



## *Deepwater Horizon* Natural Resource Damage Assessment

### ***Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill Natural Resource Trustees Approve Two More Early Restoration Projects for Gulf Coast**

#### ***Projects in Florida, Alabama and Mississippi will help beach-nesting birds and sea turtles***

**GULF COAST (Friday, Dec. 21, 2012)** – Additional early restoration projects totaling about \$9 million will begin along the Gulf Coast in 2013, according to the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) trustees (trustees).

Following a 30-day public comment period on the “*Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill Phase II Early Restoration Plan & Environmental Review” (Phase II), the NRDA trustees have finalized plans allowing for the initiation of two additional early restoration projects. These Phase II projects will help restore nesting habitats for beach-nesting birds and sea turtles impacted as a result of *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill response activities.

The Phase II projects, which are located within the Florida panhandle, state and federal lands in Alabama, and federal lands in Mississippi, were the focus of a public meeting held in Pensacola, Fla. on Nov. 13, 2012. During the comment period, more than 1,000 individuals and organizations submitted comments, which the NRDA trustees carefully considered. The comments, as well as the trustees’ responses to those comments, are included in the final Phase II plan, which can be viewed at [www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov](http://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov) and [www.doi.gov/deepwaterhorizon](http://www.doi.gov/deepwaterhorizon) or at repositories located in communities throughout the Gulf Region. A [list](#) of the repository locations is located online.

These two newly approved projects, described below, are planned to be implemented prior to the spring 2013 nesting season.

- **Enhanced Management of Avian Breeding Habitat Injuries by Response in the Florida Panhandle, Alabama and Mississippi.** This project will protect nesting habitat for beach-nesting birds from disturbance in order to restore habitat impaired by disturbance from oil spill response activities. It is to be conducted on sandy beaches in Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Bay, Gulf, and Franklin counties, Florida; Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Baldwin and Mobile counties, Alabama; and the Gulf Islands National Seashore (GUIS) – Mississippi District.
- **Improving Habitat Injured by Spill Response: Restoring the Night Sky.** This project will reduce artificial lighting impacts on nesting habitat for sea turtles, specifically loggerhead turtles, to restore habitat impaired by disturbance from oil spill response activities. It is being conducted on Gulf State Park in Baldwin County, Alabama; and in Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Bay, Gulf, and Franklin counties, Florida.

Phase II is the second phase of early restoration developed by the NRDA trustees under the April 2011 Framework for Early Restoration Addressing Injuries Resulting from the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill (Framework Agreement) with BP to fund \$1 billion in NRDA early restoration projects.

Early restoration projects represent an initial step toward fulfilling the responsible parties’ obligation to fund the complete restoration of injured natural resources and the services they provide. Early restoration provides an opportunity to implement restoration projects agreed upon by the NRDA trustees and BP under the Framework Agreement prior to the completion of the NRDA. The damage assessment continues and currently approved early restoration projects are being implemented while additional early restoration planning is under way. BP and other responsible parties are obligated to compensate the public for the full scope of the natural resource injury caused by the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, including the cost of assessing such injury and planning for restoration.

Eight early restoration projects are already in various stages of implementation as part of [Phase I](#) of early restoration under the Framework Agreement. Updates on the eight Phase I projects are available at [www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov](http://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov).

“These additional projects are important steps in recovering from the oil spill, but they, along with the other Phase I projects, are just first steps,” said Trudy D. Fisher, Chair of the NRDA Trustee Council and Mississippi’s trustee. “Use of the early restoration funding has not moved quickly enough to suit any of us. I want to stress that the NRDA trustees are working hard to see that restoration funding is used in a way that is in the best interest of our natural resources.”

“The Phase II projects were selected at this time to allow their implementation prior to this spring’s nesting seasons for sea turtles and beach-nesting birds,” said Rachel Jacobson, the Department of the Interior’s Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. “We greatly appreciate both the public’s engagement in this process and their support for these projects. Implementing projects as quickly as possible will benefit our precious natural resources, the uses they support and the local economy to which they are linked.”

“I appreciate the overwhelming support we have received from the public for these projects which go to the heart of the spill impact on nesting birds and sea turtles,” said Florida trustee representative Mimi A. Drew, special advisor to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Herschel T. Vinyard, Jr. “My fellow trustees worked hard with us to ensure project approval in time for the 2013 nesting season.”

“These projects will continue the process of restoring Alabama’s unique coastal resources from injuries sustained by the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. We look forward to initiating these projects quickly in order to take advantage of the upcoming nesting seasons,” said N. Gunter Guy, Jr., Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

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### ***Media Contacts***

Department of the Interior: Nanciann Regalado, 678.296.6805, [nanciann\\_regalado@fws.gov](mailto:nanciann_regalado@fws.gov)

NOAA: Tim Zink, 206.402.2059, [tim.zink@noaa.gov](mailto:tim.zink@noaa.gov)

Alabama: Patti Powell, 334.242.3484, [Patti.Powell@dcnr.alabama.gov](mailto:Patti.Powell@dcnr.alabama.gov)

Florida: Kendra Parson, 850.245.2089, [kendra.parson@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:kendra.parson@dep.state.fl.us)

Louisiana: Olivia Watkins, 225.241.5707, [Olivia.Watkins@LA.GOV](mailto:Olivia.Watkins@LA.GOV)

Mississippi: Donna Lum, 601.948.3071, [donna.lum@neel-schaffer.com](mailto:donna.lum@neel-schaffer.com)

Texas: Tom Harvey, 512.389.4453, [Tom.Harvey@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:Tom.Harvey@tpwd.state.tx.us)