

1 **Elevated surface chlorophyll associated with natural oil seeps in the Gulf of Mexico**

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8 Natural hydrocarbon seeps occur on the seafloor along continental margins, and account for up
9 to 47% of the oil released into the oceans¹. Hydrocarbon seeps are known to support local
10 benthic productivity², but little is known about their impact on photosynthetic organisms in the
11 overlying water column. Here we present high temporal and spatial resolution observations of
12 chlorophyll concentrations in the Northern Gulf of Mexico using *in-situ* and shipboard flow-
13 through fluorescence measurements from May to July 2012, as well as an analysis of ocean-
14 colour satellite images from 1997 to 2007. All three methods reveal elevated chlorophyll
15 concentration in waters influenced by natural hydrocarbon seeps found at depths greater than
16 1000m. Temperature and nutrient profiles above seep sites suggest that nutrient-rich water
17 upwells from depth, facilitating phytoplankton growth and thus supporting the higher chlorophyll
18 concentrations observed. Since upwelling occurs at natural seep locations around the world^{1,2,3},
19 we conclude that offshore hydrocarbon seeps, and perhaps other types of deep ocean vents and
20 seeps, may influence biogeochemistry and productivity of the overlying water column.

21 Natural hydrocarbon seeps occur on the seafloor along continental margins, where
22 gaseous and liquid hydrocarbons migrate from deep reservoirs into unconsolidated sediments
23 near the seafloor and some of this fluid is released through focused vents^{4,5}. In the Gulf of

24 Mexico, such seeps frequently emit plumes of oil and gas into the water column, releasing up to
25 1.1×10^8 L oil yr⁻¹ (6). A significant percentage of the released hydrocarbons are consumed and
26 mixed along their ascent through the water column from depths that can exceed 2000 m (5).
27 Although rising hydrocarbon plumes can be advected laterally by sub-surface currents, in the
28 Gulf of Mexico, they typically surface within a ~3-km radius of their seafloor origin⁷. Wind and
29 surface currents then shape the resulting ~0.1- μ m thick oil-slicks into patches up to several
30 hundred meters wide and kilometers long^{5, 7} that can then be detected by satellite remote sensing.
31 These slicks gradually dissipate through spreading, flocculation, dissolution, evaporation and
32 weathering over subsequent days⁸.

33 MacDonalD et al.⁹ used Synthetic Aperture RADAR imagery of surface oil-slick features
34 to map the locations of putative natural oil seeps in the Northern Gulf of Mexico. Using a
35 combination of ROV dives and satellite remote sensing, they found that even the most prolific
36 sites exhibited some episodicity in the seepage of oil and gas. Some of the most persistent slicks
37 were associated with the Green Canyon reservoir (GC), and the site denoted as GC600 is one of
38 the best-studied natural hydrocarbon seep sites in the Gulf of Mexico¹⁰, located at a depth of
39 approximately 1200 m.

40 GC600 and other sites away from seeps were studied during a shipboard survey in the
41 Northern Gulf of Mexico in May-July 2012 (Supplementary Table 1). Vertical profiles of the
42 water column made with a Conductivity-Temperature-Depth (CTD) rosette system with a
43 chlorophyll fluorometer showed that chlorophyll concentrations at the deep chlorophyll
44 maximum near GC600 were significantly elevated compared to non-seep, background sites
45 (Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test, $P = 0.01$; Fig. 1a), with mean chlorophyll concentration at the seep
46 chlorophyll maximum (0.66 ± 0.03 mg m⁻³) more than double that of background sites ($0.29 \pm$

47 0.02 mg m⁻³). The depth of the average chlorophyll maximum was shallower at seep sites (82m)
48 compared to the background sites (99m). Depth-integrated chlorophyll concentrations at GC600
49 were also significantly higher than the background sites (Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test, $P = 0.01$),
50 with integrated chlorophyll at the seep averaging 28.2 ± 1.1 mg m⁻² vs. 22.3 ± 1.8 mg m⁻² for
51 background sites. The increase in chlorophyll may be attributable to elevated nutrient
52 concentrations between 50-200 m at GC600 relative to non-seep sites (Fig. 1b, Supplementary
53 Table 2). A possible explanation for the elevated nutrient concentrations is indicated in
54 temperature profiles showing colder water at GC600 between 50 m and about 1000 m compared
55 to background sites (Fig. 1c, Supplementary Fig. 1), suggesting the upwelling of colder, nutrient-
56 rich waters at GC600.

57 Turbulence generated by buoyant bubble plumes originating at natural seeps can draw
58 surrounding water into the rising bubble stream to generate upwelling flows that persist at least
59 up to the pycnocline. These strong episodic upwelling flows manifest as colder water compared
60 to background in hydrographic profiles of the water column above seep locations and have been
61 observed at both shallow¹¹ and deep¹² seeps. Plume-generated upwelling above seeps could
62 exert a “bottom-up” influence on near-surface microbes similar to eddy-driven upwelling that
63 has been shown to episodically supply nutrients to phytoplankton in subtropical waters¹³. The
64 transport of bubbles from depths greater than 1000 m has been observed in echo-sounder data in
65 the Gulf of Mexico^{5, 6}, in the Norwegian-Barents-Spitzbergen continental margin¹², and the
66 Black Sea¹⁴ and likely happens at hydrocarbon seeps elsewhere in the world.

67 Elevations in localized chlorophyll concentration were not restricted to the deep
68 chlorophyll maximum layer, though near-surface increases in chlorophyll above seep sites were
69 more subtle and exemplified the intermittent nature of the driving mechanisms. During three

70 oceanographic cruises, high temporal and spatial resolution chlorophyll fluorescence data were
71 acquired using an Aquatic Laser Fluorescence Analyzer (WETLabs)¹⁵ plumbed to the ship's
72 flow-through system to continuously measure chlorophyll concentrations in near-surface waters
73 along the ship track. Observations along ship tracks near GC600 were separated into "seep" and
74 "non-seep background" categories based on proximity (> or < 3 km) to the seafloor coordinates
75 of GC600 (Fig. 2). To exclude the Mississippi River plume, comparisons between categories
76 were only made for sections of the ship track near GC600 with salinities > 35.6. While there was
77 a slight decrease in surface chlorophyll concentrations at GC600 compared to background during
78 the May-July 2012 cruise (consistent with the vertical profiles in Fig. 1a), during the other two
79 cruises (in September 2012 and June 2013) near-surface chlorophyll concentrations at GC600
80 were significantly elevated relative to corresponding background areas nearby (Wilcoxon Rank
81 Sum test, $P < 0.001$ for each comparison, Fig. 2b, c, Supplementary Table 3). Moreover, the
82 range and variance of near-surface chlorophyll concentrations were higher in all three visits to
83 the GC600 site compared to nearby background. Maximum near-surface chlorophyll
84 concentrations at GC600 were remarkably higher than corresponding background values, with an
85 average elevation > 300%. Episodic upwelling could explain both the higher chlorophyll
86 maxima and variance near the seep. Moreover, chlorophyll concentrations at these sites were
87 skewed towards the higher end of the distribution, with higher kurtosis values suggesting that the
88 increase in variance was related to infrequent extreme values, rather than multiple modest
89 increases.

90 The coincidence between near-surface oil inputs and chlorophyll enhancement is best
91 demonstrated on larger scales by comparing satellite observations of surface oil slicks with
92 satellite-derived chlorophyll concentrations. The database of putative natural oil seeps was

93 remapped onto 10 x 10 km grids to identify the single grid cell with the highest cumulative
94 surface area covered by slicks between 1997 to 2007 (site Alpha). Four locations that had no
95 observed oil slicks were also identified to provide non-seep, background conditions for
96 comparison. The 8-day, 9-km average satellite-derived chlorophyll concentration [chl₈] within 50
97 x 50 km boxes (the red and black boxes in Fig. 3a, based on two grid cells in each direction from
98 the central cell) was extracted for each of the 5 locations centered on Alpha and the 4
99 background sites to generate time series. Between 1997 - 2007, [chl₈] could be calculated before
100 and after the observation of 23 oil slicks directly inside the 10 x 10 km Alpha box. For these
101 observed 23 slick events, the change in 8-day chlorophyll concentration $\Delta[\text{chl}_8]$ around Alpha for
102 the time interval that followed the slick was significantly greater than concurrent changes
103 averaged across the four non-seep background locations during the same 8-day period (Fig. 3b,
104 c; Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test, $P = 0.01$). This suggests that changes in chlorophyll
105 concentrations observed at Alpha following slicks were not caused by broad regional
106 environmental factors, common with the background sites. In contrast, if slick events observed at
107 site Alpha were excluded from the time series, values of $\Delta[\text{chl}_8]$ at Alpha were not significantly
108 different from the corresponding mean background values (Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test, $P =$
109 0.22). Thus, $\Delta[\text{chl}_8]$ at Alpha only deviated significantly from background for the time periods
110 following observation of a surface slick at Alpha.

111 The SAR image database for this region was discontinuous (with only 176 distinct
112 acquisitions over the 10 year study period). Combining infrequent imaging with the sporadic
113 nature of seepage and cloud cover (that obscures satellite-derived chlorophyll), and the necessity
114 for calm surface conditions for slick detection using SAR imagery suggests that the influence of
115 natural seeps on chlorophyll concentrations was almost certainly underestimated by the satellite

116 observations. Nevertheless, the satellite observations uniquely link the increases in chlorophyll
117 concentrations at Alpha to the episodic transport of oil and other material from the deep sea to
118 the surface ocean, potentially connecting episodic upwelling of nutrients to the supply of
119 hydrocarbons.

120 The connection between elevated chlorophyll and oil at seep sites may be more complex
121 than the nutrient upwelling scenario presented initially. Oil reaching the upper water column
122 impacts an intricately interconnected microbial community including oil-degrading bacteria,
123 cyanobacteria, eukaryotic phytoplankton, protistan grazers, and viruses¹⁶. Interactions among
124 these organisms and their environment can result in negative or positive feedbacks on
125 phytoplankton biomass. Hydrocarbon degradation by heterotrophic bacteria in near-surface
126 waters can be rapid, but is typically nutrient limited^{16, 17} and these bacteria may outcompete
127 phytoplankton for the available nutrients. Fresh crude oil is toxic to phytoplankton at high
128 concentrations^{18, 19}, but can have either inhibiting or stimulating effects at low concentrations
129 depending on the species composition of the phytoplankton assemblage²⁰, the influence of
130 protistan grazers^{16, 21, 22}, nutrient concentrations^{16, 23}, the type of oil²⁴, and the duration of
131 exposure²⁵. Protistan grazers, which may be fairly tolerant of crude oil contamination^{22, 26}, play
132 an important ecological role in aquatic microbial communities, both as consumers of bacteria and
133 phytoplankton, and in the recycling of limiting nutrients²². Increases in phytoplankton biomass
134 following oil spills have been attributed to an indirect “top down” effect through predation on
135 bacteria that compete with phytoplankton for nutrients^{27, 28}. Thus, the episodic influx of nutrients
136 and hydrocarbons into the upper water column at seep sites could affect local phytoplankton
137 abundance through direct, “bottom-up” effects on phytoplankton growth rate, or through indirect
138 “top-down” effects mediated through the planktonic food web. These nutrient and grazing

139 hypotheses explaining increased chlorophyll at seep sites should not be thought of as mutually
140 exclusive²⁹ and need further study, with sufficient spatial and temporal resolution to resolve the
141 underlying processes in light of the high variability we have documented.

142 Three independent observation methods – vertical profiles and near-surface *in-situ*
143 fluorometry, as well as broad-scale remote sensing – revealed localized increases in
144 phytoplankton biomass above natural hydrocarbon seeps that in aggregate have regional
145 implications for productivity, carbon and nutrient cycling, and food-web dynamics in the
146 ecologically and economically important Northern Gulf of Mexico. These observations have
147 afforded an unprecedented view into a highly variable and previously undescribed process that
148 connects sea-floor features at depths exceeding 1000 m to biological processes in the overlying
149 euphotic zone. Given the global abundance and distribution of offshore hydrocarbon seeps¹,
150 these observations in the Gulf of Mexico likely reflect a world-wide phenomenon. They also
151 raise the possibility that other types of deep ocean vents and seeps may have subtle influences in
152 their overlying water column, influences that would likely only be detected with purposeful high
153 temporal and spatial resolution sampling.

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257 **Supplementary Information** is linked to the online version of the paper at

258 www.nature.com/nature

259

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262

263 **Acknowledgements:**

264 We thank the science parties and ship's crew of the *R/V Endeavor* for their assistance with

265 multiple shipboard operations. We thank Oscar Garcia-Pineda for his assistance in providing the

266 TCNNA derived database of putative natural oil seeps. We thank Katelyn Geddes for assistance

267 with chlorophyll extractions used in ALFA calibrations. This work is supported by The Gulf of

268 Mexico Research Initiative's (GOMRI) ECOGIG consortium, with additional support from NSF
269 grant NSF-OCE-0928495 to J.M. and NASA grant NNX10AT99G to A.S. This is LDEO
270 contribution number 7951, and ECOGIG contribution number 365. Data are available from the
271 Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative Information and Data Cooperative
272 (<http://data.gulfresearchinitiative.org>: R1.x132.134:0003, R1.x132.134:0005,
273 R1.x132.139:0025).

274
275 **Author contributions:** A.S., A.J., B.Y., J.M., and N.D. designed the study. M.H, A.C., and S.P.
276 helped analyze the data. N.D., A.J., and A.S. wrote the paper. I.M. collected and processed SAR
277 images to produce databases of oil slicks and putative seep locations across the Gulf of Mexico.
278 A.S. and S.P. collected and processed satellite images and data for analysis of chlorophyll
279 concentrations associated with slick events. N.D., M.H., and A.C. collected and processed data
280 for the shipboard *in-situ* fluorometry. N.D., M.H., A.J., S.W., and J.M. deployed the CTD and
281 analyzed the data. S.W. and J.M. collected and processed nutrients samples. All authors
282 discussed the results and commented on the manuscript.

283
284 The authors declare no competing financial interests.

285
286 **Figure Legends:**

287
288 **Figure 1: Water column profiles of chlorophyll, nutrients, and temperature above seep**
289 **GC600 and background sites.** Average seep (red) and non-seep background (blue) chlorophyll
290 concentrations (a), nitrate plus nitrite concentrations (b), and temperatures (c) from multiple

291 CTD casts at GC600 and non-seep sites. Panels **a** and **c** derive from 9 seep and 10 non-seep CTD
292 casts. Data are means ± 1 s.e.m for 1-m depth bins. In **b** data are means ± 1 s.e.m for both depth
293 and concentration. Supplementary Table 2 has further details on nutrient data. Dotted horizontal
294 lines show the mean depths of seep (red) and non-seep (blue) deep chlorophyll maxima.

295

296 **Figure 2: Transects of near-surface chlorophyll concentrations near seep GC600.** Surface
297 chlorophyll concentrations were measured near GC600 during three cruises using shipboard
298 flow-through fluorometry. Observations along ship tracks were separated into "seep" (90.6°W –
299 90.53°W) and "non-seep background" (90.53°W - 90.1°W) categories based on distance from
300 GC600. The plots show chlorophyll concentration at each location with color of the dots
301 indicating salinity according to the right-hand legend. Transects were truncated where salinity
302 dropped below 35.6.

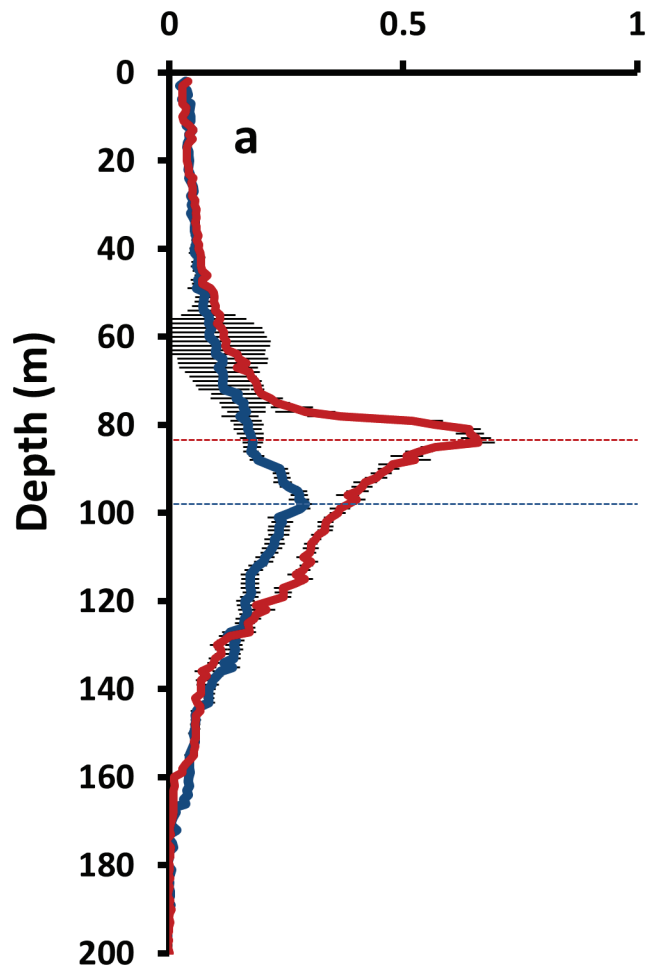
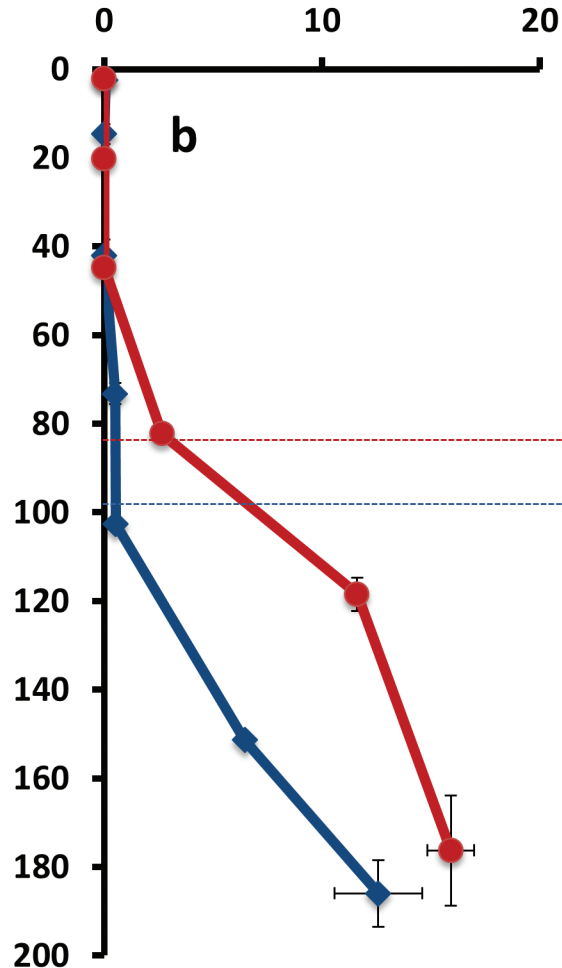
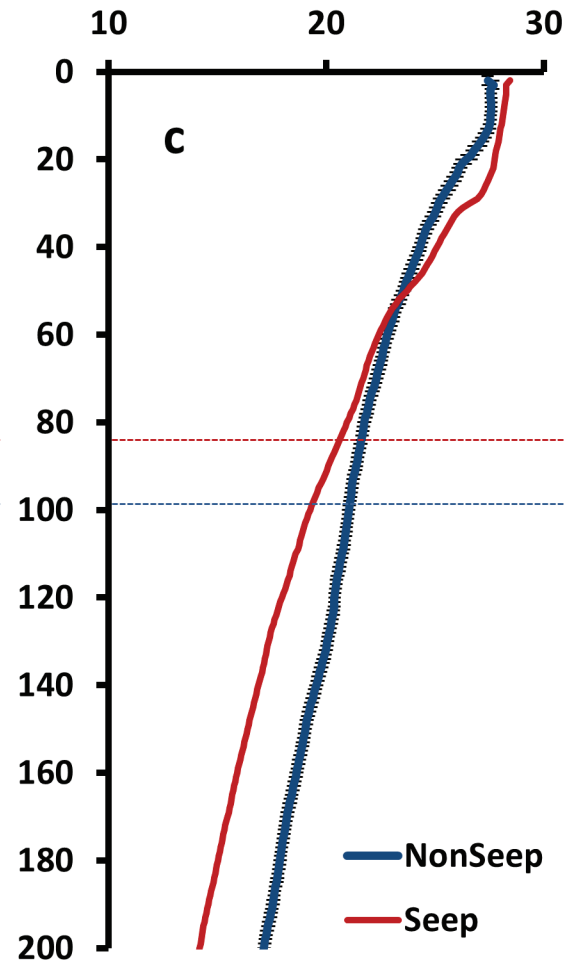
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304 **Figure 3: Changes satellite derived chlorophyll concentrations following oil slick events.**

305 **(a)**, Map showing the 10 × 10 km grid cells used to quantify oil slicks and the 50 x 50 km boxes
306 surrounding site Alpha (red), and the four background sites (black) used to quantify chlorophyll
307 concentration. **(b)**, changes in chlorophyll concentration in the 50 × 50 km area around Alpha
308 (black) and background sites (gray) from one 8-day interval to the next ($\Delta[\text{chl}_8]$) when a slick
309 was observed at Alpha. The median $\Delta[\text{chl}_8]$ at Alpha and background sites across all slick events
310 are shown by the red and blue dotted lines.

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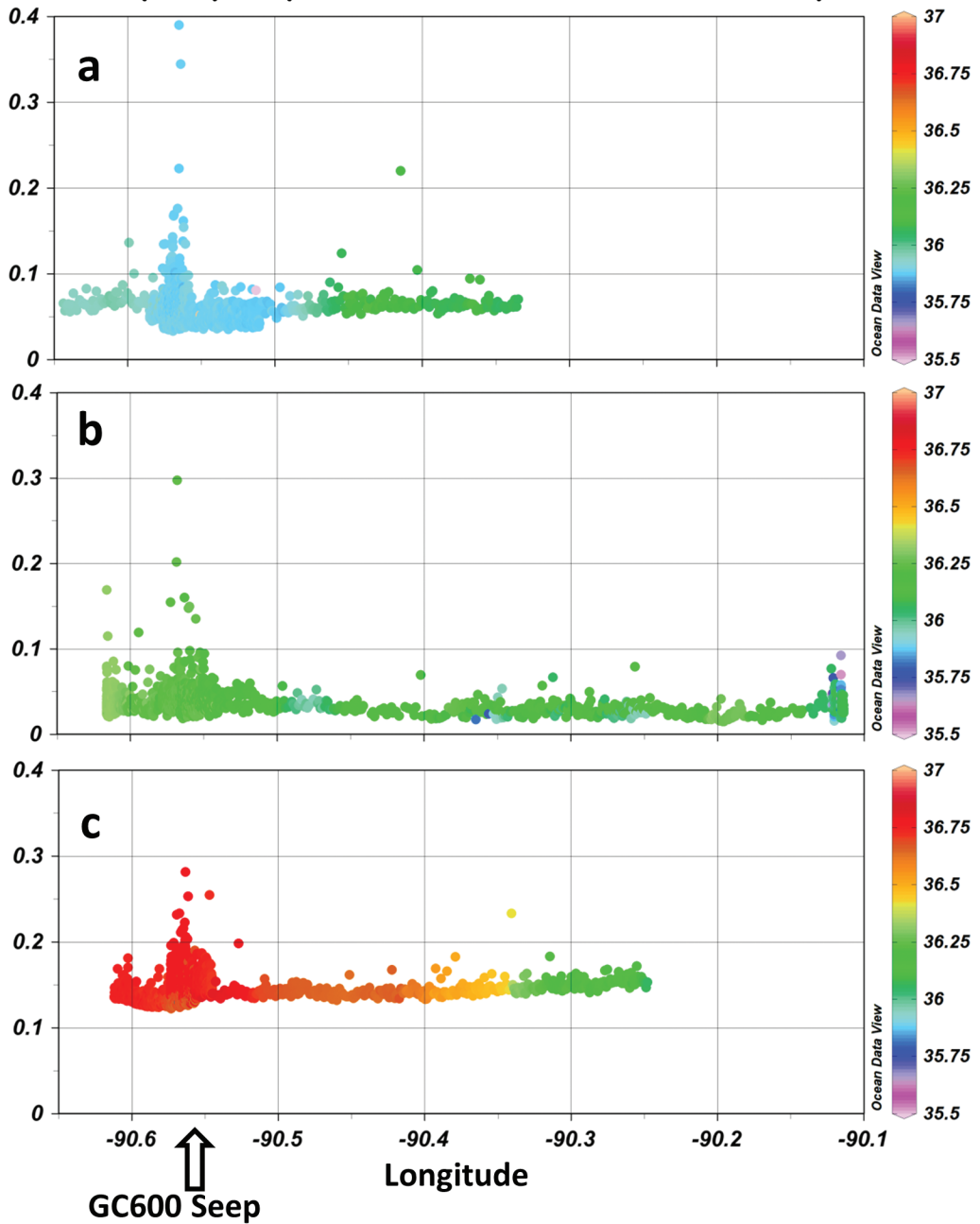
Chlorophyll (mg m^{-3}) **NO_3+NO_2 (μM)****Temperature ($^{\circ}\text{C}$)**

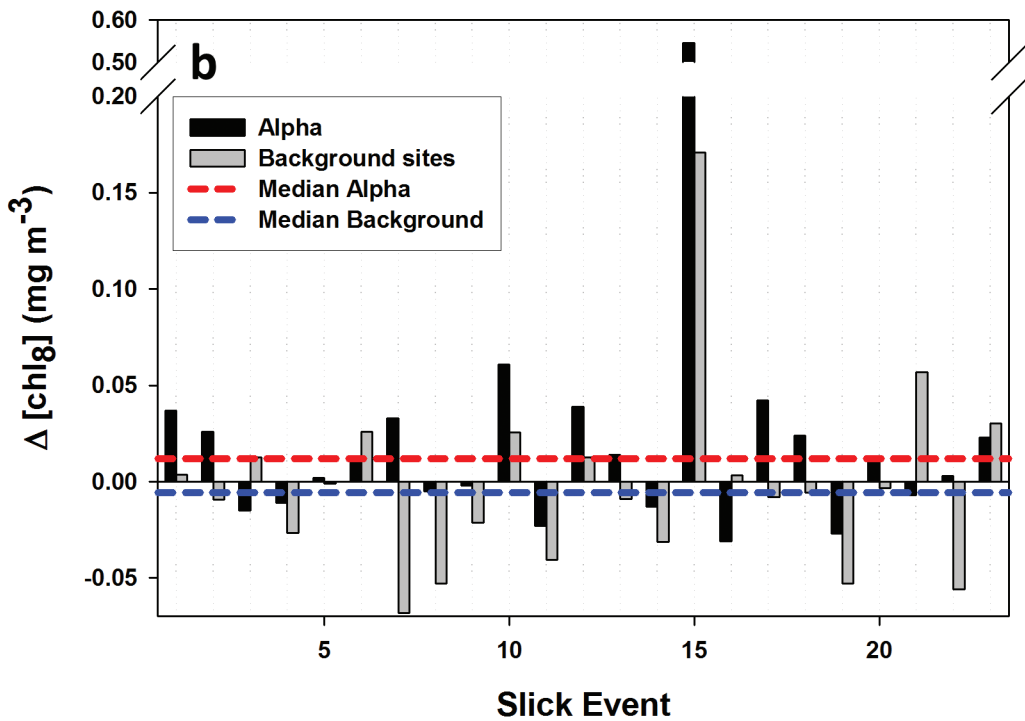
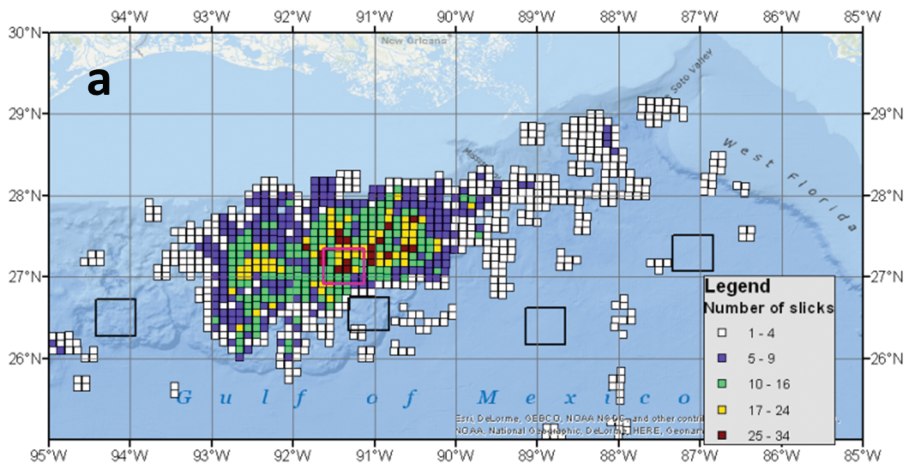
Seep

Background

Salinity

Chlorophyll conc. ($\text{mg}\cdot\text{m}^{-3}$)





1 **Methods:**

2 ***Hydrography:***

3 GC600 and comparable non-seep locations in the northern Gulf of Mexico were sampled during
4 a cruise on board the *R/V Endeavor* in May-July 2012. Nine water column profiles were made at
5 GC600 and 10 profiles were made at the non-seep background stations (Supplementary Table 1)
6 using a water-sampling rosette equipped with a Seabird 11+ CTD and a Wetlabs ECO-AFL
7 chlorophyll fluorometer. Nutrient samples ($\text{NO}_3^- + \text{NO}_2^-$, PO_4^{3-} , SiO_2) were collected from
8 Niskin bottles fired at slightly different depths on each CTD cast and analyzed at sea within six
9 hours of collection using a Lachat QuikChem 8000 flow-injection analysis system (Lachat
10 Instruments, Loveland CO, USA)¹. For comparison between seep and background categories,
11 chlorophyll concentrations, nutrient concentrations, and temperature from each CTD cast were
12 first averaged into depth bins (1-m bins for chlorophyll and temperature, variable depth bins for
13 nutrients, see Supplementary Table 2) and then combined to calculate average seep and
14 background profiles.

15 **Along-track fluorometry:**

16 An Aquatic Laser Fluorescence Analyzer (ALFA, WETLabs)² was used to measure laser-
17 induced fluorescence emission spectra in near-surface waters during three cruises that passed
18 over GC600 on the *R/V Endeavor* (June-July 2012, September 2012, and June-July 2013). The
19 ALFA was connected to the ship's underway intake, receiving water pumped from
20 approximately 5 m depth at a flow rate of 2.2 L/min. Using 405 and 514 nm excitation lasers, the
21 ALFA acquired two fluorescence emission spectra between 400 to 800 nm, every 11 seconds.
22 Then, using real-time spectral deconvolution analysis of the spectra, the concentrations of
23 fluorescent phytoplankton pigments, including chlorophyll-*a*, were quantified from fluorescence

24 normalized to water Raman scattering². Data from the ship's thermosalinograph and GPS were
25 fed into the ALFA unit and combined into a single data stream. Chlorophyll fluorescence from
26 the ALFA was calibrated to extracted chlorophyll-*a* from discrete samples collected at different
27 locations along the cruise track. For calibrations, water was filtered (0.2 µm polycarbonate filter)
28 within an hour of collection, and filters were frozen (-20°C) until extraction in acetone or
29 methanol. Extracted chlorophyll was quantified based on fluorescence using a Turner Designs
30 fluorometer^{1,2}.

31 Due to high variability in phytoplankton pigments associated with the Mississippi river
32 plume, transects near GC600 with surface salinity lower than 35.6 were excluded from our
33 analyses. Sections of the ship track within 3 km of GC600 were categorized as "seep" (S). The
34 non-seep background statistics were calculated from portions of the same ship track segment that
35 were > 3 km from GC600 and matched the salinity criteria.

36

37 **Satellite imaging:** A database of 176 SAR images that had been processed to identify surface
38 oil-slick features in the Northern Gulf of Mexico was gridded into 10 x10 km cells as described
39 by MacDonald *et al*^{3,4}. This database was used to identify the single grid cell with the highest
40 cumulative area covered by slicks from 1997 to 2007. This site (centered at 27.15°N, 91.35°W)
41 was designated "Alpha". In addition, four 50 x 50 km boxes with no incidence of oil slicks
42 during the study period, located at a similar latitude as Alpha, and not routinely affected by the
43 Mississippi river plume, were identified as non-seep background sites (Fig. 3A). Satellite-
44 derived chlorophyll concentration time series for five 50 x 50 km boxes centered on Alpha and
45 the four background sites were constructed using NASA Sea-viewing Wide Field-of-view Sensor
46 (SeaWiFS) Level 3, 8-day composite, 9-km resolution chlorophyll data (NASA Ocean Biology

47 (OB.DAAC). Sea-viewing Wide Field-of-view Sensor (SeaWiFS) Ocean Color Data, 2014.0
48 Reprocessing. NASA OB.DAAC, Greenbelt, MD, USA. doi: 10.5067/ORBVIEW-
49 2/SEAWIFS_OC.2014.0), averaging across pixels within each box. The size of this region of
50 interest for chlorophyll observation was chosen to reflect how far currents might spread a surface
51 oil slick in 8 days. The change in 8-day chlorophyll concentration in the 50×50 km area around
52 site Alpha from one 8-day interval to the next ($\Delta[\text{chl}_8]$) could be estimated for 23 time intervals
53 when an oil slick was observed directly at site Alpha. Excluding these slick events, $\Delta[\text{chl}_8]$ could
54 also be calculated for Alpha over another 392 time intervals during the study period. For each of
55 these time windows, $\Delta[\text{chl}_8]$ was also calculated at each of the four background sites, then
56 averaged together to represent a mean background condition for comparison to Alpha. Thus, data
57 from Alpha and the background sites represent the change in chlorophyll at each site across the
58 same two 8-day time intervals, rather than the absolute chlorophyll concentrations, and
59 comparisons between Alpha and the mean background were paired in time for analysis. The
60 potential for the slicks to interfere with the optical measurements used for satellite-derived
61 chlorophyll concentration was minimized because the slicks were identified in one 8-day time
62 interval, while the chlorophyll response was measured from that interval to the next. Meanwhile,
63 slick dissipation is usually rapid by comparison – MacDonald et al⁵ calculated the half-life of a
64 slick to range from 0.25 to maximum of 8 days.

65

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1 **Elevated surface chlorophyll associated with natural oil seeps in the Gulf of Mexico.**

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8 **Supplementary Figures and Tables:**

9

10 **Supplementary Table 1: Dates and locations of CTD casts.** Data from these CTD casts were
11 used in Fig. 1.

12

13 **Supplementary Table 2: Summary statistics for water column nutrient concentrations at**
14 **GC600 and non-seep sites.** Mean concentrations of $\text{NO}_2^- + \text{NO}_3^-$, PO_4^{3-} , and SiO_2 for seep and
15 non-seep sites were compared within depth bins using t-tests, n is the number of casts with data
16 within a given depth bin. Statistical significance of $\text{NO}_2^- + \text{NO}_3^-$ concentrations in the upper 3
17 depth bins were not tested because the values were below the detection limit. PO_4^{3-} data in the
18 106-157 m depth bin failed normality tests and was not analyzed by t-test, though the seep
19 concentrations were significantly higher than the non-seep values using a Wilcoxon Rank-Sum
20 test ($P < 0.001$). The 52-80 m and 158-202 m bins lacked sufficient observations to test statistical
21 significance.

22

23 **Supplementary Table 3: Summary statistics of near-surface chlorophyll concentrations**
24 **near GC600 on three separate cruises.** Summary statistics for the data shown in Fig. 2.

25

26 **Supplementary Figure 1: Average water temperature profiles for seep and non-seep sites to**
27 **1200 m.** Data are means ± 1 s.e.m for 1-m depth bins.

Supplementary Table 1

	Date	Latitude	Longitude
Seep Sites	5/28/2012	27.36253	-90.5639
	5/28/2012	27.3628	-90.563
	5/28/2012	27.36117	-90.5752
	6/27/2012	27.3646	-90.5779
	6/27/2012	27.36107	-90.567
	6/28/2012	27.36092	-90.5789
	6/28/2012	27.36353	-90.564
	6/29/2012	27.36672	-90.5625
	6/29/2012	27.367	-90.56
Non-seep sites	5/29/2012	26.02533	-92.2523
	6/5/2012	27.81852	-89.0683
	6/5/2012	27.81738	-89.0629
	6/5/2012	27.81512	-89.0622
	6/9/2012	27.73773	-88.8381
	6/9/2012	27.72155	-88.317
	6/9/2012	27.67295	-88.7774
	6/9/2012	27.5802	-88.7215
	6/17/2012	27.92133	-86.6916
	6/30/2012	27.53693	-89.7668

Supplementary Table 2

Depth bin	NO ₂ +NO ₃ (μM)				PO ₄ (μM)				SiO ₄ (μM)			
	Seep	Non-Seep	Stat Sig	p-value	Seep	Non-Seep	Stat Sig	p-value	Seep	Non-Seep	Stat Sig	p-value
Depth 0-9	0 n = 6	0.055 n = 7	NA	NA	0.119 n = 6	0.102 n = 7	N	0.133 (t-test)	1.117 n = 6	0.816 n = 7	N	0.073 (t-test)
Depth 10-25	0.0021 n = 6	0 n = 6	NA	NA	0.119 n = 6	0.0913 n = 6	N	0.059 (t-test)	1.103 n = 6	0.964 n = 6	N	0.256 (t-test)
Depth 26-51	0 n = 8	0 n = 6	NA	NA	0.109 n = 8	0.0987 n = 6	N	0.303 (t-test)	1.131 n = 8	0.879 n = 6	Y	<0.001 (t-test)
Depth 52-80	0 n = 2	0.5043 n = 6	NA	NA	0.114 n = 2	0.112 n = 6	NA	NA	1.27 n = 2	1.244 n = 6	NA	NA
Depth 81-105	2.654 n = 6	0.528 n = 5	Y	<0.001 (t-test)	0.183 n = 6	0.121 n = 5	Y	0.002 (t-test)	2.071 n = 6	1.265 n = 5	Y	<0.001 (t-test)
Depth 106-157	12.379 n = 6	6.454 n = 5	Y	<0.001 (t-test)	0.713 n = 6	0.380 n = 5	NA	NA	4.827 n = 6	2.436 n = 5	Y	<0.001 (t-test)
Depth 158-202	17.932 n = 2	12.588 n = 4	NA	NA	1.254 n = 2	0.909 n = 4	NA	NA	8.666 n = 2	5.403 n = 4	NA	NA

Supplementary Table 3

Site – Date of sampling	GC600 - June 2012		GC600 - Sept 2012		GC600 - June 2013	
	B	S	B	S	B	S
Sample size (n)	190	1665	179	1250	154	3759
Mean (mg.m ⁻³)	0.0658	0.0629	0.0303	0.0397	0.0429	0.147
% increase in Mean		-4.41		31.02		242.66
Std. Dev. (mg.m ⁻³)	0.0147	0.0188	0.0075	0.0241	0.0070	0.0108
Variance	0.0002	0.0004	0.0001	0.0006	0.0001	0.0001
Median (mg.m ⁻³)	0.0628	0.0606	0.0300	0.0370	0.0414	0.1460
% increase in Median		-3.50		23.33		252.66
Min. (mg.m ⁻³)	0.0483	0.0334	0.0173	0.0186	0.0320	0.1240
Max. (mg.m ⁻³)	0.2200	0.3900	0.0694	0.7040	0.0744	0.2820
% increase in max.		77.27		914.41		279.03
Skewness	6.662	6.488	1.381	18.526	2.002	2.248
Kurtosis	64.407	91.145	4.442	476.413	5.928	16.557
P-value (when compared with B)		P <0.001		P <0.001		P <0.001

B = background
S = seep

Supplementary Figure 1

