

Philanthropy Corner – 5-23-10  
“Philanthropy Spills Over in the Keys”  
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The constant buzz surrounding the latest oil spill updates brings about a déjà vu of circumstances surrounding an impending hurricane. As with a hurricane, it's too early to know for sure how profound the impact of the oil spill will be in the Keys, but it is never too early to prepare ourselves for the role philanthropy plays in any disaster or recovery effort.

This isn't the first time the Florida Keys have experienced such an oil spill. In the 1970's, our community saw two significant spills, one involving an oil sheen that stretched on for 30 miles, and the other a captain illegally discharging oil from his boat. The magnitude of the recent Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is leading many scientists to speculate this might be one of the worst ecological disasters in the United States. Northern coastlines are already feeling the harsh effects and Keys residents are watching anxiously to see not if, but when and how, we will be impacted. In fact, as I write this article some scientists are predicting it may arrive here as early as a few days from now.

Even with British Petroleum's promise to clean and restore any affected areas, as well as pay all “legitimate” claims, US law only requires oil firms to pay up to 75 million dollars for economic damages. Naturally, many of our residents and wildlife may be affected in ways that won't be covered and will be looking for help from friends, neighbors and local organizations as they did in the aftermath of Hurricane Wilma.

The Community Foundation of the Florida Keys (CFFK) in partnership with The Key West Chamber of Commerce, the Rodell Charitable Foundation – Florida and Cooke Communications, LLC formed an alliance to quickly respond with a community-wide effort after Wilma. Within 90 days after the hurricane, over \$1.3 million was raised from the local community and distributed to help residents get their homes and lives back in order.

As a result of that collaborative effort, a disaster relief fund remains active at the Community Foundation. This fund is ready to accept donations to help the community prepare for any disaster and fund subsequent restoration efforts. Monetary donations may be made on-line at [cffk.org](http://cffk.org) to the My Key West Emergency Relief Fund. As with Wilma, these funds will be used to aid in mitigating the impact of this oil spill or other manmade or natural disasters the future may hold.

For individuals looking for information on how to get involved, the web is one of the best sources of up-to-date information. Websites such as [volunteerfloridadisaster.org](http://volunteerfloridadisaster.org) have made public access to resources regarding any response to the oil spill a top priority. Other national nonprofit organizations such as Matter of Trust are utilizing social media to collect thousands of pounds of hair and fur clippings from salons and pet groomers to

facilitate the creation of natural booms to protect our coastlines. On shore in the Keys, 38 of our coastal zones have been adopted by Coast Watchers, volunteers who closely monitor their local coastal communities to report injured or oiled animals, oiled shoreline, or changes in air quality.

Local organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, Reef Relief and GLEE have aligned to create The Florida Keys Environment Coalition and have launched Keysspill.com to link oil-spill-related projects with volunteers, including boat captains, businesses, organizations and individuals. To aid in their efforts, CFFK has posted an oil spill resource page at [cffk.org](http://cffk.org) with links to these and other websites and volunteer opportunities.

Additionally, local banks, business associations and groups are participating in collecting cleaning products, hosting community information forums, and rallying volunteers. The Florida Keys Wildlife Rescue is appealing for donations in an effort to stockpile cleaning supplies such as linens, towels, kennels, bandages, rubber gloves, and Dawn detergent. The Turtle Hospital in Marathon is also preparing to assist our community and local wildlife if oil reaches the Keys by stockpiling donations of products such as Mayonnaise, essential to naturally removing oil from delicate wildlife. Proving that one person can make a difference are citizens like John Coffin of Big Pine Key who donated a miles worth of boom that joined the floating barricade around the oil spill off Louisiana. The 4,000 feet of boom is worth about \$150,000, and even though he has no guarantee that it will be returned or replaced, it is actions such as this that need to be at the forefront of our response to the oil, no matter which part of the coastline it impacts.

From the coastline of Louisiana, to the fragile ecosystem of the Everglades, all the way down here to our own slice of paradise in the Keys, it's essential to remember that wherever the oil goes, it will almost certainly have a negative effect on people, wildlife, the environment and the economy. Still, our community has weathered disaster before and we remain strong because of the philanthropic nature and giving spirit of our residents.

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