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# BOEMRE Leads Study of Deepwater Communities Post-Deepwater Horizon Spill

*Field Work Begins to Study Deep Sea Corals and Chemosynthetics*

**NEW ORLEANS, LA —** The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE) today announced that a team of scientists led by BOEMRE geophysicist Bill Shedd will embark tomorrow morning on a research cruise that will examine deep sea coral and chemosynthetic community sites in the Gulf of Mexico. Findings from this research will help scientists discover the possible effects of the large volumes of oil released in the deepwater following the Deepwater Horizon blowout and spill.

The cruise, funded by BP through the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA), will depart from Freeport, Texas on October 29, 2010, for the ten day cruise. Biologists and geoscientists from BOEMRE, Penn State University, Temple University, and Florida State University will conduct the research aboard the R/V Gyre, owned and operated by TDI Brooks, Inc.

“This study is one of several analyses that BOEMRE environmental scientists are conducting to consider potential effects from the Deepwater Horizon blowout and spill. This data collection is central to our efforts to better understand the effects of the spill,” said BOEMRE Director Michael R. Bromwich. “BOEMRE scientists have studied hard-bottom communities throughout the Gulf of Mexico since they were first discovered nearly 25 years ago. These studies have led to the development and implementation of important safeguards to protect these important habitats.”

Scientists will tow a “camera sled” or cage with a high-resolution digital still camera that will take photos every five seconds from about six feet off the seafloor of sites that the BOEMRE team has determined are likely to have hard ground biological communities. These communities include deep sea corals and chemosynthetic organisms, such as tube worms and mussels, which eat oil, gas and hydrogen sulfide being released from natural seeps on the seafloor.

“Though these organisms depend on the natural oil and gas seeps for sustenance from below, they cannot tolerate oil settling on them from above, which prevents oxygen absorption and causes suffocation,” said Shedd, a geophysicist for the BOEMRE’s Gulf of Mexico Region, who will serve as Chief Scientist for the cruise. “The data we collect will help us identify impact on these communities.”

BOEMRE geoscientists have mapped over 9,700 such sites in the Gulf of Mexico, dozens of which are near the spill site. The 17 sites chosen for the study have been selected by careful analysis of 3-D seismic data and are located from 2.5 to 60 miles away from the Macondo well at Mississippi Canyon 252.

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