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HURRICANE KATRINA TRIGGERS FISHERY FAILURE AND FISHERY RESOURCE DISASTER DECLARATION IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez today announced a formal determination of a fishery failure in the Gulf of Mexico due to the devastation following Hurricane Katrina. The affected area includes the Florida Keys and from Pensacola, Fla., to the Texas border.

The determination came in response to a virtual fishery shutdown in the affected states due to major flooding, damage to fishing boats and fishing ports, waterways clogged with debris and closed processing facilities.

"We are taking action now because of the significant economic effects of Hurricane Katrina on fishing communities in the Gulf of Mexico," Secretary Gutierrez said. "Major commercial fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico include finfish, shrimp and oysters, with an estimated value of almost \$700 million per year."

Although the extent of the damage to Gulf fishing industries is not yet known, fishing in the region has been essentially halted. NOAA will work with the states to assess damage to the 15 major fishing ports and the 177 seafood processing facilities in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. Based on preliminary estimates, there are 432 federally permitted fishing vessels in Alabama; 3,738 in Florida; 1,033 in Louisiana, and 351 in Mississippi. Additional fishermen hold state permits.

The action was made through provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, which makes federal relief funds available to assess the impacts, restore the fisheries, prevent future failure, and assist fishing communities' recovery efforts after a natural disaster, and the Inter-jurisdictional Act, which makes funds available for direct assistance to fishermen to alleviate harm resulting from a natural disaster.

The Administration will work with Congress and affected states to identify on-the-ground needs and develop an emergency plan to meet those needs. Once funds are in place for the disaster assistance plan, NOAA will notify fishermen with information about how to apply for relief.

After Hurricane Ivan struck the Gulf Coast last year, \$9 million in aid was appropriated to repair the oyster industries in Ala., Fla., Miss., La. In 1997, \$10 million in relief aid was appropriated to recover from damage caused by hurricanes Hugo and Andrew.

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“Working with the Gulf States, NOAA will continue efforts to assess fishing industry damage and long-term impacts to the marine environment,” said Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA’s Fisheries Service.

NOAA’s Fisheries Service has made contact with all of its 132 employees and contractors in the Gulf of Mexico region. The agency’s facilities in Pascagoula, Mississippi, sustained significant damage due to high winds and flooding and are currently undergoing engineering assessments. In the immediate wake of the hurricane, the agency responded to reports of marine mammal strandings. NOAA currently is working to provide marine enforcement agencies in the Gulf States with immediate recovery funding.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation’s coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and nearly 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

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On the Web:

NOAA: www.noaa.gov

NOAA Fisheries Service: www.nmfs.noaa.gov