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NOAA Opens 339 Square-Mile Fishing Area in Gulf of Mexico

NOAA has opened 339 square miles of previously closed fishing area off the Florida panhandle – the northern boundary now ends at the Florida federal-state water line on the east side of Choctawhatchee Bay.

This area was initially closed on June 5 as a precaution because oil was projected to be within the area over the next 48 hours. However, the review of satellite imagery, radar and aerial data indicated that oil had not moved into the area.

The federal closed area does not apply to any state waters. Closing fishing in these areas is a precautionary measure to ensure that seafood from the Gulf will remain safe for consumers.

The closed area now represents 78,264 square miles, which is approximately 32 percent of Gulf of Mexico federal waters. This leaves approximately 68 percent of Gulf federal waters available for fishing. The closure will be effective today at 6 p.m. EDT. Details can be found at <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/>. The last closed area modification was June 5, when 78,603 square miles were closed to fishing, or roughly 33 percent of federal waters of the Gulf.

Federal and state governments have systems in place to test and monitor seafood safety, prohibit harvesting from affected areas and keep oiled products out of the marketplace. NOAA continues to work closely with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the states to ensure seafood safety, by closing fishing areas where tainted seafood could potentially be caught, and assessing whether seafood is tainted or contaminated to levels that pose a risk to human health. NOAA and FDA are implementing a broad-scaled seafood sampling plan. The plan includes sampling seafood from inside and outside the closure area, as well as market-based sampling.

According to NOAA, there are approximately 5.7 million recreational fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico region who took 25 million fishing trips in 2008. Commercial fishermen in the Gulf harvested more than 1 billion pounds of fish and shellfish in 2008.

Fishermen who wish to contact BP about a claim should call 800-440-0858.

NOAA will continue to evaluate the need for fisheries closures based on the evolving nature of the spill and will re-open closed areas as appropriate. NOAA will also re-evaluate the closure areas as new information that would change the boundaries of these closed areas becomes available.

NOAA has a number of new 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

- 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: usnoaogov to get a tweet when the closed area changes

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