



BP report says Gulf environment returning to normal, others call report premature, cherry-picked

Dennis Pillion | dpillion@al.com By Dennis Pillion | dpillion@al.com

Email the author | Follow on Twitter

on March 18, 2015 at 1:34 PM, updated March 18, 2015 at 1:36 PM

"BP misinterprets and misapplies data while ignoring published literature that doesn't support its claims."

BP published a report on its web site this week saying that the "Gulf environment (is) returning to pre-spill conditions" since the **2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill**, going so far as to say "data BP has collected and analyzed to date do not indicate a significant long-term impact to the population of any Gulf species."

The report states several factors contributed to mitigate the environmental damage of the spill, including: the depth of the drill site and distance from shore; the "light" type of crude which BP says breaks down more easily than the heavier oils in the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill; the response and clean-up effort including the use of dispersants; and the natural resiliency of the Gulf.

The report also cites population counts of birds, red snapper, blue crabs, shrimp and other important species in the Gulf. Many of those species are within the range of natural variation, according to the report, which cites potential causes other than the spill for those species whose populations have declined.

See the full text of the BP report.

Strong opposition to the report

Since the BP report was released, the federal Natural Resource Damage Assessment Trustees and several conservation groups have issued statements calling the report premature at best and it is too early to make such claims and that the BP report ignores data that doesn't support its conclusion.

The Deepwater Horizon NRDA Trustees issued a statement through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that they are still investigating the impacts of the spill and that "(i)t is inappropriate as well as premature for BP to reach conclusions about impacts from the spill before the completion of the assessment."

The Trustees also attacked BP's methodology in the report, saying "BP misinterprets and misapplies data while ignoring published literature that doesn't support its claims."

The NRDA Trustees include the five Gulf states impacted by the spill, as well as NOAA, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Dept. of the Interior, and Dept. of Agriculture.

Cyn Sarthou of the Gulf Restoration Network called the BP report "a self-serving report based on incomplete science."

"We are disappointed, but not shocked, that BP is continuing its PR push to declare the Gulf back to normal despite the fact that the jury is still out on the long-term impacts of the disaster," Sarthou said in a news release.

The **National Wildlife Federation published a blog post** Tuesday titled "10 Things BP's New Report Doesn't Tell You," in which NWF biologist Ryan Fikes highlighted aspects left out of the BP report, including information on dolphins, tuna and sea turtles.

Dolphin Unusual Mortality Event: The BP report states that the bacteria brucella is a possible cause of the dolphin unusual mortality event that has been ongoing in the Gulf since the spill. However, Fikes points out a NOAA paper which states that "(s)evere environmental stress, including from exposure to oil, could have reduced the animals' ability to fight infection."

In addition, the BP report states that the UME began months before the spill, in February 2010. This is true, but as Fikes points out, those early dolphin deaths were **mostly attributed to** influxes of cold, fresh water and would not have continued for multiple years.

Kemp's ridley sea turtles: The BP report states that the number of Kemp's ridley nest in the Gulf two years after the spill were "above historical averages." Fikes said that is true, but the spill appears to have stopped a rebounding population in its tracks.

Kemp's ridley nests in the Gulf were growing by an average of 19 percent every year through 2009, according to **stock assessments** performed for the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. While the number of 2012 nests did equal 2009 levels, there has been a decrease in nesting activities in 2013 and 2014.

Court battle ongoing

The report comes as BP and the federal government await a final ruling from U.S. District Judge Carl Barbier in New Orleans on the amount BP will have to pay for violations of the Clean Water Act, which could be as high as \$13.7 billion.

Barbier ruled earlier this year that the volume of the spill would be calculated at 3.19 million barrels of oil. The government estimate had been 4.19 million barrels, and BP had argued that only 2.45 million barrels had been spilled. BP has already appealed that ruling, and federal prosecutors also **filed a notice of appeal** last week, arguing for the higher volume figure.

Under the terms of the RESTORE Act, 80 percent of that Clean Water Act fine money will go directly to the

northern Gulf region for ecosystem restoration, economic projects, tourism promotion and ongoing research and monitoring of the Gulf.

© 2015 AL.com. All rights reserved.