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**U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke Announces \$26 Million for Gulf States Fisheries Disaster Due to Oil Spill**

Secretary Locke today announced \$26 million in federal disaster relief money will be awarded to three projects designed to assist the recovery of fishing communities and fisheries from the economic and ecological effects of the BP/ Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Most of the funds will be distributed by the Gulf States Marine Fisheries commission.

The money, which Congress approved and the President signed as part of Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2010, will fund a \$15 million strategic marketing plan and health and safety assurance program for Gulf Coast seafood, \$10 million for expanded stock assessments for Gulf fish species, and a \$1 million study by the National Academies of Sciences on the long-term effects of the oil spill on the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem.

“The BP/Deepwater oil spill has had a profound effect on commercial and recreational fishing in the Gulf and the communities that rely on these activities,” U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke said. “We thank the Appropriations Committee members who worked hard to be sure funding was approved by Congress for these projects that will help restore economic vitality to the region’s fishing industry and strengthen the science used to manage fisheries for the long-term benefit of the region, its people and environment.”

Locke determined there had been a fishery disaster in the Gulf of Mexico due to the economic impact of the oil spill. The declaration led the way for Congress to approve disaster funding as part of the supplemental budget bill, which was signed into law by President Obama on July 29.

The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, an organization made up of the five Gulf states, will receive \$15 million to develop a strategic marketing plan and health and safety assurance program for Gulf Coast seafood. The commission will develop and implement the five-year outreach and marketing program to raise public awareness of the quality and safety of Gulf seafood. The grant will also be used to help the Gulf states develop strong seafood quality assurance testing.

The \$10 million was awarded to the commission, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and NOAA to work together to improve scientific assessments of Gulf fish stocks used to manage sustainable fisheries. A portion of the grant will be managed by the commission, while NOAA will provide expert fishery observer and stock assessment science support, and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council will provide independent peer reviews for the stock assessments.

Also, \$1 million was awarded to the National Academies of Science to conduct a study of the long-term effects of the oil spill on ecosystem services. This study will assess what is known about the effects of the spill, evaluate impacts in the context of stresses from other human activities in the Gulf, and identify the research and monitoring needs to more fully understand the effects of the spill.