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Fishing Ban Is Expanded as Spill's Impact Becomes More Evident

By **MATTHEW L. WALD** and **TOM ZELLER Jr.**

WASHINGTON — The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration greatly expanded the fishing ban in the Gulf of Mexico on Tuesday in response to spreading oil from the BP well blowout. The prohibited area now covers 19 percent of the gulf, nearly double what it was, according to the agency.

Officials are already seeing some impact on fish and wildlife in the region. Rowan W. Gould, the acting director of the [Fish and Wildlife Service](#), said 156 sea turtle fatalities had been recorded in the gulf since April 30, about 100 more than usual at this time of year.

Mr. Gould also said that a small number of oily birds, 35, had been recovered, including 23 dead birds directly linked to the spill.

"It's important to note that the visibly oiled birds are a small part" of the effects of the oil spill, Dr. Gould said in a teleconference on Tuesday.

"What concerns us most is what we can't see," he said, adding, "We are preparing for the likelihood that it will exist in the gulf ecosystem in years to come."

A graphic depiction of the seriousness of the leak and its threat to the environment was seen in new video clips that Senator Bill Nelson, Democrat of Florida, posted on his Web site. He and Senator [Barbara Boxer](#), Democrat of California, had pressed BP to make the clips, taken by robot submersibles, available. The footage shows black, billowing clouds of oil leaking furiously from the ruptured well pipe, 5,000 feet below the surface.

The images show the pipe end where a recently inserted siphon tube is pulling out an estimated 2,000 barrels of oil a day, according to BP officials. But the volume of oil gushing from the pipe appears virtually indistinguishable from that shown in footage taken a week ago. And the new video appears to show another breach in the drill pipe, closer to the wellhead.

The company is planning to try to “kill” the well and stop the flow by pumping heavy mud into the well shaft as early as this weekend, officials said.

In Washington, Interior Secretary [Ken Salazar](#) appeared before Congress for the first time since the well exploded a month ago. Mr. Salazar acknowledged that the [Minerals Management Service](#), the [Interior Department](#) agency responsible for policing [offshore drilling](#), had been weakened by corruption and lax enforcement of safety and environmental rules.

“We need to clean up that house,” Mr. Salazar said in an appearance before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. He said that a majority of the agency’s 1,700 employees were honest and capable, but that “a few bad apples” remained.

The Obama administration has already announced that it will separate the minerals services’ conflicting functions of promoting offshore oil operations and regulating their safety and environmental compliance. Mr. Salazar said that further steps would be needed to give oil regulators more resources, more independence and greater authority to police oil drilling operations.

At another hearing, before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, [Nancy Sutley](#), chairwoman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, said the well was operating under an environmental assessment filed in 2007 for a large lease sale. BP was granted an exemption — known as a categorical exclusion — from having to file a separate impact statement for the well. Ms. Sutley said the administration was planning to tighten the process for granting such exclusions.

Also on Tuesday, Senate Republicans blocked for a second time a Democratic plan to raise the liability limit for oil spills to \$10 billion from \$75 million.

[President Obama](#) has endorsed an increase in the amount of money that companies responsible for oil spills should pay, but he has not specified a dollar amount. He called on Republicans to allow a vote on the proposal.

“I am disappointed that an effort to ensure that oil companies pay fully for disasters they cause has stalled in the [United States Senate](#) on a partisan basis,” Mr. Obama said. “This maneuver threatens to leave taxpayers, rather than the oil companies, on the hook for future disasters like the BP oil spill.”

John M. Broder contributed reporting from Washington, and Liz Robbins from New York.