

Keys claims huge

From BP, 1A

gallon oil spill. Under that settlement, companies in affected areas — including the Florida Keys — would qualify for payments if they can show a monetary loss in the spring and summer 2010 months, followed by an increase in business.

The Florida Keys lie on the very eastern edge of an area covered by the 2012 settlement.

Although no Deepwater Horizon oil apparently reached the Keys, the threat of oil-soaked beaches dealt a blow to the summer tourist season.

"During Deepwater Horizon, we didn't get oil on our beaches but because of the concern, we didn't have people on our beaches, either," Billy Causey, southeast head of the National Marine Sanctuaries program, said at a 2013 state meeting on loss recovery.

As of May 2012, Monroe County residents and busi-

nesses had received a total of \$184.2 million on 11,135 paid claims, according to the Gulf Coast Claims Facility.

Since the settlement system was moved to the Deepwater Horizon Claims Center established by the federal courts, no county-by-county numbers have been released.

One national attorneys' group says it helped secure a May 2013 settlement of \$287,806 for an unnamed Summerland Key seafood restaurant.

Plaintiffs attorneys told "60 Minutes" that BP is overstating the number of fraudulent claims in a bid to reduce its financial exposure.

"We do not represent ludicrous claimants," Restivo said of her firm. "Along with every one of the claims we filed, our clients wrote hardship letters to describe how they were affected by the oil spill."

She estimated the firm has handled more than 1,000 individual and business claims.

NORTH KEY LARGO

Cat trapping remains ongoing

But one man says the feds in the wrong

By DAVID GOODHUE
dgoodhue@keysreporter.com



Keynoter photo by DAVID GOODHUE

A Key Largo man says one of his cats was wrongly targeted by federal wildlife trappers in their effort to protect the endangered woodrat.

Dive-ship owner Spencer Slate lives on Garden Cove Drive off State Road 905. Across 905 is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge, home to the Key Largo woodrat. Federal wildlife officials blame feral cats in part for the woodrat's endangered status.

Slate's cat Rocky was trapped and taken to the Humane Animal Care Coalition, the county's Upper Keys shelter, on April 23. A Fish and Wildlife law enforcement agent served Slate with a \$75 citation at his Tavernier dive shop. The agent told him where to pick up the pet.

Jeremy Dixon, superintendent of the Crocodile Lake refuge, said the cat was trapped on the west side of 905, which is federal land. Slate, who owns nine cats, says the traps were set in a wooded lot right next to his yard.

John Donnelly, a friend of Slate who rides his bicycle every day in the area, said he saw the trapper walking along Garden Cove. He said the trapper set about

Spencer Slate holds his cat, Rocky, who Slate says was improperly targeted by federal trappers last month. Federal officials say Rocky was caught walking in the Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

five traps in the woods. "They were all about 50 feet from my goddamned property," Slate said this week.

Slate said Rocky's face was so bloodied by the trap's spring-shut door that he did not recognize his pet when he picked him up from the shelter.

Dixon said no traps were placed near Slate's yard. The FWS uses one volunteer trapper and he places the traps only inside the 9-mile refuge, according to Dixon.

"Trappers decide where to place the traps after reviewing video footage from remote cameras scattered throughout the refuge," Dixon said. Based on the images, anywhere from zero to 30 traps may be set at any given time.

"It really depends on what the cameras tell us," Dixon said.

The program is not as controversial as one

employed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 2008 in which U.S.D.A. contractors were discovered trapping cats throughout Key Largo and taking them to be euthanized in Miami-Dade County.

Dave Gable, a welder with a shop on Garden Cove Road, lost six cats at the hands of the U.S.D.A. contractors.

"They went into neighborhoods looking for cats. They didn't care where they went," Gable said. "They killed them all."

The program stopped after a Miami television station aired a story on the program.

But Slate, who's had cats trapped by FWS and taken to the shelter in the past, disputes the need to even target cats as the culprit for eating the woodrats. He cites an experiment in which about 15 woodrats were released in 2010 on Palo Alto Key,

north of Key Largo.

The radio-tagged rats were quickly killed, but not by cats. In fact, there are no feral cats on Palo Alto Key. They were killed by natural predators like snakes, owls and other creatures.

To Slate, the FWS study shows "cats are not to blame for the loss of the rat, or the destruction of the rats. They have many natural predators."

But Dixon disagrees. He said the woodrat population has increased about 40 percent since the full-time cat trapping program was implemented in 2013. Dixon said there are likely between 500 to 700 woodrats living in the refuge.

"All that we want is to keep cats off of conservation lands in North Key Largo," Dixon said. "The evidence that cats are negatively impacting endangered species is overwhelming."

Mile 7 Grill
Historic landmark in the Keys since 1954
New Chefs, a whole new delicious menu!
All food HOMEMADE to perfection: American, Seafood and GREEK dishes (homemade desserts and best Key Lime Pie!)
\$9.99 Daily Specials
1240 Overseas Hwy. • MM 47.5 • Marathon, FL
305-743-4481
www.7-Mile-Grill.com

Happy Smiles start young
Christopher D. Golden, D.M.D.
American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry
Florida Association of Cosmetic Dentistry
American Dental Association
Cosmetic and Restorative
Dentist in the Keys
Big Pine Key • Mile Marker 29.75
305-872-4272 • www.keysdentist.com

The PALACE GARDENS

Calling All Wartime VETERANS & Surviving Spouses

If you're a Wartime Veteran or a Surviving Spouse of a Veteran AND in need of Assisted Living, you may be entitled to **\$1,056 - \$1,644 per month** from the V.A. A representative from Government Benefits Analysts, Inc. will be speaking about the **Aid & Attendance Program** and how it may benefit you. Learn how to apply and see if you qualify for this program. This is a discussion you can't afford to miss.

Thursday, May 15th at 1:00 pm
A complimentary lunch will be served.
Holiday Inn Key Largo
African Queen Room
99701 Overseas Hwy, Key Largo, Florida 33037

RSVP (305) 247-0446 or online at www.ThePalace.org/events