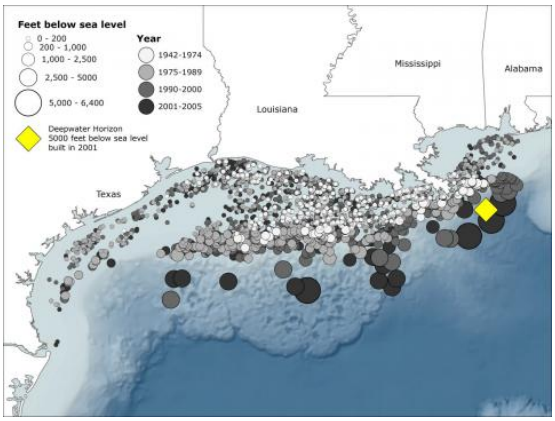
AN OIL RIG CALLED DEEPWATER HORIZON



Deepwater Horizon was only one of many other rigs located in the Gulf of Mexico, a place where significant U.S. oil reserves are located underwater. This map, from SwordPress, depicts the location of numerous oil platforms, including *Deepwater Horizon*, which had been positioned in the Gulf by the time of the 2010 disaster.

In 2009, the U.S. government - through its leasing program - granted BP the right to look for oil at a specific location in the Gulf of Mexico. The company had a lease to sink two wells at Mississippi Canyon Block 252.

BP was using an offshore oil rig, but in November it was damaged by Hurricane Ida, a late-2009-season storm. The company then leased another platform - one with an excellent safety record - known as "Deepwater Horizon." Owned by Transocean, that rig arrived at its destination in February, 2010.

People working on the project, where the Gulf is nearly 5,000 feet deep, were very excited because they had previously "found oil" 13,000 feet below the sea floor. Because everything had gone so well, BP was planning a celebration. But ... there were issues no one was really thinking about.

The Exploration Plan, which Minerals Management had authorized for Mississippi Canyon 252, had a few holes:

- At the time the document was released for public review, no one expected that a blow-out could happen.

- With work taking place 47.6 miles off the coast of Louisiana, no one anticipated that environmental contamination could reach Gulf-state shorelines.

So ... the lease agreement between BP and the federal government contains some interesting provisions. As to the potential of a blowout, we read:

> *A scenario for a potential blowout of the well from which BP would expect to have the highest volume of liquid hydrocarbons is not required for the operations proposed in this EP* [Exploration Plan]. (Initial Exploration Plan, Section 2.7, page 2-1.)

Concerning a "worst-case scenario," the government was sure BP could handle it:

> *Since BP Exploration and Production Inc. has the capability to respond to the appropriate worst-case spill scenario included in its regional OSRP* [Oil Spill Response Plan] *approved on November 14, 2008, and since the worst-case scenario determined for our Exploration Plan does not replace the appropriate worst-case scenario in our regional OSRP, I hereby certify that BP Exploration & Production Inc. has the capability to respond, to the maximum extent practicable, to a worst-case discharge, or a substantial threat of such a discharge, resulting from the activities proposed in our Exploration Plan.* (Initial Exploration Plan, page 7-1.)

Discussing the possibility of an oil spill, the agency stated:

> *Oil spill response discussion - a discussion of response to an oil spill resulting from the activities proposed in this plan is not required for this Exploration Plan.* (Initial Exploration Plan, Section 7.1.5, page 7-1.)

Nor, according to Minerals Management, was a model needed in the event of a catastrophe:

> *A model of a potential oil or hazardous substance spill is not required for the activities proposed in this plan.* (Initial Exploration Plan, Section 7.2, page 7-2.)

In addition, BP did not have to describe measures the company would take to avoid harming the environment:

> *A description of the measures that would be taken to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to the marine and coastal environments and habitats, biota, and threatened and endangered species is not required for this plan.* (Initial Exploration Plan, Section 10.1, page 10-1.)

The "nearest shoreline point" (in Louisiana) is noted, in the Exploration Plan, as "41.4NM" [41.4 nautical miles] or "47.6 statute miles." (See drawing, in section 11, of the Exploration Plan linked above.)

As it happens, a “worst-case scenario” occurred on the 20th of April, 2010.

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Media Stream

Deepwater Horizon Rig - Before the Explosion
Image of "Deepwater Horizon," online courtesy Transocean (its owner).
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