

Jindal addresses local spill impact



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Gov. Bobby Jindal was at the Port of Morgan City on Thursday to report on his just-concluded aerial inspection of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill threatening the state's coastline. During his presentation, the governor referred to a map of the state's coastline and gestured toward threatened areas. Local elected leaders accompanied the governor on the aerial tour.

By GEOFFREY STOUTE

Oil present on Louisiana's barrier islands to the east of St. Mary Parish looked better now than previously, but that doesn't mean the state is relaxing.

Gov. Bobby Jindal, during a press conference in Morgan City on Thursday, said that the state still is pressing for more boom to be shipped to St. Mary and other parishes west of the Mississippi River as it is preparing for the worst.

Recent forecasts by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration shows winds carrying the oil to the west and hitting St. Mary Parish waters as early as today.

"You can see the wave currents moving to the west," Jindal said. "The winds coming out of the southeast are pushing that oil to the north, pushing that oil to the west of the (Mississippi) river."

Jindal, along with local and state officials, boarded a U.S. Army National Guard Blackhawk helicopter to tour the coastal areas of the state, including Whiskey and Raccoon islands, both Terrebonne Parish areas where oil has washed ashore. They also toured areas of St. Mary Parish that could be affected.

He then met with local officials and commissioners with the Port of Morgan City, and assessed the parish's physical plans to fight the spill before finally addressing local and state media and even a CNN crew on the dock at the local port facility on the Intracoastal Canal.

During his flyover, Jindal said he did not see

as much oil on Whiskey and Raccoon islands as he had seen a day earlier.

He said that could be related to either work by cleanup crews or tides carrying the oil back into the Gulf.

However, he said the state is taking NOAA's projections seriously and will need 15,386 feet of boom to protect five closure points identified in St. Mary Parish if boom is to be deployed.

Thirty-five hundred feet of boom had been brought to the parish as of midday Thursday, and more was expected to arrive Thursday evening.

Jindal said the boom is being staged so it is ready to be deployed when needed.

In the parish's worst-case scenario, an additional 3,864 feet of boom would be needed for other areas of the parish.

Jindal said BP would position a 90-foot supply barge off the Shell Keys Wildlife Refuge to help if boom needs to be deployed in the area. The refuge is located south of Marsh Island in Iberia Parish.

St. Mary Parish President Paul Naquin said no oil is found on areas in the Atchafalaya Bay such as Point Au Fer, so the parish may have some time to prepare.

"It looks like we have two or three days before (it could come) unless the weather changes and pushes the oil to us," Naquin said.

Morgan City Mayor Tim Matte also pointed
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Jindal press conference

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out that the flow from higher river stages in the Atchafalaya River should keep any approaching oil-infused water at bay.

"I think that's going to help protect our coast for some time," Matte said.

However, he did say there are some inlets that may need some attention through the deployment of booms if the oil does reach the coast.

While there may be a shortage of boom, leaders are using other methods in the state's fight to stop the surging oil from the Deepwater Horizon well.

Oil has been spewing from the well, nearly a mile from the surface on the Gulf of Mexico seabed, for nearly three weeks.

The state also is using sand, inflatable dams and freshwater diversions to keep water from entering the state's wetlands.

Additionally, a Dutch dredge plan may be enacted to build "sand booms" along barrier is-

lands.

"The best defense for Louisiana is nature's defense," Jindal said. It "is that first line of defense, those barrier islands that over the years have been eroded."

The state's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority has filed for an emergency permit with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and if it is granted, dredging can begin. Results could be seen in about 10 days, he said.

"Restoring those islands will keep the oil out of our critical basins," Jindal said. "It'll also provide important hurricane surge protection as well."

Jindal said the state is doing whatever it can to keep oil from reaching marsh areas because it is much harder to clean it up once it reaches those areas.

BP officials have told Jindal that they expect to have a makeshift pipe/plug inserted into the well to funnel oil to the barge and/or a second, smaller containment dome on the well as early as today.

In another week, BP should

be ready to deploy a "kill shot" or "junk shot," which involves shooting debris like golf balls and shredded tires through a line into the well to stop the oil's flow.

If none of these ideas work, the last option is the drilling of relief wells, which could take as long as three months.

Meanwhile, Jindal said he expects BP to pay fishermen for their lost wages and make a long-term commitment to restore the damage that this spill has done to the state's wetlands and wildlife.

"This isn't over for Louisiana simply when they get the oil off the surface of the water," he said, adding that the spill will affect future generations of Louisiana residents.

Those who would like to help with the spill should log on to www.emergency.louisiana.gov.

The governor also urged anyone who may see animals coated with oil to call local law enforcement agencies. He said they should not attempt to help these animals unless they have been trained to do so.

