

Commissioner Mariano – Guest Editorial

It has been over four years since the BP oil disaster struck the Gulf of Mexico. Over 4.5 million barrels of oil were released into the Gulf through an uncontained spill that lasted 87 days. Over 1.84 million gallons of Corexit© was sprayed by planes or injected into the flowing oil. During the time since the spill, multiple scientific studies have been conducted that documented extensive damage to the shorelines and marine life that call the Gulf of Mexico home. Such damage has been documented in my District. For example, a recent study conducted by the University of South Florida found injurious fish skin lesions, resulting from the spill, on various species sampled off the Coast of Pasco County.

On September 4, 2014, U.S. District Court Judge Carl Barbier ruled in the Clean Water Act Trial involving BP that they had acted in a grossly negligent manner. BP has appealed that ruling. This appeal will likely significantly delay the payment of penalties under the Clean Water Act. For a region that relies on its natural resources to help drive its tourism industry, such delays can have disastrous effects for us in the Tampa Bay region.

On July 6, 2012, President Obama signed into law the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast (RESTORE) Act following passage under bipartisan support from the Congressional Legislature. This Act directs 80 percent of those fines to be reinvested into the overall health of the Gulf of Mexico, including its environment and economy. It was intended to provide critical funding to perform environmental and economic restoration to areas affected by the spill. The Tampa Bay region and Pasco County cannot afford a further delay in its recovery efforts.

BP's decision to appeal the ruling, and thus continue to delay the outcome of the trial, will result in yet another time delay in correcting and addressing the damage that occurred because of the spill. Numerous experts and witnesses have testified during the trial. Thousands of pages of documents have been carefully reviewed over many months for facts leading to those disastrous events. This will clear the way for local, State and Federal agencies to use those funds to begin the environmental and economic restoration that these areas need. Please join me in urging BP to do the right thing and help us get to work on restoring the Gulf. I join with many other organizations in urging them to drop the appeal and settle the Clean Water Act Trial in New Orleans.

Jack Mariano
Pasco County District 5 Commissioner