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The Florida Keys Response To the Gulf Oil Disaster: Stories Shared and Lessons Learned

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ABOUT NRDC

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Introduction

When we think of the Florida Keys, we picture blue waters and coral reefs. The possibility that black oil might spoil these treasures is almost too much to bear. But that threat was real in the summer of 2010, when the *Deepwater Horizon* oil well exploded off Louisiana, killing 11 people and sending roughly 180 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico.

Oil spills can travel vast distances and even drilling that occurs hundreds of miles away in the Gulf of Mexico can have real impacts on the health of the protected places like the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. The Keys were at risk because the Loop Current that flows up into the Gulf of Mexico loops down along the western shore of Florida and then heads right along the Florida Keys before picking up the Gulf Stream and shooting along the Atlantic Ocean's shoreline. When oil started gushing, state, federal, and local officials in the Keys snapped into action. Citizens prepared for the worst. Thankfully, an unusual current—dubbed the “Franklin Eddy”—pinched off the Loop Current and kept the oil from reaching the Keys. One of the most environmentally sensitive island chains in America was spared oiling of its shores.

As to the long-term impacts from the Gulf disaster, we are just beginning to tally the damage to the region's marine life. We know that what happens to the web of life elsewhere in the Gulf will affect the Keys' marine life and we are only starting to learn about the impacts on fish and other species due to months of oil exposure. The environmental legacy of an oil spill can last decades, if not lifetimes, and result in significant economic losses for coastal communities, whether directly affected by the oil or not.

What did the summer of preparation in the Keys teach us? To review some of the lessons learned, we interviewed a variety of people in September 2010. In the Keys, the natural and human communities are inseparable. Most people make their living off the environment—whether it is fishing, guiding, running charter cruises, or catering to tourists in restaurants and hotels. For that reason, we spoke with anglers, divers, backcountry guides, government officials, activists, and scientists about their experiences. These collected interviews offer important lessons regarding preparation for future responses if oil should once again threaten the Keys—especially the sort of massive, ongoing event that was the Gulf disaster.

So much is at stake: The Keys have the only complete sub-tropical marine ecosystem in the continental United States. America's only living barrier coral reef—the third longest barrier reef in the world—occurs about six miles offshore. The Keys are home to the world's largest seagrass bed, and 2,900 square nautical miles of marine resources are protected as the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. The Keys are also among the nation's top 20 seafood producers by dollar value of the dockside catch. Thousands of species of birds and marine creatures depend on the Keys' abundant natural marine nurseries and feeding grounds.

One of the lessons is that protecting these critical natural resources from oil and dispersants would have been a daunting challenge. While our interviewees have differing opinions about how prepared the Keys were for the spill, most people agreed that, with 1,700 islands stretching over more than 200 miles, it is doubtful anyone could keep oil from fouling shorelines somewhere in the Keys.

Most agree that there was a need for clear communication with the public on the threat, the science, and the chain of command for response. This is an area that everyone involved hopes to improve going forward. Another important lesson learned is that scientific inquiry needs to proceed on the use of dispersants on oil spills, particularly what effect different types of dispersants might have on sensitive Keys resources.

Everyone agrees on one thing: the Keys dodged a bullet during the summer of 2010. Now it is time to get together to put the lessons learned into action.

Captain Pat DeQuattro

U.S. Coast Guard
Key West Sector

Q: What was your role in the spill response?

A: As the Coast Guard sector commander, I am the federal on-scene coordinator. Wearing that hat, we are required to maintain an area contingency plan, and we are required to lead exercises with our federal, state, and county stakeholders.

Q: What was your major challenge in the spill response? Any surprises?

A: There were a couple of surprises. The *Deepwater Horizon* incident was well beyond what our Florida Keys contingency plan had considered as a worst-case scenario. Most of the scenarios we had planned for were within nearshore waters in the vicinity of the Florida Keys. Last February, we had a major pollution response exercise. The scenario we trained for in February was a tanker hitting a reef between Key West and Marathon.

Deepwater Horizon was a slow-motion disaster happening 450 miles away, which was very different from what our plans normally considered. As time went on, we had to develop an outreach plan to talk to all the communities and organizations. Every element of our communities has a keen interest in the environment and our waterways. So, as time went on, we recognized that we had to increase the number of outreach events and talk about what our Unified Command's plans were. We had to talk about it more and more because the pressure of the community concern continued to rise.

“The other great concern was the unknown quantity of oil—a ship, for example, is a known quantity. This was obviously devastating in that it was an unknown quantity, and it was ongoing.”

Q: Although you were hundreds of miles from the spill site, what was your major concern?

A: All the Florida Keys are a National Marine Sanctuary, so we are protecting super sensitive resources.

One of the first things we did was use the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) scientists and oceanographers to find out what should we expect here in the Keys. We put out a sentry program where we have vessels off the Dry Tortugas actively patrolling for pollution. It was federal research vessels, contracted civilian commercial vessels, Coast Guard vessels, and aircraft from various agencies actually flying the Gulf of Mexico, tracking the movement of the pollution.

That was not in our original contingency plan. It was an adaptation to better prepare us for this pollution incident.



CREDIT: Andy Newman / Florida Keys News Bureau

The other great concern was the unknown quantity of oil—a ship, for example, is a known quantity. This was obviously devastating in that it was an unknown quantity, and it was ongoing.

We found out we were looking at weathered oil coming our way—specifically, tar balls. It was a very challenging scenario. Do you let tar balls wash up on the shore at a sandy beach? If it is a sensitive area, would you try to put pollution boom out there and run the risk of doing more damage in certain areas?

It's very challenging, because it's a bad scenario no matter what. As a result, we've revised our contingency plan. I asked our scientists to develop a shoreline countermeasures matrix, showing how we could best prepare for tar balls on our various habitats—shoreline tidal, sandy beach, mangrove swamp, and coral reef, for example. For each habitat, our scientific team has recommendations for what would be the best way to protect that habitat from tar balls.

We already have these matrixes for #6 grade oil, for diesel, for other types of oil that we'd expect to see in a near shore spill. We didn't have anything for tar balls.

During the spill, we went back with our scientists and trustees and validated our plans. It was a great opportunity to ready our plans if needed. We found out that some of the designated staging areas listed in the plan had actually been developed for other purposes.

In another example, we only had two dolphin rehabilitation facilities listed in our plan in the middle and upper Keys. There are actually six for-profit and non-profit facilities that can hold dolphins and other marine mammals. Some have closed circulation systems and some have direct connections with the ocean, which put them at risk in a spill. Our concern was, if the local waters were polluted, what could the different courses of action be to protect marine mammals?

We recognized there was a gap in our plan for these marine mammals. We brought in representatives from the six facilities, plus the sea turtle hospital, and allowed each to share what they do and what their facilities can do. We developed a good coordinated approach. Beforehand, each facility had felt that they were on their own.

Q: Who were your best agency/industry/citizen allies in identifying resources to be protected from the spill, if it made it to the Keys?

A: It was a very intense team effort to plan and very closely monitor anything and everything that was happening out there. We activated our Unified Command. We had NOAA, and the Department of the Interior, which has the National Park Service in the Dry Tortugas and Everglades. At the state level, we had the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and we had the Monroe County Division of Emergency Management. We had liaisons with the five municipalities in the Keys.

Our best ally was our established team through NOAA; no one knows the National Marine Sanctuary better. The National Park Service rangers out at the Dry Tortugas—they are the westernmost reaches of the Keys, closest to the Loop Current. We established training with park rangers out there. We've enhanced communication. They are still on the lookout for tar balls. They provide the Coast Guard sector with a nightly pollution report.

Our relationship with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission was significantly strengthened through this experience. This experience has really provided our Unified Command team a chance to reach out and provide updates to the five municipalities and really educate folks about the existence of our Florida Keys contingency plan. I think those efforts will really benefit the community in the future.

Often the first question we got was: What is your plan? Our area contingency plan has a grid system with sensitive environmental areas listed. The plan and component grids are updated every five years. It has staging areas listed. It is meant to be a ready plan for quick activation. If we have a spill in a certain area, we can pull out a plan for that particular area and its resources. We are in the process of collecting these lessons learned and will be including these in an upcoming revision.

Q: How did you find the efforts of BP, the responsible party, in the local response?

A: BP was very timely in showing up. They were here for the duration while the pollution threat existed and they followed through with their obligations under the area contingency plan. They were here until after the well was capped. They would rotate folks through, two to three weeks at a time. They were very professional and very experienced. We were fortunate and satisfied with their efforts here.

Q: Do you feel we were well prepared for this spill?

A: A spill of this magnitude was beyond anything that we had planned for. We adapted as best we could to prepare for the pollution threat. Fortunately, we have not been impacted by this incident.

Q: What would you do differently today in a similar spill scenario? How can the Keys be better protected?

A: One lesson we learned is that the public's perceptions, given the magnitude and location of this incident, were very important. There was intense frustration across the Keys that we weren't doing enough.

Email and phone calls aren't enough when elected officials have to tell their constituents what they are doing. We held face-to-face briefings for officials and government agencies and non-profit organizations. I was fortunate to brief a wide variety of organizations about what we were doing. Once you are out and sharing information, you'd be surprised at how many people want to hear it.

We had Coast Guard search aircraft and we brought local media representatives aboard while they searched for pollution and could not find it coming our way. That went a long way toward easing fears in how local media reported this.

Under our plan in the future, I'll take more aggressive action to bring our local communities into our planning effort. It would promote understanding that we have a plan and that information is being shared when available.

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Q: Going forward, are plans being developed to address an ongoing spill scenario?

A: Coast Guard Sector Key West and our federal, state, county partners, and local stakeholders and trustees will be working to incorporate the lessons learned from the recent *Deepwater Horizon* incident to ensure we are better prepared for the next pollution incident, regardless of the source.

Dan Kimball

Superintendent
Everglades and Dry Tortugas National Parks



CREDIT: iStock

Q: What was your role in the spill response?

A: I initially reported to St. Petersburg as part of the Incident Management Team. I was the Department of the Interior's representative and served there for two weeks. I was then assigned to the newly formed Florida Peninsula Command Post in Miami, representing the Department of the Interior and serving as one of four incident commanders.

Q: You were responsible for a giant amount of federal real estate and resources. How did you feel being responsible for protecting some of the nation's most treasured marine and estuarine/freshwater habitats: the Dry Tortugas and the Everglades?

A: It is a big responsibility every day. The Everglades is a World Heritage site and an International Biosphere Reserve. We're looking at all kinds of threats, whether it is climate change, external development, an oil spill, or the possibility of drilling in Cuban waters. This was just one more challenge.

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The National Park Service did baseline assessments for natural resource impacts and cultural resource impacts. We've got 2,500 miles of coastline in Florida Bay and the Ten Thousand Islands. We have mangroves, beach, and coral habitats. One of the things we focused on—for, I think, the first time in a spill response—are the significant cultural and historical resources at risk as well. We had shell middens that were built by the Calusa Indians in the Ten Thousand Islands. We had Fort Jefferson at the Dry Tortugas, a 19th century fort with a moat that goes all the way around it. We were concerned how oiling might affect the fort.

We decided it was important to do a lot of early monitoring for oil. We had different zones delineated in our response plan, and we did a lot of monitoring and surveillance. We had two vessels off of Key West that were pulling (plankton) nets. BP contracted for those vessels and we had government observers on board looking for oil. We were towing these nets to try to detect oil that might have entered the Loop Current, but never found any. We also had five surveillance aircraft that were up everyday looking for oil.

We had teams stationed in specific places in the Keys that were ready to implement the area contingency plans deploying boom, collecting tar balls, etc.

Q: What were your plans for protecting critical habitats and protected species?

A: We looked at the areas in the two parks that were at the highest risk. The areas we were most concerned about were the Florida Bay and Ten Thousand Islands areas of Everglades National Park. It would have been very challenging if oil got into those areas, given the extent of mangroves. Approximately half of Dry Tortugas National Park is a no-take marine reserve; it is part of the largest marine protected area in the continental United States. It looked like there was the potential for the Loop Current to bring oil into this sensitive area.

Because we were at such a distance from the *Deepwater Horizon* well site, we recognized that if oil were to come our way, we would probably be dealing with tar balls and tar mats. Booms don't work very well with those forms of oil since the weathered oil can slip right underneath booms. As such, we focused on how to best deal with weathered oil—tar balls and tar mats.

Q: Could you discuss the impacts that the oil spill has had on birds in the area?

A: To our knowledge, we haven't had any impacts to birds at this point. One of the things we need to look at in both parks is: What are the long term impacts of 1.8 million gallons of dispersant in the Gulf? How this will affect the whole ecosystem in the Gulf remains to be seen.

BP has committed a half-billion dollars to look at the long-term impacts in the Gulf. My concern is what the long-term effects might be on larvae and how the fishery might be affected, as well as marine mammals and birds.

I was involved a bit in the *Exxon Valdez* spill response, and some of the impacts didn't appear until three years after the spill.

Q: Who were your best partners in identifying resources to be protected from the spill?

A: In the Park Service, we have a very robust inventory and monitoring program. We have very good information on natural resources.

During the spill, we worked very closely with the Coast Guard, the State of Florida, and NOAA. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission did an incredible job, bringing top notch science and mapping capabilities to the effort. We worked very closely as well with BP and their spill response contractor.

“Approximately half of Dry Tortugas National Park is a no-take marine reserve; it is part of the largest marine protected area in the continental United States. It looked like there was the potential for the Loop Current to bring oil into this sensitive area.”

Q: How did you respond to citizen efforts and concerns to protect marine life?

A: One of our major objectives was public outreach—to inform the citizenry of the nature of the threat. Captain Pat DeQuattro of the Coast Guard did a great job of informing the public in the Keys. We recommended that people go to volunteerflorida.org—which handled volunteers statewide—to see what they could do in support of the effort. Since we didn't have any oil clean-up operations, we recommended that groups and individuals participate in “coast watch” programs to enhance our surveillance program.

Q: What was your major challenge in the spill response?

A: Our number one challenge was getting the science right—keeping up with changing real time conditions—and determining the nature of the threat to the Florida Peninsula. Number two was informing the public about what we knew regarding the threat and letting people know that we were prepared—that we were in a heightened state of readiness and that we had a robust response plan in place that we were ready to deploy.

The challenge was trying to understand the situation out in the Gulf and trying to take the modeling results and predict what the impacts might be in our area of responsibility. Many people were on the lookout for oil, and we received scores of tar ball reports. We followed up on all those reports. We sent 233 oil-related samples to the Coast Guard Marine Safety Lab in Connecticut for analysis and fingerprinting against *Deepwater Horizon* oil. None of them turned out to be from the *Deepwater Horizon* spill.

Q: Do you feel we were well prepared for this spill?

A: I think, in general, we were. At Everglades and Dry Tortugas National Parks, we participated in the development of the area contingency plans. We worked closely with all our partners. However, we need to carefully think about the full range of incidents that might occur. We seem to focus on the scenario of a vessel grounding off the Keys, and we need to think of other incidents that might occur—like a spill that goes on for months.

Most of my time at Everglades and Dry Tortugas is spent on ecosystem restoration. We think a lot about climate change and how that could affect the Parks' resources and how important Everglades restoration and restoration of marine resources at Dry Tortugas are to our efforts to adapt to climate change—making the Parks' resources healthier and more resilient to the effects of climate change. I learned through the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill incident that restoring the health and resiliency of the South Florida ecosystem is also important in terms of

responding to other potential impacts to the environment, like those from an oil spill. Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus has been assigned by the President to develop a plan to create a healthier Gulf—making the Gulf “better than it was” before the spill. So I’m hopeful that we’ll soon have a new and reenergized Gulf restoration program that will result in a healthier ecosystem, from the northern Gulf to the Tortugas, that’s more resilient to climate change, oil spills, and other impacts as well.

Q: What would you do differently today in a similar spill scenario?

A: We are investing more time and resources in the area contingency plans to make sure they are as good as they can be. Also, it’s important to do more table top exercises because the more we simulate what might occur, working closely with our partners, the better we’ll be able to effectively respond in a real-life event. As such, the drills that we do are really important.

Participating in the development of the Area Contingency Plans and related exercises builds important relationships among all our partners. One of the things about a major incident like *Deepwater Horizon* is that it really brings a lot of people together. You develop new relationships and friendships too, and as such, we’ll all be working more closely together on a wide range of issues and challenges facing South Florida and the Keys.

“...it’s important to do more table top exercises because the more we simulate what might occur, working closely with our partners, the better we’ll be able to effectively respond in a real-life event.”

Karl Lessard

President
Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association

Q: How many commercial fishermen are there in the Keys?

A: 1,300 people hold saltwater products licenses. As far as registered commercial fishing vessels, we're the largest port of call in Florida and one of the largest between Texas and the Carolinas.

We rank about fifth in terms of the dollar value of seafood landed in the Continental United States.

We're the number two economic engine in the Keys, behind the tourism industry.



CREDIT: Vicki Gale

Q: What is the largest catch?

A: Lobsters, stone crabs, and shrimp.

Q: You live and work down here, so what was your greatest concern for the Florida Keys commercial fishermen during the height of the Gulf spill?

A: Our main concern was the impact (oil and dispersants) could have had on our fisheries.

It kills all the larvae for your future recruitment of new fish into the fishery. Where the oil spill occurred, a tremendous amount of bluefin and yellowfin tuna were spawning.

If that oil had been out there during November, December, or January, and gotten into the Loop Current, all of our lobster catch would have been wiped out from the oil.

Nearly all the spiny lobsters in the Keys come from somewhere else—the Caribbean basin. They breed in the Caribbean and then the larvae get caught in the Loop Current and come up into the Gulf between the Yucatan and Cuba. The current then goes up to the Northern Gulf of Mexico, by Louisiana and Mississippi, and then turns and comes back down the Florida peninsula and eventually comes back down and wraps around the Dry Tortugas and the Florida Keys. Lobster larva float between five and nine months in the water column. They are mostly floating through the Loop Current from November to February.

Fortunately for the lobster fishery, the oil and most of the dispersants, which kill larvae, have sunk below the level at which the larvae float. We feel we got a reprieve. We have 455,000 lobster pots in the state. I have 2,220 lobster traps, and it provides about half my income for the year. We all have tremendous investment in our lobster traps. We all have major bills. Insurance, for instance, on my commercial vessel is \$1,000 a month.

“My thoughts and prayers go out to the people in the northern Gulf who suffered the worst.”

When the oil spill happened, we knew the beginning of the lobster season was August 6. We're all wondering, if it's coming here, should we even put our traps on the water? But by the time our season started we knew we had dodged the bullet because the Franklin Eddy (an unusual diversion of the Loop Current) had kept the Loop Current from carrying oil here.

If the oil had gotten into the Everglades, boy, what a mess that would have been. Mangroves are the basis of the natural system. Mangroves breathe from their roots. My thoughts and prayers go out to the people in the northern Gulf who suffered the worst.

Q: Were commercial fishermen ready to help protect the Keys from the spill and how?

A: Our organization was in touch with the state, and with officials at the City of Marathon, which was starting to do a program utilizing our knowledge of what we'd trained for in the past. We were ready to deploy skimmers and booms and become vessels of opportunity for BP. The members of our organization had already been trained in oil spill handling. There are 33 of us who are trained in hazardous materials. We contacted everybody and let them know we were ready to help. We've been involved in a lot of pollution mitigation over the years—shoreline cleanups, programs to recover derelict fishing gear. We have the local knowledge of the water and the currents.

Q: How do you feel the federal and state governments' actions were during the spill regarding commercial fishing? Could it have been better?

A: The state of Florida did a tremendous job. Every day at 4 pm, they did a conference call and kept us informed on what was happening.

The federal response was very bureaucratic. I think the Coast Guard does a fabulous job but I think this was a little bit over their heads. They weren't really responsive to commercial fishermen. We kept offering our services and they kept saying, "Sign up for the vessel of opportunity training program," and we kept telling them, "We are already trained in the booms and skimmers and everything else." I don't know how seriously they took us. We have the training and we're ready.

Q: Do you think we were well prepared for the spill?

A: I think we became prepared pretty quickly. People in the Keys volunteered to take on any type of problem we saw. We didn't have the equipment here that we would have needed, because we sent the retention booms that we had stored in the Keys over to the Northern Gulf. By the time it reached us, it would have been very weathered oil in any case.

Bob Holston

Director of Operations
Dive Key West

Q: How long have you been a diver?

A: Since 1968.

Q: Rating popular dive spots in the United States, how do you think the Keys rank?

A: Number one. The Keys are the most popular destination for diving in the world. More people come to dive in the Florida Keys than any dive destination in the world. The reason is that it is accessible—people can drive here. According to the state's figures, more than a million people a year visit the Florida Keys for diving and snorkeling.

Q: What do you think the long-term impacts to the dive industry would be if oil had reached the Keys?

A: It would have been devastating. We would have destroyed one of the most important tourist destinations and the third longest barrier reef in the world. The repercussions would affect not only my industry, but we would lose all the people who come to the Keys and stay in hotels and eat in restaurants. It would be an economic disaster.

Q: What was your greatest concern for the Florida Keys during the height of the Gulf spill?

A: The news media. From the very day it happened, there were reports that the oil would be in the Florida Keys that next weekend. We knew that there was no way oil could get here that fast. We started getting a number of cancellations.

The news media needs to step up and be responsible.

When tar balls showed up, the news media reported that the oil spill was in the Keys. The Coast Guard dispatched a Falcon jet and flew samples to a lab in Connecticut overnight. We knew right away the tar balls had not come from the BP spill—but that correction was very lightly reported.

What we're hearing now from our customers is a big distrust in the media.

Q: Were dive operators with large boats ready to be involved in the spill response effort?

A: We were checking into it. The entire Florida Keys were prepared to do what was necessary. Almost like a hurricane—you prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

Q: How were you and other dive operators negatively affected by the threat of the spill?

A: There were a number of factors that affected us. The economy for one, and the perception of oil in the Keys for another.

We (Dive Key West) have been in business here for forty years, and we've weathered it fine. Some of the newer dive operators—they've had some problems.



CREDIT: Bob Care / Florida Keys News Bureau

Q: How do you feel the federal and state governments' role was during the spill response?

A: The Monroe County Tourist Development Council put out a factual report daily and we shared it with all the dive operators. That was helpful—it was factual and not hype. NOAA did an excellent job of keeping our industry informed.

We had a meeting in Key Largo with the Coast Guard and the National Marine Sanctuary folks, and there were about 50 or 60 people there. It was very helpful to move away from the hysteria and deal with facts. People felt better informed.

Q: Do you feel we were well prepared for this spill?

A: I think they responded properly. I think the response was quick and accurate. No, we didn't have everything in place. But I don't think anyone, in any planning scenario, looked at the magnitude like we had.

We've learned a lot from it. It was like a training exercise—it allowed our resource managers to fine-tune what would take place if something happened closer. What the Keys faces that no one else in the United States faces is the possibility of drilling off Cuba. That is only 90 miles off our coast. So we need to be prepared.

“What the Keys faces that no one else in the United States faces is the possibility of drilling off Cuba. That is only 90 miles off our coast. So we need to be prepared.”

Dr. David Vaughan

Executive Director of the Tropical Research Laboratory
and Director of the Center for Coral Reef Research
Mote Marine Laboratory

Q: You live and work in the Keys. What was your greatest concern for the Keys during the height of the Gulf spill?

A: The currents that go in the Gulf of Mexico, most of the year, they go in the Loop Current. It usually comes up between the Yucatan and the Cuba peninsulas. Usually, it goes straight up to Louisiana and Mississippi, then goes east toward the Florida Panhandle, and then comes back down and goes close to Key West and the Dry Tortugas. It goes through the Florida Straits and up towards Miami and the east coast of Florida.

If that had happened during the oil spill, that current would have surrounded the Keys—almost like a posse gathering cattle—and it would have deposited oil in the Florida Keys.

It really was a disaster scenario that we were looking at. However, that's not what happened. All that surface oil shouldn't have gone toward the Louisiana marshes, it should have gone right into the Loop Current toward the Florida Keys.

But that Loop Current pinched off into what we call the Franklin Eddy, and none of it came down this way.

Q: Which habitats/species were you most concerned for and why?

A: There are three main natural resources at risk: one is the corals, two are the pelagic species which move around—fish, dolphins and the like—and the third are all the organisms in the near-shore habitats—the shallow grasses and mangroves. We knew if the oil got up into the mangroves, there was no getting it out.

The corals we were unsure about, because we didn't know what the effect would be since the corals are on the bottom. Once a year they spawn, and the larvae go up to the surface and stay for five to seven days. That was set to happen a few days after the full moon in August. We were worried if the oil came through at the time they were reproducing, we would lose that (year) class of coral reproduction.

Q: There were a lot of concerns about sea turtles. What were the potential impacts from the oil on sea turtles?

A: Just like dolphins, sea turtles spend a lot of time on the surface. If you get an oil slick that stretches for miles, it is going to have a major impact on them. They have to come up every few minutes to breathe, and they'd be coming in contact with the oil. The other big worry was that they might try to ingest tar balls which look like their food.



In January, we had a hard cold snap and had to rescue a lot of turtles. Both the turtles and the corals already have so many things stacked against them. The last thing they needed was an oil spill.

Q: You were involved in the Mote launching of “Waldo,” which NRDC and Oceana helped support. How effective do you feel that was in watching out for oil and helping citizens feel more secure?

A: At first, we were asking: “How do we put thousands of people on boats to keep sampling to determine if the oil is reaching us?” That wasn’t going to work. The autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs), like Waldo, were the answer.

We had two AUVs—including Waldo—and before this, they had been put to work testing toxins in red tide off southwest Florida. As soon as the oil spill happened, our guys called the companies and got the vehicles outfitted with equipment that could test for the oil spill. Other researchers contacted us and sent us two more, so we had four working between Tampa, Sarasota, and the Keys.

This was the first time they were used as oil spill sniffers and dispersant testers. They were our early warning sentries. It really helped the community feel more at ease. The AUVs stayed out three weeks and took samples every two seconds over a 350-kilometer area. We could see the Gulf conditions every hour—real time—on our computers.

Q: Do you feel we were well prepared for this spill?

“At first, we were asking: ‘How do we put thousands of people on boats to keep sampling to determine if the oil is reaching us?’ That wasn’t going to work. The autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs), like Waldo, were the answer.”

A: No. And we still aren’t. What we had in the Keys was 20,000 feet of floating boom available, which would have worked only in calm waters. That’s about four miles of boom. Well, if you were to encircle the Keys from the upper portion to the lower portion, it would have taken 250 miles of boom. We could not have put booms over 250 miles even if we wanted to, because we would have impeded the water flow. So then we asked: “What if we encircle each Key individually?” We would have needed 1,500 miles of boom, which doesn’t exist in the world.

We weren’t really prepared to know what to do if oil was coming to the Keys and toward the corals. The standard methods are to boom it off and burn it, or spray dispersants on it. That may be fine if you’re in the center of the Gulf of Mexico, but not over the coral reef, which is the most critical ecosystem in the Keys.

We found out people didn’t know the effect of the dispersants on coral. Since then, we’ve been testing. So far, we’re finding that the oil is not a problem for coral larvae, but dispersants (could be) a death sentence. I’m glad we know that now because if the Coast Guard has to deal with this in the future, we can recommend the proper procedure of what not to use.

Q: What would you recommend should be done differently if a similar spill scenario happened today?

A: We've got to do more research on better dispersants that aren't toxic to corals so that if there's another spill some day, we won't be causing more harm than good to the reefs.

“We’ve got to do more research on better dispersants that aren’t toxic to corals so that if there’s another spill some day, we won’t be causing more harm than good to the reefs.”

Where's Waldo? Oil-Seeking Robot Helped to Protect the Florida Keys

On July 19, 2010, NRDC, Oceana, and Mote Marine Laboratory launched “Waldo”—autonomous underwater vehicle (AUV)—designed to help identify pollution threats to the Florida Keys’ environment and economy stemmed from the BP oil spill. Waldo was equipped with fluorescence sensors to detect dispersed oil in subsurface waters and looked for any evidence of submerged oil plumes to the north and northwest of the Florida Keys. If oil was identified, local government officials would be alerted so that emergency resources and response plans could be quickly activated to help protect the area’s important ecological treasures.

Thankfully, Waldo did not find oil in the Keys during his sponsored run. The scientific monitoring conducted by the AUV did, however, teach us more about hurricanes since Waldo operated throughout Tropical Storm Bonnie. In addition, data from Waldo and from similar robots on sentinel throughout the waters of the west coast of Florida could help us improve the accuracy of climate change models.

More information on Waldo’s mission can be found on the NRDC Switchboard blog at <http://switchboard.nrdc.org>.

Dr. Robert Lingenfelter

President
Marine Mammal Conservancy



CREDIT: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission / NOAA

Q: Which marine mammal species were you most concerned for and why?

A: Sperm whales. We have a distinct genetic population of sperm whales in the Gulf and we were unclear how the spill would affect them. They are on the endangered species list. If we lost just a few sperm whales as a result of the Gulf disaster, it would have a serious impact on that species, if not cause that species to go extinct.

“It is basically triage, like you would do in a human disaster. We contain all the animals; we start treating those that need immediate help. We do extensive exams, including ultrasound and X-rays. We have facilities where we take the animals until they have recovered.”

One sperm whale was found floating dead during the spill. It was very decomposed, so I doubt we'll find out if the oil caused its death.

Q: What would you have done if a major pod of dolphins or manatees were affected?

A: We're the best prepared team for that in the world. We're based in Key Largo, but we cover everything from Naples to the Dry Tortugas and up to West Palm Beach. We would have done our jobs. We see more mass strandings than anyone else in the world.

It is basically triage, like you would do in a human disaster. We contain all the animals; we start treating those that need immediate help. We do extensive exams, including ultrasound and X-rays. We have facilities where we take the animals until they have recovered.

Q: How do you feel about the federal and state governments' roles during the spill regarding marine mammals? Could it have been better?

A: My personal opinion is they did a heck of a job. When you're in the Gulf and you've got thousands of birds, hundreds of sea turtles, and almost 100 dolphins and whales to recover over a two-month period, you are a busy bee.

Q: Do you feel the Keys were well prepared?

A: In the Keys, we had plenty of lead time. I think we were well prepared. We had all of our ducks in a row and we were prepared if oil hit. We would not have been able to keep the oil away—we've got tens of thousands of miles of coastline—there are about 10,000 keys around the Florida Keys.

Billy D. Causey, Ph.D.

Regional Director

Southeast Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Region

NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries



CREDIT: Bob Care / Florida Keys News Bureau

Q: What was your role in the spill response?

A: My role was communicating with the media and answering questions about the potential impacts to coral and coral reefs.

Q: What was your major challenge in the spill response? Any surprises?

A: My challenge WAS my biggest surprise. It was the tendency for people to react with such little confidence in their government agencies. My challenge was the expectations that people were creating. There seemed to be no hesitancy to take rumors and turn them into one's own realities.

The large percentage of the community was generally concerned about the impacts and the aftermath of any exposure of our resources to oil. There was genuine concern and fear out there. That was not a surprise—of course we were sensitive to it.

People made all these proposals. One was that NOAA should capture all the marine mammals and sea turtles and move them into closed canals in the Keys. Can you imagine us trying to catch thousands of turtles and dolphins? That wasn't a practical solution.

When we didn't jump up and start netting turtles, people said NOAA wasn't doing anything. Another proposal was for us to get a thousand boats out there and start sampling every hour, 24 hours a day. There's not a lab in the world that would have been able to process all those tests—even by now. We had to explain why we weren't doing these things.

Q: Which sanctuary resources were of major concern if the spill had hit the Keys and why?

A: Our primary concern, of course, was the corals. The second area of concern was the mangroves and seagrasses. Oil is very lethal to mangroves. Once the prop roots are covered with oil, they die. They take decades to grow back.

Q: What were your plans for protecting the coral reef tract? Mangroves? Sea grasses?

A: Our habitats include the coral reefs, hard bottom habitats, seagrasses, and mangroves—and we have a different strategy for response for each habitat. In conjunction with the various agencies lead by the United States Coast Guard (USCG), we were prepared to implement our Area Contingency Plan for response. And with this oil spill, it was going to be weathered oil that we were dealing with.

The NOAA trajectories were extremely accurate throughout the response. We (NOAA) were dropping tracking meters into the water at different depths and using our planes to map the edges of the spill—we were getting a multidimensional picture for our models. This made the various predictions very accurate and something we could direct the public toward during the event.

We were working with the local area command lead by the USCG and the USCG was ready to call in skimmers or booms—whatever resources were necessary to deal with that particular oil product, whether it was cleaning up tar balls or setting up booms to deflect product off the reef so you could clean it up.

People were wondering: “Why don’t you have a lot of boom in the Keys?” Well, you can transport boom very quickly. You stockpile it around where it is easily accessible to transport around. We had our contingency plan and we were prepared to get it here when we needed it. It is important to not horde all of the boom or resource materials in one location in case it is in greater demand elsewhere.

For the mangroves, we would either skim or boom. Certainly, we won’t use dispersants anywhere in the Keys. We’d be skimming, mopping, and soaking it up. You do the very best you can. We’ve decided in the contingency plan which techniques to use where. We know how to respond when the time gets there.

“The NOAA trajectories were extremely accurate throughout the response. We (NOAA) were dropping tracking meters into the water at different depths and using our planes to map the edges of the spill—we were getting a multidimensional picture for our models. This made the various predictions very accurate and something we could direct the public toward during the event.”

Q: What were your plans for protecting critical habitats and protected species?

A: The use of booms, skimming, and physical removal are the primary response methods for most areas. However, with mobile species there are some challenges. Perhaps a strategy for the future is to drive mobile species out of the spill area if possible, to agitate or irritate them so they move out of harm’s way. We have plans for various species in our contingency plan, based on the specific location and the needs of each species. If we had manatees at risk from oil, we’d certainly do all we could to boom off an area to keep them safe.

All this planning is very dependent on what type of oil product you’re working with. Diesel, for example, you want it spread out over the surface so it will evaporate. Every situation has its own nuances.

Q: How did you find communications and plans with BP, the responsible party?

A: BP was trying to stay out in front of the concerns locally, here in the Florida Keys.

One of the lessons learned will be getting a better understanding on the part of the public on what are the various roles of the parties involved—the government agencies and the responsible party.

The thing we would try to do is get out in front more quickly with information to explain the roles of the different parties. People early on were wondering why the government wasn't taking over. They wonder why they have the people responsible for the spill in the lead. They are responsible under the law to make the resources whole that the United States public has lost.

Q: Do you feel we were well prepared for this spill?

A: I think we were. I think there are things that could have been responded to differently, as I've mentioned. We're not responding by the seat of our pants. We use all these scenarios we've worked on in training with all the federal and state agencies, the county, and everybody. Our response is planned, rehearsed, and we train under the various scenarios. The U.S. Coast Guard—all the federal agencies, the state agencies, the local agencies—all of them are prepared as best as we can prepare for incidents like this. Of course there are still challenges that creep in during a live event.

Irene Toner

Director
Monroe County Emergency Management Department



CREDIT: iStock

Q: What was your greatest concern for the Florida Keys during the height of the Gulf spill?

A: The economy and the habitat—the birds, the mangroves, the tourism. It was a tremendous concern. Just the notion that a big oil spill might affect the Keys is quite alarming.

When it happened, people were saying, “Oh my God, our world is coming to an end!” Job number one was to bring some order to this, some calmness.

Q: What was your role?

A: My role was to be the liaison between the Unified Command and the county government, the municipalities, and all the other interested parties in the community.

Q: What was your greatest obstacle in recruiting/coordinating local citizen volunteers?

A: We did not have any problems recruiting volunteers. There were so many volunteers and they were willing to do just about anything. Emotions were running very high. A lot of groups got very excited with their concerns.

We had a system in place for training and organizing volunteers. But within the county, there were a lot of people who were taking it upon themselves to start training and mobilizing. It got a little chaotic when some of the environmental groups wanted to function on their own.

One of the biggest jobs was coming to an understanding within the community. This is a small county, and we know everyone. We worked with everyone—we really understand their missions and their goals.

We established a Monroe County volunteer website, and we advertised it on local television and on the county website. Some people came personally to the county emergency management office. We made sure to give them time. We told them where to sign up to volunteer and we walked them through the forms—whatever they needed.

“People are so protective of the environment here because this is our livelihood—fishing, diving, hotels, restaurants. These are the primary sources of income in Monroe County.”

I think when the oil didn't make it here, people kind of thought—well, at least I was trained. At least I was ready to go.

Q: What motivated most citizens to volunteer?

A: People are so protective of the environment here because this is our livelihood—fishing, diving, hotels, restaurants. These are the primary sources of income in Monroe County. We had volunteers who did not want to get paid and you had ones who wanted to get paid if they had to go and physically handle toxic oil.

Q: Hazmat training seemed to be a big concern in some places as far as getting people to volunteer. Was this problem in the Keys and how was it handled?

A: Hazmat training wasn't a problem. People were ready to go and do anything—if it meant Hazmat training or not.

Q: What would you have done if oil had actually come ashore?

A: If something had happened here, I think the system would have worked very well between the local governments, the Coast Guard, the state agencies and the environmental groups as far as response.

We would mobilize those people that have gone through the training. We'd work closely with the municipalities so everyone would know what to do and how to do it.

Q: How do you feel the local and federal governments' role was during the spill regarding citizen involvement? Could it have been better?

A: I think the federal, state, and local officials worked together very well down here.

Right after the spill happened, our Monroe County Mayor Sylvia Murphy called and said, "I think we need to have a public meeting right away." The meeting was attended by the municipal managers, the mayors, county commissioners, federal and state officials. The place was packed.

People would write their question on a card, then Mayor Murphy would read the question and the appropriate person would answer it.

Coast Guard Capt. Pat DeQuattro helped keep the panic away. He was really phenomenal. He had this calming effect on people. He had all the facts, his staff had the facts, and he was open about what they were doing and what they were not doing. We never heard him say: "I'm sorry we can't share that information with you." He always made sure a person or a group got the best answers he could possibly provide.

When we held public meetings, we—the state agencies, the federal agencies, BP, the county and the municipalities—were always together, conducting presentations so we could answer all of people's questions and address their concerns.

Q: Do you feel we were well prepared for this spill?

A: I think on a local level, it took a while, but we worked through the Coast Guard contingency plan. They were ready. Initially, it was: "Oh my goodness, are we ready for this?" Mostly we deal with hurricanes.

Q: What would you recommend should be done differently if a similar spill scenario happened today?

A: We have our volunteers trained now. We know what the chain of command is. It would not be as chaotic as the first time.

A lot of people didn't know who the lead agency was—in the Keys, it was the Coast Guard. I think the county government turning around quickly and making sure the needs were met resulted in a great response.

Captain Lara Fox

Vice President and Co-Owner
Danger Charters, Key West



CREDIT: Bob Krist / Florida Keys News Bureau

Q: How long have you lived and worked in the Florida Keys?

A: Thirteen years.

Q: What is the nature of your ecotourism business?

A: We specialize in off-the-beaten-path eco-tours—kayaking, snorkeling, sailing. We have shallow-draft schooners that are reproductions of Nineteenth Century sailboats. Unlike a lot of schooners, we can get in very shallow water. We go through the Key West National Wildlife Refuge, you can see fish, rays, turtles, dolphins, sharks, and all manner of birds.

Q: Did the Gulf disaster impact your business at all? How did you anticipate that it would have?

A: We had some cancellations—there was a fear among the public for a while. We were about fifteen percent down. We have 20 employees who depend on us. During our high season, we have three schooners going out twice a day, with 20 people per trip. Our trips were not full. We definitely adjusted and scaled some things back.

“For every question you get on the phone from people, you know there are others who are deciding not to come down. They’re deciding: let’s go to California this year or somewhere else.”

A lot of people called us with questions about the conditions in the Keys. For every question you get on the phone from people, you know there are others who are deciding not to come down. They’re deciding: let’s go to California this year or somewhere else. Almost every charter boat operator had a Plan B.

For us, because we're so tied to the environment, ecology, and the pristine nature of it, it really is kind of a wait-and-see, trickle-down effect of what's going on with the fishery and the entire ecosystem. Sometimes you won't see the effect for four or five years when it moves up the food chain in terms of where fish are migrating and grazing.

It wasn't personal until they started talking about the Loop Current. I realized we're really vulnerable, especially when you're seeing people saying that it's almost certainly inevitable that oil will be caught in the Loop Current and come down here.

Everything turned out differently for us, and thank goodness. It is so rare to have that Loop Current pinched off like that for so long.

Q: What was your greatest concern for the Florida Keys during the height of the Gulf spill?

A: We (Key West) are an island that is two miles by four miles. The water is our everything. It is our life.

The greatest concern was that the oil would be caught in the Loop Current and come this way. But I don't think that a lot of us knew how that would happen. Would it come straight down and flow around the Dry Tortugas with the Loop Current or would it flush across the islands and back country? How do you prepare for something when no one knows what's going to happen?

Q: Were you and other recreational charter guides ready to help protect the Keys from the spill and how?

A: We all were ready and would have helped, definitely. We were talking about the fact that our shallow-draft schooners were the perfect vessels for laying down boom, because we can get in three feet of water.

No one ever contacted us. I think it is good we got organized. We'll be organized should something happen here in the future. It is such a difficult place to navigate and we know how to do it. We're familiar with the unique aspects of this area.

Q: Were you or others approached by BP to work on the spill response effort?

A: No.

Q: How do you feel the federal and state governments' actions were during the spill regarding communicating with the public? Could it have been better?

A: I think they did a good job here locally—our local officials did, and particularly Capt. Pat DeQuattro of the Coast Guard; he really worked hard to go to all the public meetings.

“For example, dispersants—they can save things, as well as harm things. We need to look at that. If you are going to use dispersants, it has to be the least toxic kind, and it should be stockpiled here in the Keys. In the northern Gulf, they kept saying there were less toxic dispersants than the one they used, but that they didn't have enough of it. We need to make sure that's available next time.”

I helped form the Florida Keys Environmental Coalition during the spill so we could pull our community resources together. Every municipality passed a resolution supporting the coalition's efforts to have a seat at the table—to be involved directly with the Emergency Operations Center's activities—should the oil occur here.

We have a huge team of scientists in our coalition.

We had people that we ran everything by—scientific protocols, dispersant use, things like that. We were all trying to get trained so that we can work effectively in any response here.

We were concerned about what happened in the Northern Gulf of Mexico—just the lack of transparency, keeping the media away, closing down air space. We were worried that, if we did see any oil, would they try to do that to us?

Q: Do you feel we were well prepared for this spill?

A: No. We organized ourselves because we weren't getting enough information. There were a lot of massive questions.

We kept asking: "Are dispersants going to be used?" We kept getting referred to a 400-page book that was response protocol from the Coast Guard.

It took us a while to find out how detailed it (Coast Guard response protocol) is and whether it would be effective. I think we're still trying to find that out.

For example, dispersants—they can save things, as well as harm things. We need to look at that. If you are going to use dispersants, it has to be the least toxic kind, and it should be stockpiled here in the Keys. In the northern Gulf, they kept saying there were less toxic dispersants than the one they used, but that they didn't have enough of it. We need to make sure that's available next time.

Q: What would you recommend should be done differently, if a similar spill scenario happened today?

A: I think I would like to see us pull together as a community with the local Emergency Operations Center people and the Coast Guard and get to know that plan.

I'd like for us to learn lessons without judging, without saying: "Why didn't you do this?" Let's learn lessons, come together, and create better protocol. Let's work with the local experts who know the local ecology.

Captain Victoria Impallomeni-Spencer

Board President Emeritus
Reef Relief

Q: How long have you been involved with Reef Relief and how did you become a Board Member Emeritus?

A: I have been involved with Reef Relief for 22 years. I am the longest-standing board member.

Q: What activities was Reef Relief involved in to address the spill?

A: During the spill, we helped organize citizen involvement in coastal cleanups to remove marine debris. Reef Relief had a cleanup every weekend. The idea was to remove debris before it got covered with oil and became hazardous waste. We helped direct citizen interest in volunteering, to get everyone trained in hazardous materials and learning how to clean birds and how to take care of the sea turtles, if needed.

Reef Relief has over 3,000 volunteers. We've always been looked at as a leader for teaching in the community. The amount of grassroots citizen activity in our community is huge. When this happened, the phone calls were constant with people asking: "What can I do?" We were thinking outside the loop of government.

Q: You have lived and worked down there for a long time, so what was your greatest concern for the Florida Keys wilderness charters during the height of the Gulf spill?

A: The saltwater flats, because the flats are the nursery for 90 percent of the fish, crabs, shrimp and everything. The food chain would just be knocked down.

Q: Were recreational charter guides ready to help protect the Keys from the spill and how?

A: Everybody signed up for hazardous materials training. Those of us who make our living off the water were, of course, excited to protect it. A lot of us were worrying about the kids, whether the next generation would have the resources that we have in the Keys today.



CREDIT: iStock

“Everybody signed up for hazardous materials training. Those of us who make our living off the water were, of course, excited to protect it. A lot of us were worrying about the kids, whether the next generation would have the resources that we have in the Keys today.”

Q: Were you or other recreational guides you know economically impacted by the spill? Have you (they) made or received claims?

A: I didn't make a claim with BP, but in the month of May, I had half as many charters as normal. I had more charters in June, July, and August. People all wanted to see the Keys before it was gone, because they were thinking the oil would reach here.

Q: What would you recommend should be done differently, if a similar spill scenario happened today?

A: We are trying to do a citizen scientist program at the community college. People will be able to collect water samples so we have baseline data. To be prepared, we need baseline data to understand existing conditions and how they are affected.

Captain Tad Burke

Commodore
Florida Keys Fishing Guides Association



CREDIT: Bob Krist / Florida Keys News Bureau

Q: First off, can you tell us about your recreational fishing business in the Keys?

A: I have been in the charter fishing business for 25 years. I have three boats, we take people to fish just about everywhere—offshore, backcountry, canoe fishing in the Everglades, flats fishing, tuna, wahoo, sail fishing. You name it, I do it.

“We have not seen any effects from the spill. That could change. Just because it’s out of sight doesn’t mean it is out of mind. The Loop Current transfers a lot of nutrients. We’re at the bottom of the watershed for the Gulf of Mexico. What happens in the long term? We don’t know. What about five years down the road, ten years down the road?”

Q: What was your greatest concern for the Florida Keys recreational guide fishermen during the height of the Gulf spill?

A: My biggest concern was the potential for the Loop Current to bring the oil to the Florida Keys. I wanted to try not to have doom and gloom, but my initial reaction was that if this oil washes up in the Keys, onto the reef, it’s dead forever. The coral’s not going to recover. I was sick at the fact that they couldn’t stop it.

Q: Were recreational charter fishermen ready to help protect the Keys from the spill and how?

A: Absolutely. Both commercial and recreational fishermen were. Everybody was pretty much on red alert status.

Q: Were you or others approached by BP to work on the spill response effort? What did you think about that?

A: BP never contacted me directly. Everybody kept their ears open and tried to find out as much information as we could.

We tried to be as proactive as we could about getting accurate information. There was a lot of misinformation out there. We had meetings, we did phone calls; I had no less than 20 messages a day from people wanting information.

I started doing blanket emails to our membership with links to accurate information. The media reports were inaccurate, and they really hurt us. We had people calling us asking: "Should we come down?" We told them: "The fishing is great, you should definitely come down."

Q: Were you or other recreational fishermen you know economically impacted by the spill? And if so, how? Have they made and received claims?

A: BP opened claims offices in Marathon and Key Largo. I think a few guides and captains and did go to the BP office and claims.

We have not seen any effects from the spill. That could change. Just because it's out of sight doesn't mean it is out of mind. The Loop Current transfers a lot of nutrients. We're at the bottom of the watershed for the Gulf of Mexico. What happens in the long term? We don't know. What about five years down the road, ten years down the road?

I'm hopelessly optimistic, but I am resigned to the fact that this is not over. This stuff could easily show up in the Keys a few years from now.

Q: How do you feel the federal and state governments' actions were during the spill regarding recreational fishing? Could it have been better?

A: Everybody had this question on their face: Whose problem is it? Is it a federal problem? Is it a corporate problem? Who was in charge? Who was going to be responsible for making sure the Keys were protected?

Do you feel we were well prepared for this spill?

A: No. I don't think the federal officials were ready for it and I don't think the corporation that was in charge of the well was ready for it.

Q: What would you recommend should be done differently if a similar spill scenario happened today?

A: First of all, let's prevent this from happening again. Let's write some new rules and find out who is going to be responsible for what. Everybody should know what their responsibility is.

There should be more of a concern about protective measures, no matter what the cost. The recreational fishing industry in the United States is worth a ridiculous amount of billions of dollars. People want to walk on clean beaches. They want to know there are dolphins and fish and clean waters.

Do they even know the extent of the damage to the sea bottom? Is BP going to be here in 10 years if the fisheries crash and it can be directly related to the oil spill of 2010? Who is going to subsidize us then?



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