U.S. Department of the Interior

Deepwater Horizon - Recovering the Gulf Coast

Overview

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) Southeast Region serves as the lead for the Department of the Interior's (DOI) work on an extensive Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR) effort in the Gulf of Mexico in response to the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill that leaked nearly five million barrels of oil into the Gulf.

DOI serves as both the Federal Lead Administrative Trustee (FLAT) and the Lead Administrative Trustee (LAT) for this NRDAR effort to restore the Gulf Coast's natural resources injured by the spill. DOI also chairs both the Restoration and Legal Sub-committees for the Trustee Council.

Resource Facts and Figures

- The DOI manages more than 45 national wildlife refuges (NWRs) and eight national parks across the Gulf Coast region including about 3.5 million acres of freshwater, tidal, and terrestrial habitats.
- The Gulf Coast Region is home to 38 Federally-protected species – 29 of which are endangered.
- Nearly half of the southeastern population of brown pelicans lives on the northern Gulf Coast.
- One in three royal terns make their home in habitats along the northern Gulf Coast as well.
- The coastal wetlands and marshes of the Gulf Coast Region provide vital wintering habitat for millions of migratory birds.
- There are more than 400 avian species that migrate, winter, or live along the Gulf Coast.
- 2010 sea turtle nesting surveys found 5,739 nests (green, loggerhead and leatherback) along 425 miles of the northern Gulf Coast.

Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, by Alabama Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit

- From 2007 to 2009, more than 75 percent of the total U.S. shrimp landings and over 60 percent of oyster landings were from the Gulf of Mexico.
- More than 44 percent of all marine fish caught by recreational anglers in the U.S. in 2009 were from the Gulf of Mexico.
- The Gulf and its natural resources produce 30 percent of the nation's Gross Domestic Product; and 33 percent of the nation's seafood.
- Crude oil production is over 1.6 million barrels per day in the federal waters of the Gulf and is 54 percent of total U.S. production based on a three-year average from 2008 to 2010.
- 52 percent of total U.S. natural gas production comes from the Gulf based on a three-year average from 2007 to 2009.
- Parts or all of 31 states and two Canadian provinces drain into the Mississippi River totaling 41 percent of the contiguous United States.

Demographics

- The Gulf Coast region's population in 2010 was 20.9 million, 37 percent of the Gulf States' population lives in the Gulf Coast region, which amounts to 25 percent of the land area of those states.
- The Gulf Coast region's population has increased by 10.9 million since 1970, an increase of 109 percent, compared with a 52 percent increase in the U.S. population over that same period.
- The Gulf Coast region's population is expected to increase by 15 percent by 2020.
- Recreational and commercial fishing is a multi-billion dollar industry critical to the economies of the states and the nation.
- Revenue from fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing in the Gulf region's states topped $22 billion, according to a national survey of wildlife-dependent recreation.

Key Habitats and Ecosystems on the Gulf Coast

The Gulf of Mexico region boasts a wide range of ecosystems with unique features and habitats, and Gulf waters are home to a rich diversity of species. Its coastal areas contain half of the coastal wetlands in the United States. Habitats associated with the Gulf of Mexico include barrier islands with sandy beaches, dunes and tidal flats; bays and estuaries with emergent marsh, seagrasses and oyster reefs; coastal bird nesting islands; forested wetlands and coastal woodlots including bottomland hardwoods, longleaf pine, and coastal shrublands. Offshore deep water supports unique and biologically rich marine communities such as dense communities of corals, sponges and other invertebrates.

The BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill – Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration

The NRDAR effort quantifies the injuries caused by the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill to natural resources, and determines the restoration needed to return those resources to pre-spill conditions. The Service's Southeast Regional Director represents DOI as its Authorized Official on the seven-member Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment Trustee Council, which also includes representatives from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and five Gulf Coast states: Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas.

Under NRDAR, the Trustees have responsibility for not only assessing injury, but also for developing a restoration plan that will return the Gulf of Mexico to its pre-spill condition.

DOI staff is actively engaged with fellow Trustees in the injury assessment phase, a complex, science-based process that seeks to establish the types and magnitudes of injury to natural resources and human use of those resources. Injury assessment studies are designed and results are analyzed by specialized technical working groups (TWGs), on which many DOI staff serve. Injury assessment studies and the work of the TWGs are critical to determining the compensation required of responsible parties.

On April 21, 2011, BP agreed to provide up to $1 billion toward early restoration in the Gulf of Mexico to address injuries caused by the oil spill. This agreement allowed restoration to begin prior to completion of the entire injury assessment.

The Service led the Trustees' effort to develop the Phase I Early Restoration Plan, which was completed on April 18, 2012. The Service also managed the public notice, comment and meeting activities associated with the draft Phase I Plan.

The $62 million Phase I Early Restoration Plan includes eight projects, two in each of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The Service is the lead implementing agency on one of the projects - the Alabama Dune Restoration Project, which will involve lands within Bon Secour NWR.

In addition to the Region's leadership on the NRDAR effort, its employees play a key role representing the Service on the more broadly focused Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force.

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force

The Task Force's primary purpose is to support and coordinate efforts of Gulf Coast states, the federal government, tribes and local governments to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of Gulf Coast ecosystem restoration actions. The Task Force released the Gulf of Mexico Regional Ecosystem Restoration Strategy in December 2011. The Strategy is the result of a collaborative effort among five Gulf coast states and 11 federal agencies including the DoI. It incorporates significant input from field staff, academics, non-profit partners, industry, and the public.

The Region worked to ensure the Strategy addressed critical conservation and restoration issues facing the fish and wildlife resources it works with others to conserve in the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem. The Strategy outlines four goals for restoration across the region: Restore and Conserve Habitat; Restore Water Quality; Replenish and Protect Living Coastal and Marine Resources; and Enhance Community Resilience.

The Spill Response

The DOI continues to work with the U.S. Coast Guard, state, local, other federal agencies and organizations, and BP to limit the damage to the Gulf of Mexico's marine and coastal ecosystems from the spill and associated response activities. DOI's response activities, led by the Service, began within hours of the incident, and today roughly 60 full-time DOI employees are still working to ensure all cleanup activities are conducted in a way that avoids or minimizes collateral impacts to fish and wildlife resources. Approximately 1,070 miles of shoreline in the area of response received some degree of oiling— roughly 275 miles of which were the DOI lands.

Internet Resources

DOI's work on Deepwater Horizon response and NRDAR:
www.doi.gov/deepwaterhorizon/

NOAA's NRDAR Restoration planning and early restoration:
www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force:
www.epa.gov/gulfcoasttaskforce

September 2012