

Louisiana, Florida residents differ on views of long-term effects of oil spill

12 April 2011

One year after the BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion on the Gulf Coast, new research from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire shows that despite the roughly equivalent economic compensation, Louisiana and Florida residents differ in perceptions about the current and long-term effects of the largest marine oil spill in U.S. history.

"Louisiana residents were more likely than Floridians to say their family suffered major economic setbacks because of the spill, to expect compensation by BP, and plan to leave the region as a result of the spill. Louisianans also were more likely to think their state and local governments were doing an excellent job responding to the spill and to trust newspapers as a source of information regarding the spill," said Jessica Ulrich, a doctoral student in sociology at UNH and research assistant at the Carsey Institute.

The research is part of the Carsey Institute's Community and Environment in Rural America (CERA) initiative. Since 2007, Carsey Institute researchers have conducted nearly 19,000 telephone surveys with randomly selected adult Americans (age 18 and above) from 12 diverse rural locations.

Carsey researchers surveyed 2,023 residents of the Gulf Coast following the BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion in April 2010. During the late summer, while oil was still gushing into the Gulf of Mexico, researchers conducted telephone interviews with 1,017 residents of Louisiana's Plaquemines and Terrebonne parishes and 1,006 residents of Florida's Bay, Gulf, and Franklin counties.

Respondents were asked how they perceived the oil spill to be affecting their families, communities, and the environment, their levels of trust in sources of information about the spill, and whether they perceived institutional responses to the spill as

effective.

The key findings show:

- Nearly one-half of all Gulf Coast residents (48 percent) perceived damage to the environment and wildlife as the most serious result of the oil spill.
- Perceptions regarding the impact of the spill reflect the economic differences in the two states-Floridians are most concerned about effects on tourism and Louisianans on the fishing and oil industries.
- The majority of Gulf Coast residents thought that the economy, fishing industry, beaches, and wildlife would recover within a few years after the spill.
- Gulf Coast residents had little faith in BP to rectify the situation after the oil spill. Fifty-nine percent did not trust the information BP provided about the spill, and 69 percent thought BP was doing a poor or fair job responding effectively to the spill.
- Although more than one-half of the respondents from both states experienced either major or minor economic effects from the Gulf oil spill, only 16 percent of Floridians and 18 percent of Louisianans have been compensated or expect that BP will compensate them for the losses.
- Louisianans were more than twice as likely as Floridians to think that their state and local governments were doing an excellent job responding to the spill. Approximately three-fourths (77 percent) of Gulf Coast residents thought that the federal government was doing a poor or fair job responding.

- Nine out of 10 Gulf Coast residents plan to remain in the region despite the economic and environmental impacts of the spill. Those planning to move because of the spill are more likely to be Louisianans than Floridians.

"CERA surveys, such as the one conducted in the Gulf in the wake of the BP spill, can gather important subjective information about perceptions of changes occurring in rural America. The findings can be utilized by local leaders, policy makers, and disaster response teams to help foster healthy and sustainable communities that can rebound from -- and perhaps prevent -- even large-scale disasters like the BP oil spill," Ulrich said.

More information: The complete report about this research is available at

www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/Caresearch/search.php?id=158

Provided by University of New Hampshire

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