



# Impacts of Offshore Oil and Gas Drilling on Marine Wildlife



Spinner dolphins



Endangered  
Sperm whales

Over 20 species of **whales** and **dolphins**,  
5 species of **sea turtles**, dozens of **fish**  
species, and hundreds of species of **birds**  
live and breed in the Lease Sale 181 area in  
the Gulf of Mexico.



Killer Whales



Endangered  
Hawksbill sea turtles

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# OCS Drilling: Effects on Wildlife\*

## Marine Mammals

- Deep-divers, like the endangered sperm whale, spend large amounts of time resting at the surface of the ocean, increasing the **risk of collision** with vessels.
- Oil can affect survival or the reproductive success of marine mammals through **exposure to hydrocarbons** and by affecting distribution, abundance, or availability of prey.

## Sea Turtles

- Government studies suggest that vessel traffic around platforms may increase collisions with sea turtles. Sea turtles are difficult to sight from moving vessels and often rest on or just below the surface of the ocean.
- All five species found in the Gulf are either endangered or threatened, making any adverse effects very significant to the overall populations.

## Birds

- The Gulf of Mexico is the heart of one of the **most important migration corridors** in the world, traveled by hundreds of species of birds.
- Government studies demonstrate that development of this area may result in a large increase in **collision mortality** in migrant species.
- Studies also show that birds are attracted to the lighted platforms during nocturnal migration; they circle the platforms out of confusion and die of exhaustion.

## Fisheries

- An MMS report cited a study showing that **acute histologic lesions** were observed in fish collected near drilling platforms.
- Offshore rigs affect **commercial fishing** by making large sections of the offshore area unavailable, interfering with migratory routes, spawning, and feeding areas for target species, generating pollution that **destroys crucial nursery habitat** for larval and juvenile stages, and resulting in oil spills that reduce catches.
- Scientific reports cast significant doubt about any supposed habitat benefits of rigs, and, instead, point to potentially significant **damage to fish around rigs**.

\*All information provided was gathered from the following publications of the Minerals Management Service, Department of Interior:

Deepwater Gulf of Mexico Environmental and Socioeconomic Data Search and Literature Synthesis. Volume I: Narrative Report. 2000. Minerals Management Service.

Interactions Between Migrating Birds and Offshore Oil and Gas Platforms in the Northern Gulf of Mexico. Final Report. 2005. Minerals Management Service.

## Marine Mammals

Sperm whale  
Bryde's whale  
Minke whale  
Dwarf sperm whale  
Pygmy sperm whale  
Killer whale  
False killer whale  
Pygmy killer whale  
Blainville's beaked whale  
Cuvier's beaked whale  
Gervais' beaked whale  
Sowerby's beaked whale  
Melon-headed whale  
Short-finned pilot whale  
Bottlenose dolphin  
Clymene dolphin  
Frasier's dolphin  
Pantropical spotted dolphin  
Spinner dolphin  
Striped dolphin  
Rough-toothed dolphin  
Risso's dolphin  
Atlantic spotted dolphin

## Sea Turtles

Loggerhead  
Green  
Hawksbill  
Kemp's ridley  
Leatherback

## Birds

Migrants  
(280 species)  
Waterfowl, Herons, Warblers,  
Raptors, Shorebirds, Orioles,  
Flycatchers, Hummingbirds  
Resident species:  
Storm-petrels, Gulls, Terns,  
Tropicbirds, Frigatebirds

## Fish

Tuna (7 species)  
Swordfish  
Wahoo  
Shark (4 species)  
Oilfish  
Grouper  
Flyingfishes  
Molas  
Longtail bass  
Tilefish  
Snapper (2 species)  
Barrelfish  
Hake (3 species)