

The City of Gulf Breeze Deadman's Island Restoration Project
Final Report for the US Fish and Wildlife Service 11/01/13
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14.2 Observations of nature during the oil spill

As part of the on-the-water daily oil spill response and environmental resource protection team for the City of Gulf Breeze, these were a few interesting observations by the project manager, Heather Reed, on how nature recovered from this large environmental impact.

2011 showed the presence of more sharks than ever within the bay, it could be speculated the sharks came in to scavenge of the large amounts of dying fish in the bay. Deadman's Island was no exception, several sharks frequented the reef site during the monitoring events. As the oil spill affected the microbial environment and killed off the sensitive creatures, this allowed the hardy marine organisms, usually predators come in and "clean up" the area. This clean up allowed the pioneer species to come into the affected sites and begin the recovery process.

The project manager taught the Coastguard and Coastwatchers about the local currents, longshore and converging currents and eddies of Pensacola Bay, which made the oil transport easily predicable and Coastguard and BP staff was ready for response in a faster timeframe than waiting for verification from the Mobile district or other source. The most interesting observation was even though the City of Gulf Breeze bought their own skimmer and oil absorbing clean up supplies, which they used quite a bit, the sargassum seaweed was the best collector of the oil product at any stage of product composition. The seaweed collected the oil whether the product was the first red Vaseline like crude or the extremely pure black crude. When an ebb tide occurred, the oil covered sargassum would gather the in convergence current and could easily be collected. This was almost like clockwork and made BP staff, Coastguard and the City of Gulf Breeze's job much easier.

Although the oil spill and its effects was heart breaking to watch each day, the natural recovery process provided a hope and overall the Deep Water Horizon oil spill allowed technology and science to advance in environmental protection, monitoring and future prevention and response methodology.

15.0 Restoration work and ecological benefits

The City of Gulf Breeze's Deadman's Island was the first true restoration project of Pensacola Bay. True restoration restores the area back to its historical design and natural resources, whereas, creation projects are designed to enhance and add natural resources. Creation projects usually have more ideal parameters to sustain the environmental goal. The danger to each type project is determining whether the already established area needs to be restored or created and the type of impact it may have on the current natural resources. The project, through documents and aials, has been affected from anthropogenic stressors, since 1940. Thanks to our generous funding partners, currently, Deadman's Island north end has been restored to 1972, is a flourishing ecosystem and is protecting much history and cultural resources.