

USF College of Marine Science Awarded \$11M for Gulf Spill Research *Selected as one of eight centers nationwide for continued studies of BP spill*

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (Aug. 25, 2011) – A research consortium led by the University of South Florida’s College of Marine Science has been awarded more than \$11 million through BP’s Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative (GRI) to continue assessing the impacts of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill on the Gulf of Mexico’s ocean and coastal ecosystems and to build a better ways for predicting damage from future spills.

The announcement was made Tuesday in Washington by Dr. Rita Colwell, GRI Research Board Chair. [USF’s College of Marine Science](#) is one of just eight centers selected from 77 proposals nationwide. The college will lead an international consortium of universities in four states, Canada, the Netherlands, and Germany, in examining the impact of the spill and the use of chemical dispersants.

“This is a tremendous opportunity to continue our work in the Gulf” said College of Marine Science Dean Jackie Dixon. “The college, its faculty and its students are focused on the science associated with the spill. Together with our national and international partners, we look forward to contributing to the Gulf recovery effort.”

USF researchers will focus on two themes related to the spill: understanding the physical, chemical, biological and geological processes that control the dispersion and fate of oil and gas released during a deep-sea blowout and understanding of the impacts of the Deepwater Horizon spill on key marine ecosystem processes and species.

The goals of the research project include not only understanding what occurred in the epic 2010 spill and its long-lasting effects, but also to improve the understanding of scientific processes that occur in deep-sea blowouts to aid response and mitigation efforts in future oil spills, USF researchers said. Citing the wide-ranging impact of the Deepwater Horizon spill from the deep ocean to the fisheries, and specific ecosystem components on the continental shelf slope, coastal marshes, beaches and estuaries, the scientists said their project seeks to a create a more accurate understanding contaminant distribution, composition and ecosystem impacts from the Deepwater Horizon spill and future well blowouts.

The research will build on USF’s leading work in the immediate aftermath of the physical, chemical and environmental impact of the spill which continues on in several fronts some 16 months later.

USF played a leading role in tracking the movement of the oil spill through the Gulf through USF’s Ocean Circulation Group and the Optical Ocean Laboratory. USF researchers and the crew of the *R/V Weatherbird II* were also among the first to identify the existence of deep-sea plumes, including two moving away from the Deepwater Horizon well toward ecologically-sensitive areas of the Gulf in the DeSoto Canyon. In August 2010, USF researchers found Deepwater Horizon oil buried in the canyon’s sediments and documented the toxic effects of oil and dispersants on the tiny organisms that make up the base of the Gulf’s food chain.

More recently, USF has joined with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Florida Wildlife Research Institute and the commercial fishing industry to investigate a surge in anecdotal reports of fish suffering from strange lesions, discoloration and fin rot since the spill occurred. Working with commercial fishing fleets over the summer, USF scientists led by Florida Institute of Oceanography Director Bill Hogarth and USF Biological Oceanographer and fisheries expert Steve Murawski have gathered thousands of fish from the Gulf using chartered fishing vessels to document the mysterious ailments and investigate potential causes.

BP has pledged \$500 million over 10 years to support scientific research in the Gulf and established the Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative as an independent body to consider research proposals. The GRI Research Board has 20 members, 10 appointed by BP and 2 recommended by the Governor of each of the five Gulf Coast States.

In June 2010, the Florida Institute of Oceanography was awarded \$10 million from BP to fund research projects through the state's public and private marine science institutes who are members of the consortium. Details on those projects and their results can be found at fio.usf.edu.

The University of South Florida is a high-impact, global research university dedicated to student success. USF is classified by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in the top tier of research universities, a distinction attained by only 2.2 percent of all universities. It is ranked 44th in total research expenditures and 34th in federal research expenditures for public universities by the National Science Foundation. The USF System has an annual budget of \$1.5 billion, an annual economic impact of \$3.7 billion, and serves 47,000 students in Tampa, St. Petersburg, Sarasota-Manatee and Lakeland.

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