

Severe and Lasting Ecological Consequences after BP Deepwater Horizon Gulf Oil Spill

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“Deepwater oil spill: BP steps up PR effort to insist all is well in the Gulf

Oil giant says area is making a rapid recovery but evidence mounts that wildlife is still struggling to rebound, five years after Deepwater Horizon spill

Critics say BP's insistence that everything is getting better merely acts as salt on a not-yet-healed wound Photograph: Reuters

Peter Moskowitz <<http://www.theguardian.com/profile/peter-moskowitz>> in New Orleans

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<<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/mar/31/bp-pr-effort-gulf-coast-deepwater>>

In the run-up to the five-year anniversary of the Deepwater Horizon spill this April, BP <<http://www.theguardian.com/business/bp>> is ramping up its effort to convince consumers that life is returning to normal on the Gulf coast.

Over the last month, the company has released PR materials that highlight the Gulf's resilience, as well as a report compiling scientific studies

<https://www.thestateofthegulf.com/media/1508/bp_year-five-report-final.pdf> that suggest the area is making a rapid recovery.

But evidence is mounting that five years after millions of gallons of oil spilled into the Gulf of Mexico, wildlife is still struggling to rebound. A new report

<<http://www.nwf.org/News-and-Magazines/Media-Center/Reports/Archive/2013/12-05-13-Forestry-Bioenergy-in-the-Southeast.aspx>> , released on Monday by the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), suggests that at least 20 species are still being affected by the spill.

"This report, more so than any, shows that science is certain that this is a long-term problem," said Ryan Fikes, a scientist with NWF. "But it's going to take even more time to understand the true magnitude of this."

The NWF report is the organization's fifth survey highlighting scientific research into the environmental impact of the spill. This year, the NWF found that higher-than-normal rates of death for many species continued, and are likely linked to the disaster: dolphins along Louisiana's coastline were found dead at four times historic rates last year, and research has shown the deaths of 12% of brown pelicans and 32% of a species of gull can be linked to the spill.

The NWF report also says the eggs of many animals - from trout in the Gulf to pelicans nesting as far away as Minnesota - have been found to contain oil and the dispersant used by BP in the wake of the spill.

A representative from BP sent a statement, attributed to senior vice-president Geoff Morrell, that read in part: "The National Wildlife Federation report is a work of political advocacy ... the dire predictions made in 2010 have fortunately not come to pass."

But even less political groups, like the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric

Administration (NOAA), seem to agree that BP is underplaying the spill's continued impact. Earlier this month, NOAA said <http://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/wp-content/uploads/statement-from-EC-to-BP-5-yr-3-16-15-with-contact.pdf>> BP "misinterprets and misapplies" data to obscure the truth.

People on the ground seem to agree - activists and residents of the area surrounding the Gulf of Mexico say oil is still being found on beaches, on private land and in the water. They say that in addition to having to deal with economic hardships and environmental damage, BP's insistence that everything is getting better merely acts as salt on a not-yet-healed wound. "As a lifelong resident of Louisiana, it makes me really angry," said Colette Pichon Battle, an attorney with the Gulf Coast Center for Law and Policy who helps low-income residents file claims against BP.

"As an attorney making these claims who has been out into the marsh many times, to see them act like this, it feels disingenuous at best."