

**St. George Island Visitor Center  
2A East Gulf Beach Drive  
St. George Island, FL 32328**

**850.927.7744**

**888.927.7744 (Toll Free)**

**[www.seestgeorgeisland.com](http://www.seestgeorgeisland.com)**

**[info@seestgeorgeisland.com](mailto:info@seestgeorgeisland.com)**

## **Horizon Oil Disaster Did Not Reach St. George Island**

The mood at the first meeting of members of the Franklin County Tourist Development Council following the Horizon Oil Disaster was one of uncertainty. No one knew for certain whether the oil would spread to St. George Island's pristine beaches, marshes and nearby Apalachicola Bay – where the world's finest oysters grow from spats to unsurpassed taste treats.

Many felt it was inevitability or at least a possibility. All recognized that potential visitors could feel the same. Reservations were already being cancelled and others were waiting until the last possible minute to plan their usual summer beach vacation. St. George Island and Franklin County tourism officials immediately became proactive in their advertising and promotional efforts and those efforts saved the summer season.

Thanks to a great deal of luck and winds that almost continually blew to the west, the oil sheen, tar balls and plume never even got within 100 miles of the Forgotten Coast. The flow of fresh, local seafood was never seriously threatened and summer visitors could indulge in all they cared to eat. And they did.

But that doesn't mean that the island and county wasn't making an attempt to be ready for an oil attack. Tier one, two and three booms were deployed throughout the area. Unfortunately several boat ramps were closed to the public so they could be used for setting up the makeshift barriers. Equally unfortunate was the disclosure that the booms were to be used to block oil from getting into the marshes and estuaries and that the oil would be diverted to the island's powdery white beaches to be collected.

The "Captain of the Port" for the disaster admitted at a County Commission meeting that the previously created state and federal oil spill plan never had a "Horizon" in mind when it was conceived.

A great deal of "second-guessing" is likely to go on for years.

Meanwhile, with the "How I Spent My Summer Vacation" youngsters headed back to school in August, St. George Island slips into its usual September to March mellow mood. With the exception of the long Labor Day weekend and a few other holidays. No long lines or waits at island eateries or souvenir shops.

The bartender will now have time to learn your name (if you care to share it) and favorite libation. And you can have all of the “spread out” space on the beach you might desire.

Did we mention that the fish don’t have to go back to school (many stay in one) and the angling all around the island remains fantastic? Some charter captains with tons of local knowledge swear that the fishing during the summer of 2010 was the best it has been for decades. And that’s saying something.

Most of the businesses on St. George Island are of a “mom & pop” nature and they have a great deal to be grateful for. First and foremost, that the oil didn’t come ashore and spoil one of the ultimate ecotourism destinations in Florida. And, equally important, that their loyal summer vacation visitors stayed loyal and didn’t cancel their plans.

It was a long, hot summer.