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## Mississippi officials aren't surprised BP will appeal

By MARY PEREZ

meperez@sunherald.com Twitter: MaryPerezSHSeptember 4, 2014

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Thursday's ruling that the Deepwater Horizon oil spill was caused by BP's gross negligence wasn't unexpected, Mississippi officials said, and neither was BP's vow to appeal the decision of U.S. District Judge Carl Barbier.

The ruling that BP acted recklessly puts the damages per barrel of oil that poured into the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 at the highest amount, said State Sen. Brice Wiggins, R-Pascagoula. The maximum fine is \$4,300 per barrel of oil.

"I think BP should accept the ruling and settle on the damages and let us move forward on restoring the Gulf Coast," he said.

"BP's oil is still washing up on the beaches of the Gulf and is still impacting the Gulf's communities and wildlife," Cynthia Sarthou, executive director of Gulf Restoration Network, said at a press conference in New Orleans after Thursday's ruling. "If BP will just own up to the damage they've done, then we can get to the business of restoring the Gulf. They should be making it right in the Gulf, not spending millions on PR and legal fees appealing this decision."

The original estimated damages BP would have to pay under the Clean Water Act was \$5 billion to \$21 billion. Thursday's ruling exposes BP to about \$18 billion in fines, according to Associated Press. Much of that money is expected to be distributed through the RESTORE Act to the Gulf states affected by the oil spill -- Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Florida and Texas.

"It's really a first-of-its-kind legislation in terms of penalties being distributed to the states," Wiggins said. "That's why we have a duty and responsibility to be smart about the money."

Gov. Phil Bryant and Trudy Fisher, former director of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality and an environmental lawyer, convened Gulf Coast 2020, a group of environmentalists, government officials and business leaders, to establish priorities and vision for the money that will come to the state.

It could be awhile until the money arrives as the decision is appealed. New MDEQ Executive Director Gary Rikard said the ruling "is a tremendous step in our continued efforts to hold BP accountable," but the legal process continues.

The RESTORE Act is what people talk about most and Jamie Miller, executive director of the state Department of Marine Resources, said "big, transformative projects" are contemplated with that money. But some of the early money from the National Resources Damage Assessment funds are coming to Mississippi to restore oyster reefs and begin coastal preserve work.

Jack Norris, director of the Gulf Coast Business Council, said the U.S. Department of Treasury is preparing to issue the regulations for implementation of the RESTORE Act, and the governor and DEQ have done a "great job" clearly setting the expectations for how the money will be used.

In addition to the Clean Water Act penalties, he said, BP faces additional fines for the oil spill under the

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