



NEWS RELEASE FROM

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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NOAA AND FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION SUBMIT \$2.2 MILLION CLAIM FOR SOUTH FLORIDA OIL SPILL

Today the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) presented a claim to the federal Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund (Fund) for \$2.2 million to restore beaches and marine habitat damaged by an oil spill near Fort Lauderdale, Fla., in August 2000. This is the first time NOAA has presented a natural resource damage claim with no identifiable responsible party. Payment for this claim will be handled through the U.S. Coast Guard's National Pollution Funds Center (NPFC).

In August 2000, oil tar balls and oil mats began to appear on beaches near Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Over the next few days, approximately twenty miles of high-use recreational beaches, from North Miami Beach northward to near Pompano Beach, were oiled and required cleaning. While the majority of oil along the shoreline was removed within a few days, natural resources were impacted, including threatened and endangered sea turtles and their habitats, fish, birds, plus the recreational use of the beaches.

Under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, the party responsible for a discharge of oil is responsible for natural resource damages that result from the incident. However, in this case, in spite of an exhaustive search the responsible party was never discovered. In the absence of a known responsible party, natural resource damage claims may be submitted to the Fund for payment. The primary source of revenue for the Fund is a five cents per barrel fee on imported and domestic oil. Other revenue sources include interest on the fund, cost recovery from parties responsible for the spills, and any fines or civil penalties collected for oil spills.

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“This scenario – one where a responsible party can’t be identified – is one of the reasons the fund was created,” said James Walpole, general counsel for NOAA. “Our claim will ensure the natural resources adversely affected by this spill are restored and will improve the quality of the beach experience for visitors and residents in the Fort Lauderdale area.”

For this oil spill, NOAA and Florida DEP are the natural resource trustees with responsibilities for; assessing the nature, extent and severity of natural resource injuries; planning for appropriate restoration projects; preparing draft and final restoration plans; and implementing restoration. In the assessment report the agencies describe the process that was used to assess resource and service losses attributable to the spill and recommended restoration actions. Quantitative estimates were made for four main categories of injuries: recreational beach losses; sea turtles, water column injuries to fish and invertebrates, and seabirds.

“Our active partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration will lead to the completion of some very worthwhile projects in the areas impacted by the spill,” said DEP Division of Law Enforcement Director Thomas S. Tramel. NOAA and Florida DEP are proposing to create dunes, construct dune walkovers, provide beach access for handicapped individuals, and provide shade areas in Broward County.”

Additional restoration projects include:

- augmenting lighting ordinance enforcement activities in Brevard and Palm Beach Counties to reduce the mortality of turtle hatchlings due to disorientation;
- planting mangroves on Virginia Key that will create new habitat for fish and invertebrates; and
- installing educational signs at the Dania Beach pier to protect birds by preventing entanglement and providing seabird rescue.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation’s coastal and marine resources.

For more information online please visit:

NOAA - <http://www.noaa.gov>

Assessment report - <http://www.darp.noaa.gov>

Florida Department of Environmental Protection - <http://www.dep.state.fl.us>