

HOUSTON, May 26 (Xinhua) -- A U.S. oil and gas company announced Thursday that it has completed the drilling phase of a deepwater well in the Gulf of Mexico, marking another milestone in the slow resumption of drilling in the Gulf after the BP oil spill.

ATP Oil & Gas Corporation has completed the drilling phase of deepwater Mississippi Canyon Block 941 A-2 well located at ATP's Telemark Hub, and affirmed pre-drill estimates of the pay sands, the Houston-based company said in a statement.

The company said its next step is to "run casing to total depth, install temporary barriers in the well permitting removal of the drilling riser and installation of the production riser." First production is expected in the early part of the third quarter.

ATP was the first Gulf of Mexico operator to begin drilling in the deepwater after the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE) began issuing permits.

BOEMRE has approved 37 permits for 14 unique deep water wells.

A temporary deep-water drilling ban was put in place shortly after the outbreak of the BP oil spill last April, idling companies operating in the Gulf of Mexico region. Though the U.S. government lifted the ban on Oct. 12, oil companies were asked to meet more stringent safety requirements before they got drilling permits.