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Experts at FSU have been conducting research on the BP oil spill's impact

Scientists studying the Deepwater Horizon oil spill are convinced that it will be years until the full effects of the disaster are fully understood.

But that doesn't mean some results aren't evident already, two years to the day after the explosion aboard the oil rig that led to 4.9 million barrels of oil flooding into the Gulf of Mexico.

Ian MacDonald, an oceanographer at Florida State University who is part of two BP-funded research projects in the Gulf, says scientists are finding a decline in the food chain.

"I think that there was a decrease in the diversity and it's propagating itself forward," MacDonald said. "The greater ecosystem has been damaged to some degree."

He pointed to Louisiana's devastated coming together within days of the April 20, 2010, disaster. They helped form a network of scientists and academics throughout the state. After BP committed $500 million for research on the oil spill over the next 10 years, Florida institutions were awarded four of the eight grants that have been approved. FSU is the lead agency in one of those, with Eric Chassignet, MacDonald's colleague in the Department of Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Science, the principle investigator.

Bill Hogarth, director of the Florida Institute of Oceanography at University of South Florida, marvels at the way the state's experts joined forces in the aftermath of the oil spill.

"We still have a lot to do in the Gulf. We haven't answered the questions yet," Hogarth said. "But Florida's response was very impressive. We were very coordinated, the best-coordinated state in the whole process."

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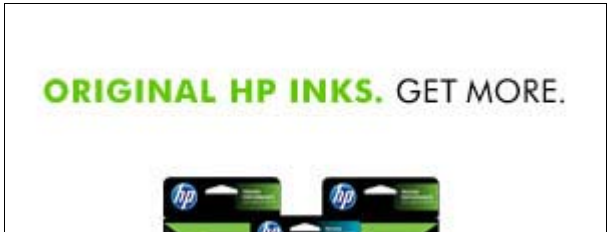

shrimp industry, which has yet to recover from the oil spill.

MacDonald and Ross Ellington, assistant vice president for research at FSU, were instrumental in the formation of the Gulf Coast Academic Task Force, which started

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BP also provided $20 million to Florida's Department of Agriculture, which has dedicated $10 million for marketing the state's seafood and $10 million to expand testing. Sterling Ivey, a spokesman for the department, said no oil or dispersants have been detected in the 1,359 samples tested since August, 2010.

A variety of experts at FSU have been conducting research on the oil spill's impact. For example, Felicia Coleman, director of FSU's Coastal and Marine Laboratory, has been studying the ecological effects of the oil spill on coastal habitats and organisms in general. Steven Morey, a researcher at the university's Center for Ocean-Atmospheric Prediction Studies, is focused on developing methods to incorporate satellite data to better understand the oil spill.

"We're proud of the faculty, we're proud of the way the science community galvanized around this issue very, very quickly," MacDonald said.

As the oil gushed from the deepwater well for more than two months, there was speculation that oil would eventually coat Florida's beaches all the way to the Keys, potentially ruining the state's No. 1 industry — tourisim — for countless years. But the worst-case scenario never developed.

measure that trend and to try to reverse it."

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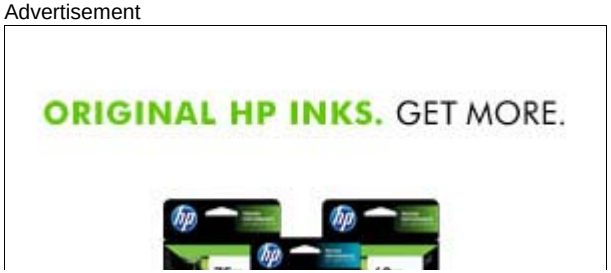
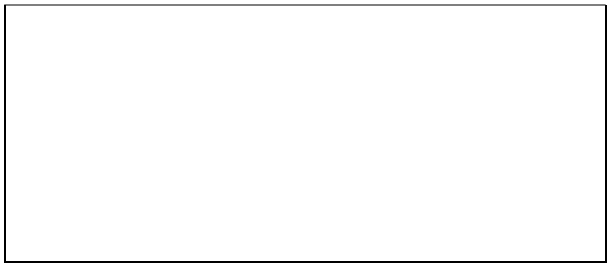
"The Gulf is still beautiful, the beach is still white — it's not quite as white as it used to be, but there's no immediate danger. The ecosystem is in flux," MacDonald added. "We face a tremendous challenge to