Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

Mississippi's Battle Plan

TESTIMONY

For the House Subcommittee on Insular Affairs
Oceans and Wildlife Hearing

"*State Planning for Offshore Energy Development: Standards for Preparedness"*

And

"The Gulf of Mexico Governors Alliance"

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State Planning for Offshore Energy Development: Standards for Preparedness

Within days of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, and Governor Haley Barbour began putting together a plan to protect and if necessary clean up Coastal Mississippi following the explosion and sinking of the Deepwater Horizon drilling platform and the resultant release of crude oil into the waters of the Gulf of Mexico at a site some 96 miles south southeast of Mississippi's coastline.

This Plan is consistent with the Area Contingency Plan (ACP) developed by the Mobile Sector Area Committee (AC) as required by the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. This Plan is also consistent with Mississippi's Coastal

Program, our federally (NOAA)-approved coastal management plan which addresses energy facilities located in or which may affect our coastal zone as required by the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972.

Regarding protecting Coastal Mississippi, MDMR and MDEQ decided early on that our first priority was protection of the critical marsh habitat that serves as nursery ground and protective refuge for Mississippi's juvenile shrimp, crab, and fish species. These priority areas were communicated to BP, and BP contractors have protected these areas with boom material. Presently, the following areas are protected with boom: Grand Bay, the Pascagoula River, Biloxi Bay, Bay St. Louis, and the marshes west of Bayou Caddy. Additional marsh areas requested by our cities and counties have also been boomed. On Monday of this week we began installing a second layer of larger boom in all of these areas to further fortify and protect our sensitive and critical habitat and nursery areas. We have installed strategic test areas nearly two miles of absorbent silt fencing designed to allow water but not oil to pass supplement the booms. This fencing has worked well, and we have asked BP to approve installation of 30 additional miles.

Mississippi's plan to combat this oil spill is attached. The Plan has several facets and triggers that, when pulled, result in specific actions. Our preference and first line of defense is to fight this spill offshore, at the site of the spill. Our first trigger is pulled when oil material is detected within 30 miles of our barrier islands, some 45 miles offshore from our coastal beaches. This trigger was pulled on May 31 when degraded oil and sheen was detected some 40 miles south of Horn and Petit Bois Islands which are located 12 miles south of Mississippi's coastline. Pulling this trigger resulted in BP contractors deploying collection vessels to the location and removal of all material related to the oil spill.

Our second trigger is activated when oil material is detected on our barrier islands. This trigger was pulled on June 1 when balls or patties degraded oil were reported onshore on Petit Bois Island. Pulling this trigger resulted in BP contractors deploying personnel to Petit Bois Island to pick up this material and place it in plastic bags for analysis and landfill disposal.

Our third trigger is pulled when oil material is reported north of our barrier islands in the Mississippi Sound. This trigger was pulled on June 2 when weathered oil was reported north of Petit Bois Island, and resulted in BP

contractors sending vessels to the area to pick up the material. All of these actions were executed in concert with the plan and all were successful. The good news is that these events were relative small portions of weathered oil material that had broken away from the main body of the oil, which remains today some 70 or so miles south of our barrier islands. Degraded oil south of Mobile Bay is only 25 to 30 miles away from our barrier islands, and BP contractors are aggressively skimming that material. Should more significant amounts of oil material enter the Mississippi Sound, we are prepared to skim it, corral it with boom, and where feasible burn it to keep it from reaching our mainland coast.

Our fourth trigger is pulled when oil material reaches our mainland beaches and wetlands, and our fifth trigger is pulled when oil material reaches our bays, rivers, and bayous. Thankfully, these final two triggers have not been pulled, and we continue to work to ensure that we will not have to trigger them. We are, however prepared to do so if necessary.

So, our current situation is that while some relatively small patches of weathered oil and sheen have reached our barrier islands and into the Mississippi Sound, the vast majority of oil, crude and degraded forms, remains offshore. This is in part due to favorable weather conditions. Prevailing winds continue to move the oil away from Mississippi. Current winds are pushing the oil to the east, away from our shores. And, anticipated winds from the north will move the oil farther south. Also, there is a tremendous level of activity going on at the site of the spill to skim, burn, and siphon the oil to reduce the amount of product on the surface of the water. And, the use of dispersants, both sprayed from airplanes at the surface and injected subsurface at the source of the emerging crude, is successfully breaking the crude oil into hundreds and thousand of small droplets with significantly increased surface area available to microorganisms capable of biologically degrading or “eating” the oil. These microorganisms are present in the Gulf because of natural oil seeps that release about 250,000 barrels of oil annually into Gulf of Mexico waters. These bacteria would not be there if not for the oil seepage, and they are quite capable of metabolizing the oil, especially in dispersed form.

Now a word about the subsurface “oil plumes.” Dispersants serve to break crude oil into small particles of varying size and buoyancy. When dispersed, these particles float in the water column and drift with the prevailing current. As these particles drift in the current, the bacteria naturally present in the

environment metabolize the oil, reducing it over time ultimately to carbon dioxide and water.

The key to success here is closing off or significantly reducing the introduction of new crude oil into the water. If those efforts are successful, we should be able to deal with most of the oil offshore. If that is the case, Mississippi's short term effects should be minimal. Even if we are successful in dealing with the oil offshore, questions about long term effects remain. Long term effects on populations of marine species whose larval forms are currently present in the area of the spill are unknown and will take years to assess and monitor. Fortunately, Mississippi has talented and qualified scientists who stand at the ready to address these long term concerns and questions.

With regard to other funding that might be applied to the activities associated with this event, I am pleased that BP has pledged $500 million to research, monitoring, and restoration efforts in the aftermath of this massive oil release. I feel very strongly that a significant portion of these funds should flow through the Gulf of Mexico Governors' Alliance, a partnership of the governors of the five states which border the Gulf of Mexico. Contained within the membership of the Gulf Alliance are academic institutions, state agencies, NGOs, and others from all five Gulf states, as well as an outstanding group of federal agencies. I will speak about the Gulf Alliance later in this testimony and provide you with the Alliance's latest Action Plan. I hope you will get a flavor of the overall focus and capability of the Alliance and I hope you will agree that this is the proper mechanism for designing and implementing the BP research, monitoring, and restoration effort.

Let me close by once again stressing that BP has stepped forward as the responsible party and said repeatedly and publically that they will pay all costs associated with damage assessment, mitigation, and compensation. BP has provided Mississippi with $50 million to reimburse cities and counties for lost revenues, for the purchase of equipment necessary to deal with the oil spill, and for other purposes. BP has promised additional funds are available for these purposes if needed. BP has paid $6 million in claims directly to Mississippi citizens and businesses. They have denied no claims to date, although some continue to be under investigation. BP has provided $15 million to Mississippi to promote tourism, and have put 2000 Mississippians to work.

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance is a partnership, initiated in 2004, by the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, with the goal of significantly increasing regional collaboration to enhance the environmental and economic health of the Gulf of Mexico. The Alliance is a state led, federally supported partnership that works closely with a variety of partners, including state agencies and academic institutions, the Gulf of Mexico Foundation, the Northern Gulf Institute, the Hart Research Institute, the Nature Conservancy, and the six Mexican states.

The Alliance is focused on planning, implementation, and management at the *regional* level and has identified six priority issues that are significant to the Gulf of Mexico Region and that can be more effectively addressed through collaboration at state, local, and federal levels. Each issue area has a team of scientists and resource managers working to establish priorities and plans to address the most pressing issues. These issue areas are:

- Improved Water Quality for Healthy Beaches and Shellfish Beds
- Habitat Conservation and Restoration
- Environmental Education
- Ecosystem Integration and Assessment
- Reducing Nutrient Impacts to Coastal Ecosystems
- Coastal Community Resilience

The five U.S. Gulf state governors released the 1st Governors' Action Plan for Healthy and Resilient Coasts in March 2006. That first plan challenged the new Alliance partnership to make tangible progress over the next 36 months. Ninety-six specific deliverables were contained in Action Plan I, and 96% of them were accomplished over the 3-year span of the Plan.

Building on the success of the first Plan, the Alliance released the second Governors' Action Plan in June 2009. The 2nd Plan is longer and more aggressive and addresses some of the most pressing issues affecting the Gulf of Mexico Region. The 2nd Action Plan is provided as a handout.

The Gulf of Mexico Region continuing to demonstrate the power of partnership, and other regions of the continental United States is following

our example. This national trend of regional ocean partnerships is exemplified by the West Coast Governors' Agreement on Ocean Health, the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration, the Northeast Regional Ocean Council, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean, the Governors' South Atlantic Alliance, and the Gulf Alliance. The Gulf Alliance, along with the other U.S. Regional partnerships, is working closely with the Interagency Task Force established by President Obama to develop a national plan for ocean governance and coastal and marine spatial planning. The Gulf Alliance is also working closely with the Interagency Work Group established by the President to assist with the recovery and restoration of Mississippi and Louisiana following Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. With respect to Katrina, in January 2006 Congress directed the Mobile District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to develop a comprehensive plan to restore Mississippi. At the direction of Gov. Haley Barbour and in my position of co-lead of the Gulf Alliance, I worked closely with the Mobile Corps District to ensure that the developed plan, the Mississippi Coastal Improvements Program (MSCIP), was directly aligned with the goals and objectives of the Gulf Alliance. MSCIP is complete, it has been signed by the Secretary of the Army, and it has been presented to Congress. The cost to fully implement MSCIP is $1.2 billion, and you have funded Phase 1of the plan at the level of $439 million focused on restoring our barrier islands and our coastal wetland and wildlife nursery areas. For that I say thank you and I ask that you continue your support of Mississippi's recovery and restoration through MSCIP.

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance is well positioned to play a significant role in the current oil event in the Gulf. The Gulf Alliance presently has teams of qualified people working together in the Gulf working on the projects outlined in Action Plan II. These folks have been working together now for almost nine years, and they are in place to respond to the research, monitoring, and remediation needs brought on by the Deepwater Horizon explosion and resulting continuing oil spill. BP has pledged $500 million dollars to fund 10-year research program focused on assessing long-term effects of this event, putting appropriate remediation and recovery actions in place, and monitoring the recovery of the Gulf Region once the event is over. Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour, who presently serves as gubernatorial lead for the Gulf Alliance, has made it clear to BP that his expectation is that a significant portion of those funds is, in fact, placed with the Gulf of Mexico Alliance. To date, two other Gulf governors have joined to support Gov. Barbour's request. The remaining two should place their

support. Gov. Barbour also discussed this situation with President Obama during the President's recent visit to Mississippi. Placing these funds with the Gulf Alliance will ensure that an appropriate, comprehensive, and meaningful research plan is developed, that the region's best and brightest minds are brought to bear on this issue, that the research will be carried out by competent individuals familiar with and working in the region, and that the result will be that the region will be ultimately restored to conditions better than before the event occurred on April 20, 2010.

I ask for your consideration and support of using the support pledged by BP to leverage funding already provided to the region by NOAA, USEPA, USACOE, DOI/MMS, USDA and by Congressional action, to allow the Gulf of Mexico Alliance to continue to make improvements in the Gulf Region that will continue to result in improving the environmental health, the economy, and the overall quality of life in the Gulf of Mexico Region.

www.gulfofmexicoalliance.org

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony today.

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