

NOAA's Oil Spill Response

Fishing Industry in the Gulf of Mexico



Fishing

One of the biggest industries in the Gulf of Mexico is the fishing (commercial and recreational).

More than three million (3.2 million) recreational fishers took fishing trips in the GOM in 2008, totalling 24 million fishing trips.

In 2008, commercial fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico harvested 1.27 billion pounds of finfish and shellfish. Commercial fishermen earned \$659 million in total landings revenue in 2008. Two of the largest commercial fishing operations in the Gulf of Mexico are red snapper and shrimp. Brown shrimp is the most important species in the U.S. Gulf fishery, with principal catches made from June through October.

The following shrimp species are found in the Gulf of Mexico:

- Brown shrimp (*Penaeus aztecus Ives*)
- White shrimp (*Penaeus setiferus Linnaeus*)
- Pink shrimp (*Penaeus duorarum Burkenroad*)
- Royal red shrimp (*Hymenopenaeus robustus Smith*)
- Seabobs (*Xiahooeneus kroverl Heller*) - incidental bycatch
- Rock shrimp (*Sicyonia brevirostris Stimpson*) - incidental bycatch

Marine Mammals

There are two resident species of large whales in the Gulf of Mexico that may occur in the area of the spill: Bryde's whales and Sperm whales (endangered).

Bryde's whales (pronounced Brew-duhs) are not listed as endangered or threatened, but they are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Bryde's whales are baleen whales, meaning they have hair-like "teeth" in their mouths that the whales use to filter water and trap their food. A small population of Bryde's whale (*Balaenoptera edeni*), the only baleen whale to commonly occur in the Gulf, inhabits the shelf break region in the northeastern Gulf.

Sperm whales are much more abundant than Bryde's whales and are found throughout the northern Gulf of Mexico, especially near the 1,000 m depth contour. Sperm whales are listed as Endangered under the Endangered Species Act, and are also protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Sperm whales are the largest toothed whales, and they hunt relatively large-bodied prey in deep water.

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The following 21 marine mammals that routinely inhabit the northern Gulf are protected under the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act:

- 1) Bottlenose dolphin
- 2) Atlantic spotted dolphin
- 3) Bryde's whale
- 4) Sperm whale (also protected by the Endangered Species Act)
- 5) Dwarf sperm whale
- 6) Pygmy sperm whale
- 7) Cuvier's beaked whale
- 8) Blainville's beaked whale
- 9) Gervais' beaked whale
- 10) Short-finned pilot whale
- 11) Killer whale
- 12) False killer whale
- 13) Pygmy killer whale
- 14) Melon-headed whale
- 15) Risso's dolphin
- 16) Rough-toothed dolphin
- 17) Fraser's dolphin
- 18) Pantropical spotted dolphin
- 19) Striped dolphin
- 20) Clymene dolphin
- 21) Spinner dolphin

The greatest threat to whales from the oil spill is probably fouling of the baleen. If Bryde's whales are skim-feeding in the slick or otherwise get oil in their mouths, the oil would quickly clog and foul the baleen. Fouled baleen could lead to compromised feeding, starvation and death.

Skin contact or inhalation exposure is probably a much less serious risk for large whales, and would probably only have sub-lethal effects. Long-term impacts are also possible through take-up of oil components through the food chain and likely "biomagnification" of the contaminants in large marine mammals.

There are nine species of dolphins that routinely inhabit the northern Gulf and are protected under the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act:

- 1) Bottlenose dolphin
- 2) Atlantic spotted dolphin
- 3) Risso's dolphin
- 4) Rough-toothed dolphin
- 5) Fraser's dolphin
- 6) Pantropical spotted dolphin
- 7) Striped dolphin
- 8) Clymene dolphin
- 9) Spinner dolphin

Sea Turtles

There are five species of turtles that inhabit the Gulf of Mexico:



- Kemp's Ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*) (endangered)
- Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) (endangered)
- Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) (threatened)
- Green (*Chelonia mydas*) (endangered)
- Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricate*) (threatened)
- Possible -- olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) (threatened)

The only place in the world that the Kemp's Ridley nests is in the western Gulf of Mexico. They are now in the peak of their nesting season. One of the only foraging grounds for the Kemp's Ridley is in the area of the oil spill. They are currently foraging there.

Learn more about NOAA's response to the BP oil spill at <http://response.restoration.noaa.gov/deepwaterhorizon>.

To learn more about NOAA, visit <http://www.noaa.gov>. 