

Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group Draft Restoration Plan 2 and Environmental Assessment: Fish, Sea Turtles, Marine Mammals, and Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities

Public Webinars: June 11, 2019 and June 13, 2019.

The following is a summary of questions and responses provided during both the June 11 and June 13 webinars.

Question read by Stephen Heverly: Folks are wondering if any of these opportunities appear as a Request for a Proposals or an RFP under NOAA Protech (Fisheries or Oceans), and those are probably some contracting ways, mechanisms, for folks to participate in.

Answered by Laurie Rounds: Thank you Stephen and it's a great comment. As I mentioned, we have our comment period on the draft restoration plan and the proposed projects through July 1st. Following that comment period, the Trustees will consider all of the input that we receive and incorporate comments and finalize the restoration plan. That will include selecting the projects as final and then we will move into the implementation stage. It's during that stage that the Trustees identify the most effective mechanisms that we can use to implement projects. Many times that can range and it will depend on the specific project so it can include various mechanisms, including those in the question, that the lead implementing Trustee may have in place such as contracting mechanisms. But it really is going to be based on each project and the most effective mechanism to achieve the goals of that particular project. There will be multiple ways in which we implement these projects as effectively as possible. Thank you very much for your question.

Question read by Stephen Heverly: How will projects be directly funded where stakeholders can monitor project activities over the duration of the projects?

Answered by Laurie Rounds: Another great question and thank you very much. As we move into implementation of a project, all of the projects that are going to be finally selected in the final restoration plan, will be available on our Deepwater Horizon project website, and we will provide information about all the project activities being implemented including annual reports on the progress that we're making for each of those projects. That is an easy way in which stakeholders can go and get more information about the projects that ultimately do get selected and move towards implementation. For all of these projects also I wanted to point out that each of these do have a monitoring and adaptive management plan associated with them. Those are included in the appendices for the draft restoration plan. All of those monitoring and adaptive management plans provide information about the types of data that the Trustee will use to help monitor our progress, and if need be to make corrective actions to make sure that we achieve the goals for each of those projects. Those are a couple ways that you can take a look at the monitoring and adaptive management plans that are being proposed right now and then once the final projects are selected and begin implementation you can access that information from our Gulf Spill Restoration website. Thank you very much for your question.

Stephen Heverly added: Thank you Laurie and that is a great reminder. The Trustees throughout the Deepwater Horizon restoration program just released the annual reports for all the ongoing activities and projects and those are available on the Gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov website.

Question read by Stephen Heverly: In regards to the project named “Reducing Impacts to Cetaceans during Disasters by Improving Response Activities by Improving Response Activities” -- it sounds like the current project focuses on identifying gaps, probably information gaps. Will the funds outlined in this plan also be used for implementation or would future funds be used for future plans?

Answered by Laura Engleby: Thanks. So that is exactly right. The project does focus on identifying gaps. Some of the funds will be used for implementing certain outcomes from those gap analyses, but this project is also meant to leverage with existing activities and training networks that are supported along the Gulf by the states and through other means, and certainly continued implementation could be considered in future plans as well. Thanks for the question.

Question read by Stephen Heverly: How will marine mammals that were injured in nearshore waters be addressed through what restoration planning process?

Answered by Laurie Rounds: Thank you very much. As we described earlier, the injury to marine mammals was quite extensive by the oil spill. The allocation to marine mammals was distributed across the Trustee Implementation Groups based on the type of injury that occurred to marine mammals. That was developed to have those Trustee Implementation Groups focus on the injury that is most applicable to their restoration area. So, the allocation for marine mammals was distributed across the other Trustee Implementation Groups such as other state restoration areas as well as the Region-wide Trustee Implementation Group, and obviously as we were talking about today, the Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group. Collectively, the Trustees do look at the injury across the Gulf; they look at the injury and the allocation across the Trustee Implementation Groups and look to address the injury in the most appropriate way through our Trustee Implementation Groups. For the question of nearshore waters, those may be addressed through a very similar planning process to what we’re going through today through another Trustee Implementation Group. The Trustee Implementation Group would identify interest in collecting project ideas for how to restore marine mammals in the nearshore environment, review those project ideas, and develop a draft restoration plan for public comment. A very similar process across Trustee Implementation Groups and again, collectively looking at the injury to marine mammals and the most appropriate place to be able to restore for that injury. Thank you very much for your question.

Question read by Stephen Heverly: Bycatch of marine mammals is a direct threat and how will marine mammal bycatch be addressed?

Answered by Laura Engleby: Thanks. This is a really important question. As it says in the PDARP and our strategic framework, certainly bycatch in commercial fisheries is a significant threat particularly to bay, estuarine and coastal cetaceans. This restoration plan is focused on, and the Trustees made the decision

to focus on the continental and oceanic species of marine mammals, and those species typically interact primarily with the pelagic longline fishery. With a significant amount of observer coverage in the Gulf of Mexico portion of that fishery, there has been very limited bycatch in that particular fishery. For those species, that fishery isn't as significant a threat as in other fisheries such as the shrimp, menhaden, gillnets and crab pots, and things like that. So, basically the idea is that this plan is focused on oceanic and continental shelf species and on the threats to them. For addressing the important issue of bycatch reduction, the thought is to look towards working collectively and collaboratively through the Region-wide process, and working with states to address those coastal and nearshore fisheries that have a direct impact on those coastal and nearshore species. Thanks for the question.

Question read by Stephen Heverly: For the CETACEAN project platform -- once completed would the platform be accessible to the public? Is the goal to have near real-time data house there?

Answered by Laura Engleby: Thanks so much. This project is still in planning, and the goal is to make it accessible to a variety of stakeholders and that would include the public. The types of data collected haven't been fully established, but there's certainly the possibility of near real time data being available in the future. All of those things haven't been fully fleshed out at this point in time. Thank you.