

BP reports Gulf of Mexico almost back to normal, but others claim otherwise

By **AMY WOLD**

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The Gulf of Mexico is close to being back to normal and there are no indications of any long-term damage from the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster, a BP [report](#) released Monday says.

“The science is showing that most of the environmental impact occurred immediately after the accident — during the spring and summer 2010 — in areas near the wellhead and along oiled beaches and marshes,” the report says. “Areas that were affected are recovering, and data BP has collected and analyzed to date do not indicate a significant long-term impact to the population of any Gulf species.”

Those conclusions were quickly contested as the report circulated among state agencies and nonprofit organizations.

State and coastal environmental groups said it was just the latest attempt by BP to say “all is well” in an attempt to limit its damages and fines.

As the fifth anniversary of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig disaster approaches, BP released “Gulf of Mexico Environmental Recovery and Restoration,” which highlights work to determine environmental damage from the April 20, 2010, explosion that killed 11 men and spilled more than 4 million barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico.

The report lists studies, numbers of samples taken and results, bird survival rates, marine populations and more to make a case that the Gulf is at pre-spill conditions.

“It shouldn’t be a huge surprise. This has been, more or less, BP’s tack over the last couple years,” said Kyle Graham, of the state Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority.

The report, he said, shows BP defending itself while the Natural Resources Damage Assessment process to determine the extent of damage to the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem continues.

It’s the Natural Resources Damage Assessment process that ultimately will determine

how much damage occurred. The process was expected to take five to 10 years to complete, and another one to three years of work remain before a draft report on damages will be released for public review.

“We think it’s grossly premature to cherry-pick the science when the science assessment hasn’t even been completed yet,” Graham said.

He added that the report seems to ignore even studies BP funded, through the Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative, that point out potential problems resulting from the oil spill. The initiative is funded by \$500 million from BP to pay for spill-related research — including the impact on fish development such as elongated [hearts](#) as well as reduction of the Gulf marshes’ [insect](#) populations, which are part of the food chain.

Also, Graham said, thousands of pounds of oily material were collected on East Grand Terre Island just last weekend.

“I’d love to say we’re out of the weeds, but we’re not as confident as BP is,” he said.

BP maintained Monday that the oil from East Grand Terre Island hasn’t been tested to determine if it’s from the Deepwater Horizon well. BP said it stands by the report, claiming numerous scientific [studies](#) show the Gulf is recovering.

“Still, misinformation persists about the recovery of the Gulf,” wrote Geoff Morrell, BP’s senior vice president for U.S. communication and external affairs. “Studies are often misrepresented to paint an incomplete and inaccurate picture about conditions in the Gulf. This leads to a narrow, one-sided perspective in which studies that demonstrate that the Gulf is recovering are often overlooked.”

Environmental coastal groups dismissed the BP report.

“We’re neither surprised nor persuaded,” said Steve Cochran, director for Mississippi River Delta Restoration with the Environmental Defense Fund. “BP has certainly really gone to great lengths to say the Gulf is healthy.”

Darryl Malek-Wiley, senior organizing representative with the Sierra Club, said the report is wrong.

“It just boggles the mind,” he said. “The Gulf of Mexico is not even close to what it used to be before this massive oil spill BP created. These guys have a financial interest to downplay damage.”

Melanie Driscoll, director of bird conservation in the Gulf Coast Conservation/Mississippi Flyway with the National Audubon Society, said the BP report doesn’t show a complete picture. Peer-reviewed science papers covering topics such as oil on the sea floor, fish development and impacts on sharks, whales and deep sea corals

show a different picture, she said.

“I would say things are not back to normal, and lots of scientists have shown through peer-reviewed research that this report is wrong,” Driscoll said.

It’s these omissions that led coastal environmental groups to call the report a continuation of BP’s public relations push.

“BP’s report essentially ignores any of the science that finds a conclusion contrary to their interest,” said Cynthia Sarthou, executive director with the Gulf Restoration Network. “This is a self-serving report based on incomplete science.”

Not included in the report are studies that suggest links among an ongoing pattern of dolphin deaths in the Gulf, a [mat](#) of oil found on the Gulf floor and others, she said.

“BP isn’t looking out for the Gulf and its people. BP is just looking out for its bottom line,” Sarthou wrote.

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