

Perdido Pass project proceeds;

'Katrina Cut' plug is coming

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Casandra Andrews, Press-Register

A \$4.6 million project to erect a sturdy boom of steel pipe at Perdido Pass is ahead of schedule and could be finished in another week, said John Baker, president of Thompson Engineering, the firm designing the system.

Meanwhile, work to fill a mile-wide breach on Dauphin Island created by Hurricane Katrina was described Monday by a BP spokesman as imminent.

BP PLC owns the Deepwater Horizon well, which has been spewing oil into the Gulf of Mexico since April 20.

Little oil washed ashore Monday along the coasts of Mobile and Baldwin counties, with only a few tar balls reported on Dauphin Island and Gulf Shores.

The Perdido Pass project calls for extending a barrier of large pipes filled with foam for more than half a mile to prevent oil from pushing into wetlands and waterways to the north.

The water current and wave action in the pass are too strong for conventional boom to be effective.

"We're driving all the vertical pipes today, if all goes well," Baker said Monday.

Crews are working from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., Baker said. "It is a fairly dangerous operation in that type of environment to work at night."

The floating pipes will be suspended from chains attached to two rows of pilings driven into the bottom of the pass, Baker said.

"We're working 24/7 on pipe manufacturing and fabrication," said Tony Smith, construction manager for Thompson Engineering.

Smith said he tried out a section of the boom Monday afternoon: "It floated just exactly like we predicted. So far, so good."

One glitch in the Perdido Pass effort, Baker said, was a hydraulic hose that broke over the weekend: "We lost the clamp that holds the pipe. We got a diver down there yesterday morning and recovered it."

Early Monday, BP representatives and others met with Dauphin Island Mayor Jeff Collier to discuss plans to fill what has become known as the 'Katrina Cut.'

"The plan is to be finished within 60 to 80 days," said BP spokesman Ray Melick. He said the work could start in two weeks.

Elected officials on both sides of Mobile Bay met Monday to discuss ways they could get more help from BP.

The Baldwin County Commission identified more areas that need protection from oil and accepted another \$3 million grant from the state to help do that.

The commission also voted to send a letter to Gov. Bob Riley, suggesting mechanized cleaning of all area beaches by BP contractors.

In May, BP gave states affected by the spill \$25 million. Of that, Baldwin County got \$3 million and used about \$2 million of the money to buy protective boom and hire a contractor to place it in environmentally sensitive areas.

The Mobile County Commission voted Monday to send a letter to BP asking it to hire more local boat owners to help with cleanup efforts. The commission will also send a letter requesting an additional \$3 million to promote tourism in the county.

(Staff Reporters Rhoda Pickett, Kim Lanier and Daniel Boyette contributed to this report.)