

Facing a grim future

As the oil slick spreads, the Gulf fishing industry is heading for possible disaster

VENICE, La. — Heading out of the marina in the heat of a southern Louisiana afternoon, you would never know that dozens of miles offshore, the sea floor is bleeding oil with the potential to cause complete devastation to an already weather-beaten part of the United States.

Navigating through the maze of reeds, we hit the mighty Mississippi before entering the Gulf of Mexico. With fish jumping and birds soaring, it's hard to imagine that a few miles away, the oil has come ashore.

There isn't much talk about the "top kill" not working or the fact the oil keeps flowing. Instead, there's a quiet pessimism about the future.

In a region hard hit by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the people of Cajun country know hardships and this is just another. With much of the shrimp fishery closed, recreational anglers cancelling trips and many prolific fishing spots now covered in oil, the future is unknown for the people of Venice.

My guide, Trinity Bourgeois, had just started her fishing charter business when the Deep Water Horizon



went down, forcing her to abandon her dream. For her and her family, the water is a way of life and has been for generations. She spends more time on the water than on land and the thought of losing this way of life is unfathomable.

Trinity took me to one of her favorite fishing locations, now covered in oil and surrounded by the "protective" boom.

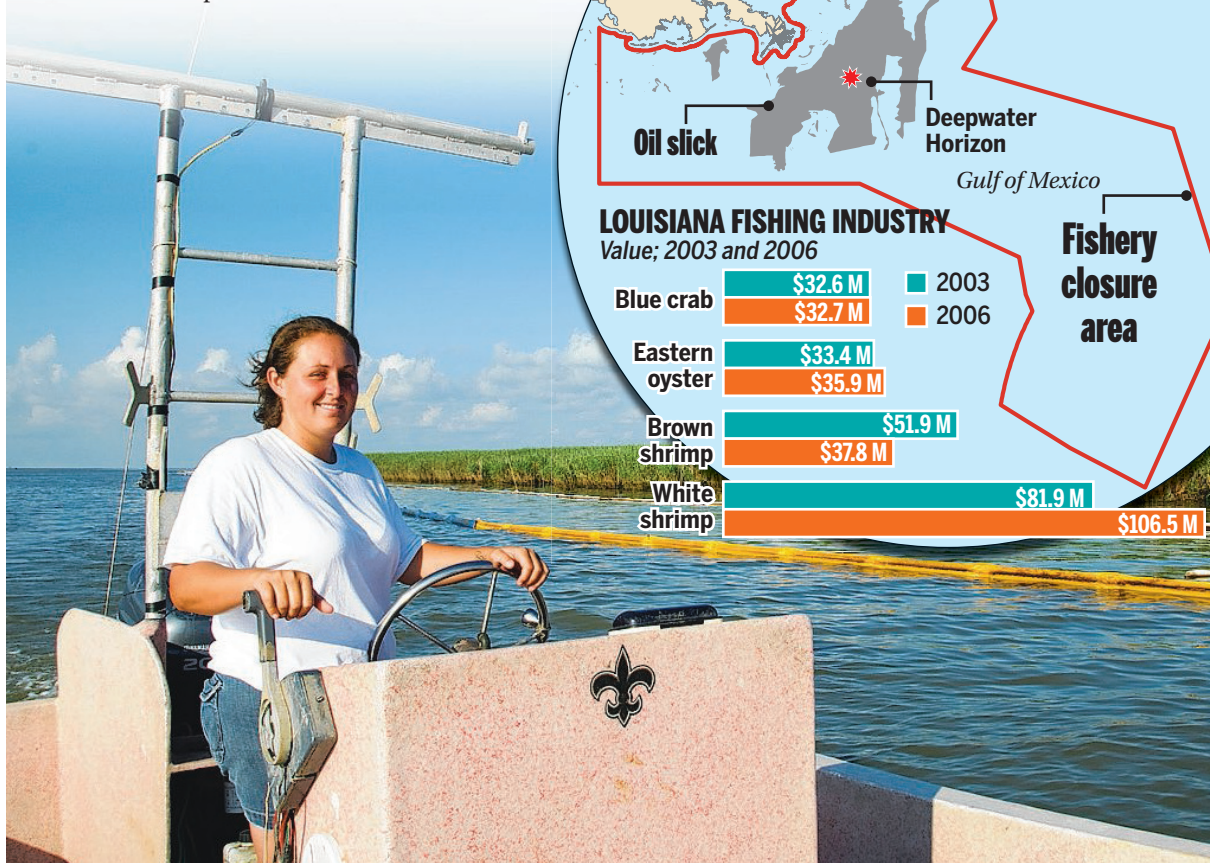
Inside the boom, the reeds were coated with oil, rendering them inhospitable to the fiddler crabs, juvenile fish and other animals that inhabit this delicate ecosystem.

She told me with a pensive look that "lots of big fish had come from this hole"

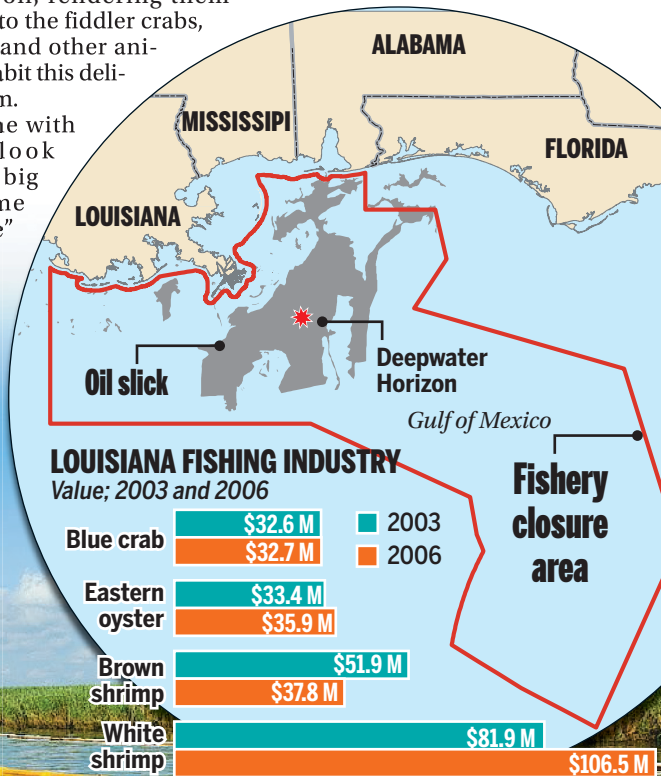
as she looked off into the distance. It wasn't hard to believe her as a school of mullet jumped out of the water just outside of the boom and schools of small baitfish swam next to it using it as shelter.

You could feel that a big redfish was lurking below, but the surface was covered with a sheen of oil as well as thicker droplets that passed by making fishing impossible and the future of both the fish and fishermen uncertain.

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Trinity Bourgeois — who had just started her fishing charter business when Deep Water Horizon went down — shows a favorite fishing location, now covered in oil and surrounded by a "protective" boom.



Another attempt

KRISTEN HAYS
Reuters

HOUSTON — BP started sawing extraneous pipes Tuesday at the seabed site of its latest attempt to corral oil leaking from a ruptured well in the Gulf of Mexico. Moving past its failed "top kill" attempt to plug the leak, BP focused on containment rather than stopping the flow.

"We're not talking about capping the well anymore. We're talking about containing the well," Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allen said at a news conference Tuesday.

BP is counting on a pair of relief wells being drilled to intercept and plug the leak far beneath the seabed. But the relief wells, each begun

in May, will not be finished until early to mid-August — forcing the company to keep seeking a stopgap.

This week BP aims to place a containment cap with a grommet seal at the bottom on top of a lower marine riser package, or LMRP, that sits atop a failed blowout preventer at the seabed. If the cap and seal work as hoped, leaking oil and gas will be channeled through a pipe that connects the cap to a drillship a mile above the seafloor.

In addition, BP is planning to back up the containment cap operation by using seabed equipment installed for the failed top kill to pull oil and gas from the well and channel it to a different vessel at the water's surface.

BP expects that system to be ready by mid-June.

BP prepares next bid to stop oil flow

In a new attempt to curb the massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, BP is to lower a containment cap over its leaking well in the hope that most of the oil can be piped to the surface. But this could initially increase the flow and success is not guaranteed

