



Everything New Orleans

BP oil spill: Environmental groups comment on 5th anniversary of the spill

bp oil spill protest

Activists camped out in the lobby of BP's headquarters in Houston Wednesday, April 15, 2015 ahead of the 5th anniversary of the Deepwater Horizon rig explosion, which killed 11 men and led to the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, one of the largest environmental disasters in American history. (Rainforest Action Network)

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A variety of environmental and civic groups have issued statements on the fifth anniversary of the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster and oil spill, outlining their continued concerns about the oil cleanup, the effects of oil on wildlife and plans for restoration of wildlife and habitat affected by the spill.

Gulf South Rising has planned a march through the French Quarter in New Orleans, beginning at 4:45 p.m. Monday (Apr. 20) at Lafayette Square. The march leaves the square at 5 p.m. and ends at the Jackson Square amphitheater.

Speakers will include Colette Pichon-Battle with the Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy; Bette Billiot with United Houma Nation; Sharon Gauthe, with Bayou Interfaith Shared Community Organizing (BISCO); Monique Harden, Advocates for Environmental Human Rights; Diem Nguyen, NOELA Community Health Clinic/MQVNCDC; and Minh Nguyen, VAYLA New Orleans.



Community Voices, an organization that has been interviewing area residents about recovery issues involving the oil spill, has released a series of talks with activists and fishermen on its YouTube web site.

Linda Usdin, one of the organizers of the project said the goal was to provide a voice to "a diverse group of people whose lives have been impacted by the spill, people whose voices don't necessarily make it to the media or the various convenings that are held around town."

She co-produced the videos with New Orleans writer/videographer Deborah Cotton.

The **Louisiana Oystermen Association** and other fishing groups sponsored a day-long series of panel discussions, including comments by fishermen, on the effects of the spill and goals for the future.

The program, which runs through 2 p.m. Monday at the Rev. Percy M. Griffin Community Center, 15577 Highway 15 in Davant, is sponsored by the Louisiana Oystermen Association, Fishermen & Concerned Citizens Association, Zion Travelers Cooperative Center, Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, Oxfam America and the Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy.

"BP promised to make our fishing communities whole, but put us in a hole," said Byron Encalade, president of the Louisiana Oystermen Association. "The future of our communities in Plaquemines Parish is at stake."

The New Orleans-based Gulf Restoration Network, paired with a variety regional and national environmental groups focusing on Gulf issues, issued a **report recommending public participation and openness** in the use of Clean Water Act penalties for restoration projects as part of the federal Restore Act.

The Restore Act requires that 80 percent of Clean Water Act fines paid by BP and its drilling partners stemming from the Deepwater Horizon incident be spent for restoration and economic improvements in and along the Gulf.

"In the report, we demand accountability and public engagement from the Restore Council, which is tasked with disbursing billions of dollars in eventual Clean Water Act fines from the BP disaster," said a release from the group announcing its report.

The report recommends that projects focus on protecting and enhancing sea turtle, marine mammal and bird habitats, restoring coastal and marine habitats of bottom-living organisms, and restoring and maintaining oyster reefs and fisheries.

In implementing the projects, it recommends providing training and employment for local workers and support for local small and minority-owned businesses.

The **Restore the Mississippi River Delta coalition**, which includes the National Wildlife Federation, National Audubon Society, Environmental Defense Fund and the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, issued a **statement** charging that BP continues to sidestep responsibility for the spill.

"Despite BP's attempts to convince the public through high-priced publicity campaigns that the Gulf is fine, the negative impacts of its 'gross negligence' will be felt for decades. BP claims that the Gulf's natural resources have rebounded, but peer-reviewed scientific studies and visible ongoing effects tell another story," the groups said in a joint statement.

"Five years later, **10 million gallons of oil remain on the Gulf floor**. Last month, a **25,000-pound BP tar mat** was discovered on a Louisiana barrier island. And Cat Island - an **important nesting site** for brown pelicans and other coastal birds - has **nearly disappeared** since the spill. Even more troubling are the lingering effects *not* visible: significant damage from oil and chemical dispersants to the food web, wildlife and overall ecosystem of the Gulf Coast," the statement said.

In a separate **statement**, the coalition, joined by the Nature Conservancy and the Ocean Conservancy, called on President Barack Obama to make restoration of the Gulf a priority.

"Five years ago, President Obama promised to do whatever is necessary to help the Gulf Coast and its people recover from this tragedy," the groups said in a statement. "It's time to renew that commitment. Not only must BP be held fully accountable for the harm it caused in the Gulf, but the administration should ensure that its agencies work with all the Gulf stakeholders to make certain that the fines and penalties are used for well-planned, coordinated, large-scale comprehensive Gulf restoration."

The **Sierra Club** issued a statement warning that the spill has left "a lasting legacy of destruction from which coastal communities have still not recovered."

"No matter what BP tells us, the Gulf is far from recovered. In fact, the full extent of the damage has yet to be discovered," said Michael Brune, Sierra Club executive director, in a statement. "Sadly, the damages from the disaster itself are just a small fraction of those incurred by local communities as they deal with the daily leaks and spills and loss of wetlands that the oil industry considers nothing more than the cost of doing business."

The **Ocean Conservancy** issued a statement praising the inclusion of three projects aimed at the Gulf of Mexico among 10 projects announced Monday by federal and state trustees and BP as part of BP's \$1 billion early restoration program. The projects they praise include a \$20 million Pelagic Longline Bycatch Reduction Project aimed at protecting open-ocean fish protected by the disaster, including Atlantic bluefin tuna and yellowfin tuna; a project that will help degraded seagrass areas in Florida; and a \$45 million project to help restore endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtles.

"Early restoration was intended to address the immediate impacts of the BP oil disaster, before the natural resource damage assessment is complete," said Bethany Kraft, director of the Gulf Restoration Program at Ocean Conservancy. "Five years on, the emerging impacts beyond the shore of the Gulf are myriad and troubling, from dolphins dying at record numbers, corals covered in oil and millions of gallons of oil sitting on the seafloor.

"We have been waiting to see when the trustees would turn their attention to the deep water. This announcement is encouraging. It is past time to begin restoring our impacted deep-water resources and habitats. Only by addressing restoration in an integrated and comprehensive way - from the coast to the deep water, can our impacted habitats, wildlife and coastal communities fully recover."

Oceana focused its anniversary message on its concerns about continued effects of the spill on the ocean, and the potential for future spills from the expansion of oil and gas exploration along the Atlantic Coast and in the Arctic Circle.

"Today's anniversary is a stark reminder that when we drill, we spill," said Jacqueline Savitz, Oceana's vice president for the U.S., in a statement. "Yet Congress has not passed a single piece of legislation to better regulate this dirty and dangerous industry. The myth that more energy produced at home means lower gas prices is simply untrue -- oil is sold on the world market, and the majority of what we produce at home is shipped overseas.

"Instead, we have seen a constant push to expand our drilling efforts. In fact, the Obama administration is currently considering opening up the East Coast to offshore drilling for the first time in U.S. history," Savitz said. "The federal government is also planning to authorize new drilling in the U.S. Arctic Ocean, the worst possible place we could allow drilling given its remoteness, extended darkness and icy conditions. There is no good reason to sell more leases in the Arctic Ocean, where companies such as Shell have proven so clearly that drilling can't be done safely."

The **Gulf Future Coalition**, representing a variety of local community organizations on the Gulf Coast,

delivered petitions signed by 121,000 people to BP's Houston headquarters building on Monday that demanded the company "come clean in the Gulf" by admitting to damage caused by the spill and immediately moving to restore the damage.

The petition also urges BP not to claim tax deductions for any money it spends on responding to the spill. Coalition officials said BP refused to meet with its members on Monday, some of whom were also asking that the company compensate residents for health problems they contend were caused by the spill.

Included in the protesters were a delegation of Vietnamese fishing families from coastal communities who said their problems are not being addressed by the company, said a news release announcing the delivery of the petition.

"When BP says it has done right for the Gulf, they are lying," said Thao Vu, a member of the **Mississippi Coalition for Vietnamese-American Fisher Folks and Families**. "Less than 18% of the health claims submitted have been approved and even fewer have actually been paid out. While BP plays games with our media and with our court system, our fishing families are sick and suffering."

The **United Way of Southeast Louisiana** issued a news release focusing on the variety of organizations it funds that provided assistance to individuals and businesses affected by the spill.

"Immediately following the oil spill, United Way worked with communities to quickly identify the most serious issues," said the news release. "United Way provided funding to 12 local nonprofits to support case management, mental health and emergency assistance services especially needed in Jefferson, Plaquemines and St. Bernard parishes -- helping more than 31,000 people."

The **Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation**, organized by the Land Trust Alliance, issued a report outlining conservation needs in the Gulf region, entitled, "**A Land Conservation Vision in the Gulf of Mexico Region.**"

The report recommends state and federal officials work with existing land trusts and conservation organizations to provide oil spill restoration money to restore wetlands, migratory bird habitat, scenic rivers and longleaf pine forests in the five states touched by the BP spill.

Americans United for Change, a group advocating use of renewable fuels, announced it has released new television ads entitled "**Rare Incidents**" in **Iowa** and **Chicago** that say the BP spill is one of many oil spills that could be avoided by the use of renewable fuels.

"If lawmakers discourage innovation towards cleaner renewable fuels of tomorrow, Big Oil will only be encouraged to drill, and spill, more," said Brad Woodhouse, president of the group in a statement announcing the ads. "Over the last five years, ethanol has made up 10 percent of our nation's fuel supply, and the ethanol produced last year displaced over 500 million barrels of crude oil that would've otherwise been used to make gasoline. When consumers have more choice of cleaner, cheaper and safer renewable

fuels like ethanol at the pump, it means less demand for gasoline made from dirty oil."

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