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GOVERNOR CRIST ENCOURAGES CONTINUED ENJOYMENT OF FLORIDA'S PRISTINE BEACHES AND NATURAL AREAS

TALLAHASSEE - Recognizing the importance of Florida's tourism industry to the state economy, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) as lead agency on the Deepwater Horizon oil spill response is coordinating closely with VISIT FLORIDA, the state's official tourism marketing organization, to ensure visitors are aware they have access to accurate, real-time information for making informed travel planning decisions. Through www.VISITFLORIDA.com, vacationers are able to view live Twitter feeds and read up-to-the-minute information on the status of any city or region in Florida, allowing them to see first-hand whether or not an area is currently affected.

"At this time, Florida's more than 1,200 miles of shoreline and 663 miles of beaches are open to normal water and beach activities, and VISIT FLORIDA continues to promote Florida as the number one travel destination in the world," said Governor Charlie Crist. "Today, the message is that the entire state is open for business, and we invite travelers from around the world to come and enjoy the Sunshine State."

Tourism is the largest industry in the state – welcoming more than 80 million visitors per year who spend over \$60 billion, generating 21 percent of all state sales tax collections and employing nearly 1 million Floridians. Given the industry's importance, VISIT FLORIDA continues to market the Sunshine State to both domestic and international visitors. As news reports raise the alarm about a potential impact from the spill, VISIT FLORIDA is working closely with DEP and other state agencies to ensure that Floridians and visitors are kept informed of any potential impacts through real-time updates.

"If we are going to remain the trusted source, we have to acknowledge that there may be a potential impact to vacationers down the road and help them to find credible information easily," said President and CEO of VISIT FLORIDA Chris Thompson. "Our responsibility to the Florida travel industry, as well as the traveling public, is to provide them with truthful, transparent, up-to-date information on any event that affects the Sunshine State."

For more information on opportunities to visit Florida's coastal communities, please visit www.visitflorida.com. For the most up-to-date information on Florida's Deepwater Horizon response, as well as health and safety tips, visit www.dep.state.fl.us/deepwaterhorizon, follow us on Twitter at www.Twitter.com/FLDEPAlert or contact the Florida Emergency Information Line at 800-342-3557.

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