NOAA FISHERIES

Office of Habitat Conservation

Habitat Restoration to Recover Injured Resources

The NOAA Restoration Center, housed within the Office of Habitat Conservation in NOAA Fisheries, invests in habitat restoration across the country where our fisheries need it most.

The Restoration Center is NOAA's only office solely devoted to restoring the nation's coastal, marine, and migratory fish habitat.

With our national network of partners, we leverage funding and develop high-quality restoration projects within four primary areas:

1. *Recovering threatened and endangered species.*
2. *Sustaining fisheries.*
3. ***Reversing the damage from oil spills and toxic releases.***
4. *Strengthening the resilience of coastal communities and ecosystems.*

Our Work Reversing Damage from Oil Spills and Toxic Releases

NOAA acts as a steward for the nation's coastal and marine resources to protect and restore natural resources damaged by environmental harm, such as oil spills, hazardous waste releases, and ship groundings.

Through the legal process for restoring injured resources—known as the Natural Resources Damage Assessment process, or NRDA—NOAA works alongside other natural resource trustees to review oil spill, hazardous waste, and ship grounding incidents; clean up contaminants; and restore habitats, fisheries, and other natural resources.

Within NOAA's Damage Assessment, Remediation, and Restoration Program (DARRP), the Restoration Center helps develop and implement plans to restore fisheries and the habitats they depend on to the condition they were in before they were damaged—and helps hold polluters accountable for the costs of restoration.

Outside of the NRDA process, we also assist in restoring injured resources in some of the most polluted areas of the Great Lakes region through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

By restoring damaged habitats and fisheries, we protect the economic, social, and cultural benefits that communities receive from those resources: tourism, fishing and boating, jobs, flood protection, property values, quality of life, and more.

Example Projects

New Bedford Harbor Restoration – Massachusetts

- Between the 1940s and 1970s, industrial manufacturers in southeastern Massachusetts discharged waste containing polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and toxic metals into New Bedford Harbor, contaminating the water, sediment, plants, and wildlife. One location in the harbor contained the highest concentrations of PCBs ever documented in a marine environment.
- In 1992, the New Bedford Harbor Trustee Council—made up of NOAA, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—reached a $20 million settlement with the responsible polluters to restore natural resources that were lost, injured, or destroyed by the contamination.
- Since 1998, we've worked with the other members of the Trustee Council to implement 37 restoration projects in and around the harbor, helping to restore salt marshes, eelgrass beds, and other habitat for fish and wildlife. In addition to habitat restoration and conservation, we've supported projects that provide access to and recreational use of the harbor, including the construction of several community parks.

Deepwater Horizon Restoration – Gulf of Mexico Region

- In 2010, the historic *Deepwater Horizon* incident spilled 134 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico—the largest offshore oil spill in our nation's history. The spill caused extensive damage in coastal and offshore waters from Texas to Florida, negatively impacting a wide range of wildlife and habitats, as well as commercial and recreational opportunities like fishing, boating, and beach access.
- After assessing how the spill impacted the Gulf's natural resources, NOAA and the rest of the *Deepwater Horizon* Trustee Council developed a comprehensive plan allocating up to $8.8 billion for restoration. Goals of this plan include conservation and restoration of habitat, water quality, living resources, and recreational opportunities, as well as monitoring and adaptive management.
- Our *Deepwater Horizon* Program team assists with restoration projects focused in the Gulf region, working alongside other Trustees to support coastal and marine resource projects within seven restoration areas: Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, region-wide, and the open ocean.

Muskegon Lake Habitat Restoration – Michigan

- As the largest freshwater system on Earth, the Great Lakes are one of our nation's most important natural resources. However, the region faces many environmental threats, including pollution from oil spills and industrial waste. Muskegon Lake in Michigan, for example, served for decades as a dumping ground for pollution from foundries and paper mills.
- In 1987, Muskegon Lake was listed as a Great Lakes Area of Concern, one of 43 "toxic hot spots" in the United States and Canada. Areas of Concern are designated based on a list of beneficial use impairments, which indicate how a waterway's poor health is affecting the environment, human health, and the economy.
- Since 2010, we've worked with our partners through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to restore Great Lakes Areas of Concern in the United States. We've helped fund numerous projects to restore habitat in and around Muskegon Lake by removing debris, restoring wetlands, and reopening migration routes to fish.
- Results of a NOAA-funded socioeconomic study demonstrate that our funds invested in Muskegon Lake restoration produced a 6-to-1 return to the local economy. Our work has served as a model throughout the region of how to engage the community and work with partners.

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