

## **BP/Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill: Federal Fishery Closure Frequently Asked Questions June 2010**

### **Why is NOAA Fisheries Service prohibiting fishing in certain areas?**

- NOAA Fisheries Service prohibited fishing as a precautionary measure to ensure public safety and assure consumer confidence in Gulf of Mexico seafood.
- NOAA Fisheries Service strongly advises fishermen not to fish in areas where oil or oil sheens (very thin layers of floating oil) are present, even if those areas are not currently closed to fishing.
- A process to expedite modifications to the fishing closed area in the Gulf of Mexico has been established. Boundaries of the fishing closed area can be modified daily, based on dynamic oil spill conditions.

### **Where is the fishery closure located?**

- A map with the coordinates of the closed area and other materials can be viewed on the Southeast Regional Office [BP Oil Spill web page](#).
- The coordinates can be heard on NOAA Weather Radio or by calling 1-800-627-NOAA (1-800-627-6622).
- A list of dates of the closure modifications and the areas covered can be found at <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/ClosureSizeandPercentCoverage.htm>.

### **What criteria and protocol does NOAA use to close fishing areas?**

- A combination of computer modeling and daily overflights. Sophisticated computer models produce trajectory maps of where the oil is likely to be in 24, 48 and 72-hour time frames based upon weather, satellite imagery, ocean buoy data, and ocean currents. This trajectory is truth-tested by daily overflights to verify the actual extent of the oil.
- Managers review data each morning and post a decision regarding whether to expand the closed area boundary or maintain the current boundary by 12 p.m. Eastern Time each day.
- Changes to the closed area boundary are communicated to the public via fishery bulletins, NOAA Weather Radio, and by posting new maps and explanatory materials to the Southeast Regional Office website.
- Any changes to the closed area boundary take effect at 6 p.m. Eastern Time to provide fishermen adequate time to respond to the notification and plan the next day's activities.
- You can sign up for Twitter or text alerts when the closed area changes by visiting the Southeast Regional Office [BP Oil Spill web page](#).

### **May vessels transit the closed area?**

- Yes. The rule prohibits fishing within the closed area. The rule does not prohibit transiting or the possession of fish within the closed area.

### **Is catch-and-release fishing allowed within the closed area?**

- No. Currently all fishing is prohibited within the closed area.
- NOAA Fisheries Service may consider opening areas to catch-and-release fishing; however, we need to better understand the potential risks of the spill and response activities to fishermen and fishery resources, as well as law enforcement issues, before determining whether such action is appropriate.

### **Is diving allowed in the closed area?**

- Yes. The rule prohibits all fishing, including spearfishing, within the closed area, but not other activities.
- NOAA Fisheries Service urges divers to use caution and avoid diving in areas with signs of oil.

### **What are the criteria for re-opening closed areas?**

- An area will be reopened when there is no longer a risk of seafood contamination or adulteration.
  - NOAA Fisheries Service will open areas that were closed based on the oil spill trajectory if cumulative mapping shows no oil was ever in the area.
  - When the oil spill is contained or the oil is no longer present in an area, cleanup is underway, and/or there are indications the cleanup is reducing the presence of visible oil, the acceptability of the seafood can be assessed. This assessment includes further sampling followed by sensory and chemical analysis to detect the presence of oil in samples.

### **How does NOAA Fisheries Service conduct analysis of seafood?**

- NOAA Fisheries Service has developed screening methods to quickly assess contaminant loads in water and in seafood; e.g. shrimp, crabs, finfish.
- Sensory Analysis: Federal and state sensory testing analysts have been trained for months to detect certain thresholds of chemicals that are not normal to fish background odors. Each fish sample is tested by 10 trained expert assessors who conduct a blind nose sensory evaluation of the raw odor of the fish. If the fish passes the sensory smell test, the analysts cook it and sensory smell test again. If the sample passes that test, the analysts will taste the sample to ensure no contamination. NOAA has 40 screeners and 15 expert assessors and is currently training another 40 screeners and 15 expert assessors.
- Chemical Analysis: The standards applied for oil are based on current standards developed by the FDA.
- It is likely that NOAA Fisheries Service will be developing new standards for dispersants and is working with the FDA in the implementation of these new standards.

**What is NOAA Fisheries Service doing to account for changes in fishing effort due to the oil spill when estimating the length of 2010 recreational fishing seasons?**

- NOAA Fisheries Service is reviewing legal authorities and considering options for adjusting fishing season dates in response to the movement of the oil slick and associated fishery impacts.
- Beginning June 1, the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Information Network (Gulf FIN) program will provide weekly, rather than bimonthly, tracking of changes in charter boat fishing effort in the Gulf of Mexico that may be related to the recent oil spill.
- This increase in data collection will allow a more precise estimation of the total number of trips made by anglers on for-hire fishing vessels.
- In addition to the increased sampling, questions are being added to the survey to assess fishing trip cancellations directly related to the oil spill.
- Results from the sampling will be used to evaluate fishery closures for species such as red snapper and greater amberjack. If sampling indicates quotas are not being met prior to each closure, NOAA Fisheries Service could increase the season length if warranted.

**What are the restrictions on federally permitted vessels while fishing in state waters?**

- If state waters are closed to fishing due to the oil spill, all vessels must comply with that closure.
- If state waters are not closed to fishing due to the oil spill, federally permitted vessels may fish in those waters while abiding by all other applicable regulations.