

# ASSESSING THE IMPACTS OF OIL: NEXT STEPS

**O**n April 20, 2010, the Deepwater Horizon offshore drilling unit exploded. Eleven workers tragically lost their lives, and an oil release of unprecedented magnitude began flowing into the Gulf of Mexico. These events set in motion a process known as a Natural Resource Damage Assessment, or NRDA.

## Resources at Risk

Oil in and on the water can impact resources—from the microscopic organisms that form the basis of the oceanic food web, to fish, shellfish, turtles, marine mammals, birds, oysters, wetlands, coastal wildlife, corals, and other deepwater communities. As oil approaches shorelines, it can imperil sensitive nearshore resources, including oyster beds, aquatic vegetation, and corals. When it reaches land, oil can severely impact marshes, mudflats, mangrove stands, and sandy beaches.

*\*Trustees for the Deepwater BP oil spill include representatives from the Department of Commerce, the Department of the Interior, Department of Defense, and the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Texas.*

Species that use these habitats—such as crabs, shrimp, birds, turtles, and marine mammals—also are at risk.

The trustees\*, state and federal partners working together, are gauging the damage to these resources and the lost human uses of them, such as fishing, hunting, boating, and beach closures.

## Assessment Activities

The trustees are in the *injury assessment and restoration planning phase* of the NRDA process. We are conducting scientific and economic studies to assess and quantify injuries and lost services, and will develop a restoration plan or series of plans to identify potential projects to implement during the *restoration phase*. In addition, the trustees are working with the public and the parties responsible for the spill to identify projects for implementation and monitoring.

## Public Involvement

Because the NRDA is a legal process, use of volunteers in the assessment process is challenging. During restoration planning, however, there will be opportunities for the public to:

- Assist in identifying a general range of potential restoration types.
- Propose specific project ideas.



## Public Involvement (cont.)

Restoration implementation also may provide opportunities for the public to:

- Volunteer during implementation or monitoring of restoration projects.
- Act as stewards of restoration projects for the future.

## More Information

The following resources are available online:

- [www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov](http://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov)  
The latest information about the NRDA, including preassessment and sampling plans.

- [www.doi.gov/deepwaterhorizon](http://www.doi.gov/deepwaterhorizon)  
Information about the response and damage assessment, including the Administrative Record Index for the NRDA.
- <http://restoration.doi.gov>  
Information on the Department of the Interior's program to restore damage from oil spills and toxic releases.
- [www.restorethegulf.gov](http://www.restorethegulf.gov)  
The official federal portal for the BP oil spill response and recovery.
- [www.geoplatform.gov/gulfresponse](http://www.geoplatform.gov/gulfresponse)  
A one-stop shop for information on the data being collected by the NRDA.



## ASSESSMENT SCIENCE - March 2011

- Damage assessment teams have collected about 29,000 total NRDA samples from southeast Florida to the Texas-Mexico border.
- Our laboratories have completed and validated more than 13,600 analyses on those samples.
- Teams have surveyed more than 4,250 linear miles of shoreline to collect data on the degree and extent of habitat oiling.
- During the course of the spill, oil has been detected on more than 1,050 linear miles of shoreline; teams are reporting that 66 miles of shoreline currently remain heavily or moderately oiled.
- Since the spill's first days, teams have conducted surveys on broad range of marine mammals, turtles, birds and coastal wildlife.

