



## BP owes us more money

Jim Ash • News Journal Capital Bureau •  
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TALLAHASSEE — It's too early to calculate all the losses, but the BP oil spill was more damaging to Northwest Florida than the oil giant is so far willing to admit, a University of West Florida economist suggested to a Senate panel on Tuesday.

In June and July, bed-tax revenues alone fell between 40 percent and 45 percent in Pensacola compared with the previous year, said Rick Harper, director of the university's Haas Center for Business Research and Economic Development.

Harper spoke to the Transportation, Tourism and Economic Development Appropriations Committee Tuesday.

During the same time, the Destin-Fort Walton Beach market suffered a 14 percent decline in the number of hotel rooms rented and an 8.5 percent drop in average daily room rates, Harper said.

BP officials said they are willing to compensate businesses based on a comparison from 2009 revenues, but that doesn't come close to what the actual losses are likely to be, Harper said.

Without an oil spill, Northwest Florida could have done better than the previous year as the economy slowly pulls out of a recession, Harper said.

"We are at the beginnings of a recovery," he said. "Tourism should be the sector that leads Florida out of the recession."

Myrtle Beach, S.C. saw tourism revenues rise 13 percent this summer, Harper said.

Harper said Florida should send damage estimates to the federal government as soon as possible to keep pace with other Gulf of Mexico states that will be competing for restoration dollars.

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