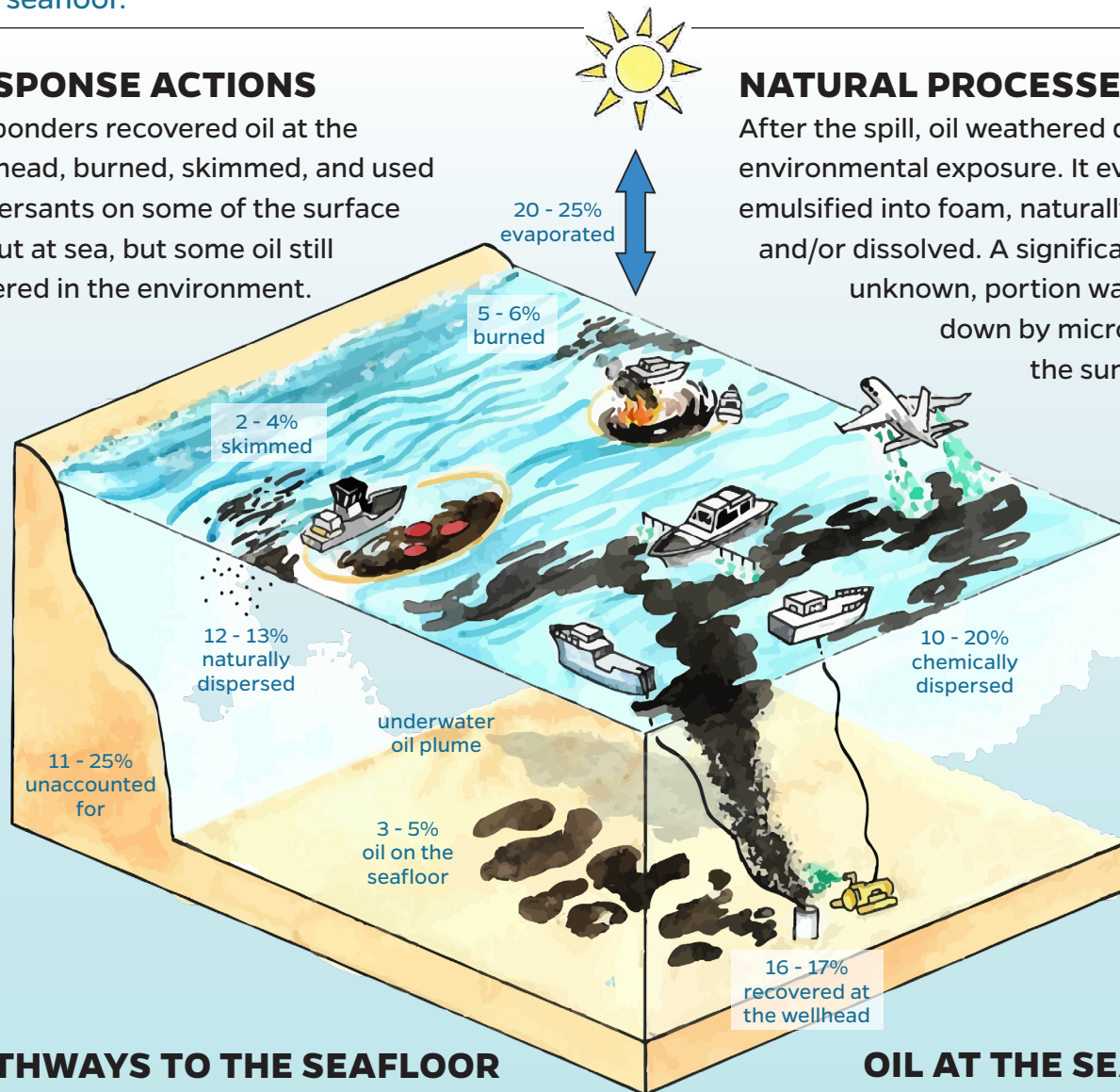
During the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, approximately 200 million gallons of oil flowed from the Macondo well. Due to the size and scope of the spill, people wanted to know where the oil would travel. Some oil accumulated at the shoreline, on the ocean's surface, in an underwater plume, and on the seafloor.

RESPONSE ACTIONS

Responders recovered oil at the wellhead, burned, skimmed, and used dispersants on some of the surface oil out at sea, but some oil still lingered in the environment.

NATURAL PROCESSES

After the spill, oil weathered due to environmental exposure. It evaporated, emulsified into foam, naturally dispersed, and/or dissolved. A significant, but unknown, portion was broken down by microbes and the sun.

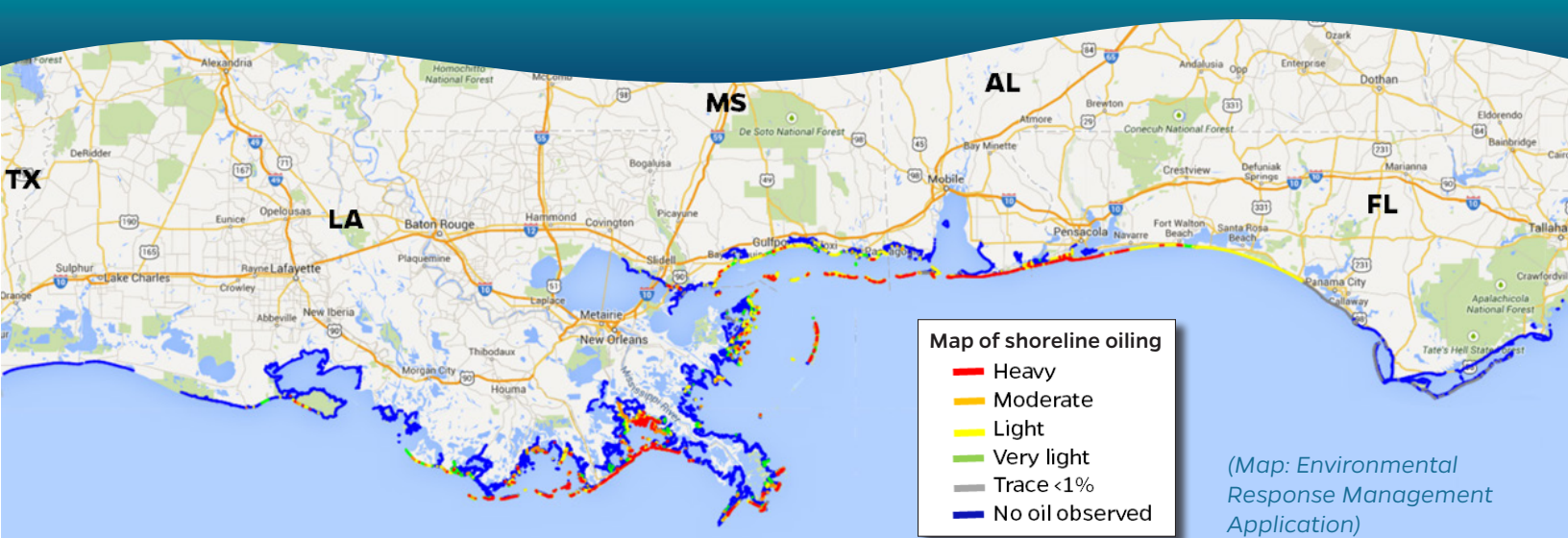


PATHWAYS TO THE SEAFLOOR

Oil made its way to the seafloor by binding or combining with sand, burned byproduct, or other particles in the water, causing it to sink. Some animals ate oil droplets or particles and then excreted oil-containing fecal pellets, which sank to the seafloor.

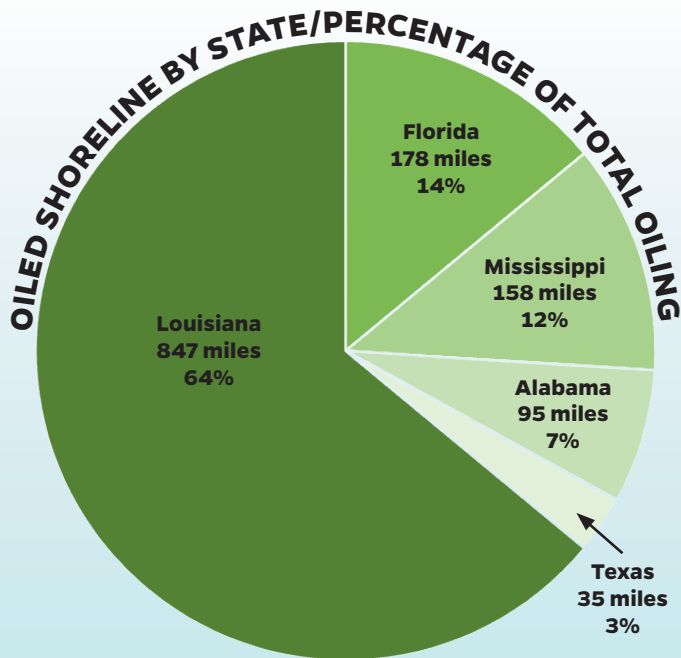
OIL AT THE SEAFLOOR

Scientists estimate that 1,235 square miles of the seafloor around the well contained oiled sediments.



1,313 miles of oiled shoreline

Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida coasts experienced different amounts of shoreline oiling. The oil impacted 1,313 miles of the 3,540 miles of the U. S. Gulf of Mexico coastline.



WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Read *Deepwater Horizon: Where did the oil go?* and *Microbes and oil: What's the connection?* at gulfseagrants.org/oilspilloutreach

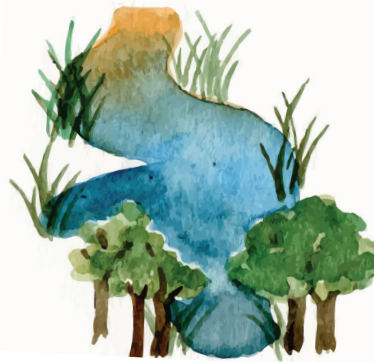
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Special thanks to the many external reviewers who contributed to the betterment of this oil spill science outreach publication.

gulfseagrants.org/oilspilloutreach

OILING BY HABITAT

The two shoreline habitats primarily affected were beaches and coastal wetlands.



Wetlands - 687 miles of wetlands were oiled, making up more than half (52%) of the oiled shoreline. Most of the wetlands that were oiled were in Louisiana. Plant cover decreased by 11 to 53% in heavily oiled sites in Louisiana after the spill.

Beaches - 600 miles of sandy beaches were oiled, 46% of the oiled shoreline. During the spill, thick, weathered oil washed up on beaches in patches. Some of the oil was buried by sand and re-exposed when wind and waves moved sand around. Responders removed approximately 100 million pounds of oiled waste material.



(Front and back watercolors: Anna Hinkeldey)