

CRISIS IN THE GULF

Since April 20, oil has been gushing from the BP well deep in the Gulf of Mexico. No one knows how much oil is flowing or how long before it is capped.

What is known, however, is that the oil—and the chemical dispersants used to break it up—have devastating effects on the array of marine life of the "American Mediterranean."

Coastal waters are home to such species as **shrimp**, **oysters** and **gag grouper** (an imperiled species in the Gulf). **Turtles** and **dolphins** also live in these waters.

Plankton, the base of the marine food web, live in surface waters.

Endangered and vulnerable shark species in the Gulf include **scalloped hammerheads**, **bigeye thresher** and **longfin mako**. The Gulf is also the only major breeding ground for **Western Atlantic bluefin tuna**. This species has declined by about 82 percent since 1970.

The oil can be toxic to **fish larvae** rising to the surface.

Deep offshore waters contain vulnerable marine habitats, including **cold-water corals**, whose reefs provide feeding grounds and nursery structure for a range of species. One of the most extensive cold-water coral communities in the Gulf is 25 miles north of the BP well.

CONTINENTAL SHELF