

October 2021 Open Ocean TIG Script and Q&A Session

October 28, 2021 Webinar – Presentation Script

Slide 1: Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group

Speaker: no speaking

Message in the Chat: Welcome to the Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group’s webinar. We will begin shortly.

Slide 2. Webinar Participation

Speaker: Stephen Heverly

Thank you everyone for joining today’s Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group webinar. I’m Stephen Heverly, a contractor with NOAA’s Restoration Center in the Office of Habitat Conservation. I’m helping facilitate the webinar today.

Before we begin the presentations, I’d like to quickly run through some webinar logistics with you. Hopefully everyone’s logged in to the webinar by now. You should be able to see the control panel on the right-hand side of your screen – which is shown on this slide.

If you’re using a phone for audio, you should all be dialing in using the phone number provided by GoToWebinar—that’s the number and access code listed under “Audio” in the control panel. Please note that only presenters will be heard over the phone during the webinar; attendees will be muted.

Please also look at the “Questions” box at the bottom of the control panel – where the green and blue arrow is pointing. If you have questions about the presentation topics along the way, we encourage you to enter those in the “Questions” box at any time. Although, you’ll also have an opportunity to submit questions at the end of the presentation, if you plug them in early, it can help us organize them ahead of time.

After our presentation, we’ll answer as many questions as we can in the time allotted.

We’ll also post the presentation slides and a transcript of the webinar to the GulfSpillRestoration.noaa.gov website in a few days.

Finally, to help you get the more acquainted with the Open Ocean Restoration Area, we’re going to send a link in the chat that’ll take you to the restoration area webpage that lists all the projects and plans approved as of earlier this year. And, we’ll also add a link to a fact sheet you can refer to in the chat. There are a lot of projects we’ll be talking about today – you can find detailed info about all of them at that web page and a list of all our projects on the fact sheet.

Now to Treda Grayson to go through our agenda for today.

Links Provided in the Chat:

1. Open Ocean Restoration Area webpage:
<http://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/restoration-areas/open-ocean/>
2. Open Ocean projects fact sheet:
https://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-06%20FINAL_OO%20TIG%20Factsheet%202021_508.pdf

Slide 3. Webinar Overview

Speaker: Treda Grayson

Thank you, Stephen, and thank you everyone for joining today's Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group webinar. I'm Treda Grayson with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

We're happy to have over 100 people joining us today. During today's webinar we'll provide information about restoration for the Deepwater Horizon Open Ocean Restoration Area, and we'll share progress on Open Ocean restoration planning. You'll also hear from several of our restoration project managers who will share highlights from our Open Ocean projects. We will conclude the annual meeting with a Question-and-Answer session. Following the annual meeting, we will hold a special session focused on our restoration work for Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities. The special session will provide highlights of the progress made on the four restoration projects approved in our 2019 restoration plan. There will be an opportunity to ask questions as well.

Slide 4. Open Ocean Trustee Representatives

Speaker: Treda Grayson

I'd like to introduce the members of the Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group, which are shown on this slide. The Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group, referred to as a TIG, is one of seven Gulf of Mexico Restoration Areas established to conduct restoration for the Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment. The four federal natural resource trustees are the members of this TIG, and we work together to plan and implement restoration for the Open Ocean resources injured by the 2010 BP oil spill. All of our work is consistent with the programmatic restoration plan finalized by the Trustee Council in April 2016. The Open Ocean TIG also coordinates with the five Gulf state trustees, especially when restoration overlaps state jurisdictions.

Slide 5. Restoration Funding

Speaker: Treda Grayson

The Open Ocean TIG will receive a total allocation of \$1.2 billion dollars in settlement funds that will be received through annual payments over the life of the program. The allocation includes funds to restore for the injury to fish and water column invertebrates, sturgeon, sea turtles, marine mammals, birds, mesophotic and deep benthic communities and lost recreational uses. The allocation also includes funds to support monitoring and adaptive management and case-wide comprehensive planning and oversight by the federal trustees.

As of April 2021, the Open Ocean TIG has received over \$365 million in payments, which is approximately 27% of the total allocation. These funds are being used to implement and monitor early and post-settlement restoration projects across all restoration types and to conduct monitoring and adaptive management activities, strategic restoration planning and public engagement.

Over the remaining 10 years of payments, the Open Ocean Restoration Area will receive almost \$603 million of our allocation for restoration and almost \$192 million for monitoring and adaptive management. Therefore, the Open Ocean Trustees continue to plan strategically to achieve our restoration goals and conduct monitoring and adaptive management over the life of the program.

Next, Laurie Rounds with NOAA will provide updates on the TIG's activities.

Links Provided in the Chat

1. OO TIG financial table handout from TC annual meeting:
https://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-06%20FINAL_OO%20TIG%20Funding%20Chart%20Handout_508.pdf

Slide 6. Over \$290M for Open Ocean Restoration

Speaker: Laurie Rounds

Thank you Treda. I'm Laurie Rounds and I serve as NOAA's representative for the Open Ocean TIG.

As Treda mentioned, the TIG has received about 27% of the total Open Ocean allocation. Of that, the Trustees have committed over \$290 million of the allocation to restoration projects and monitoring activities. These funds have been committed, however it's important to note that the funds have not all been spent. Each project is in a different stage of implementation, including forming partnerships and establishing contracts or other agreements for implementation activities.

So, I'd like to provide a high-level overview of the status of our projects. Two of our early restoration projects to enhance recreational uses on federal lands have been completed and we are nearing completion of the two remaining projects that are enhancing recreation at Gulf

Islands National Seashore. We are also beginning our final year of implementation for the Early Restoration Project to Restore Oceanic Fish, which has been implemented through a partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. And we continue implementation for three Monitoring and Adaptive Management activities. Two of those activities focus on addressing data gaps for sturgeon and began implementation in early 2020. The third monitoring activity is focused on modelling cumulative impacts for marine mammals. This activity recently began its implementation activities.

The Trustees are also implementing the 21 projects approved in 2019 through our first two restoration plans. These projects commit over \$241 million to implement restoration for all six restoration types. The projects range from a 3-year project to protect sea turtle nesting habitat to projects implementing activities over the next 10 to 15 years. As Treda mentioned, we will highlight some of these restoration projects later in the presentation.

Slide 7. Monitoring & Adaptive Management

Speaker: Laurie Rounds

Next, I'd like to provide an update for some of the TIG's planning activities. In addition to restoration, important overarching goals for the Open Ocean Trustees are monitoring and adaptive management. This year, we focused on information needed to evaluate restoration progress, which is one of the three priorities identified in our Open Ocean Monitoring and Adaptive Management Strategy.

Our work for this priority began with resource experts for each restoration type working together to identify specific restoration objectives that focus on Open Ocean priorities for the broad restoration goals established in the Deepwater Horizon Programmatic Restoration Plan. We are also identifying objectives to help us consider the ecosystem-level injury caused by the oil spill. These more specific objectives will help the Trustees target future restoration efforts and assess restoration activities.

Our next steps through early 2022 are to refine these draft objectives. We will also identify measurable indicators that are sensitive to restoration actions and that will help us evaluate progress. Some examples of indicators that may be developed include abundance of focal species, metrics of productivity, and measures of habitat quality, as well as trends in these metrics.

Over the next year, the TIG will also develop additional monitoring and adaptive management activities focusing on the priorities and using the process identified in our Strategy. We will consider a range of activities to advance restoration planning, implementation, and evaluation, which may include compiling and evaluating data for selected indicators, assessing key data gaps, or conducting monitoring activities to address data gaps.

We will share the outcomes of this work through future webinars and on the Gulf spill restoration website.

Links Provided in the Chat:

1. Open Ocean MAM Strategy: <https://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/2020/06/initial-open-ocean-monitoring-and-adaptive-management-priorities-released>

Slide 8: Strategic Planning for Fish Restoration

Speaker: Laurie Rounds

One example of our work where we are developing restoration objectives is the strategic planning underway for the Fish and Water Column Invertebrates restoration type, which was announced in March. This strategy will inform priorities over multiple future restoration plans for the \$320 million allocation that remains for this restoration type. Like the Strategic Frameworks developed for other restoration types, the Fish and Water Column Invertebrates restoration strategy will also help promote information sharing and coordination across TIGs and with potential partners.

A team of subject matter experts is leading the TIG's efforts to develop a restoration strategy that prioritizes the hundreds of species injured by the oil spill and establishes restoration objectives that consider key ecological factors that affect restoration for the priority species. The team's work incorporates input received at four public meetings and stakeholder round-table meetings that were held between March and June this year. The input provided during these meetings helped to identify priority species, key threats, and opportunities for partnerships. We'd like to thank everyone that contributed their expertise and input during these meetings.

Strategic planning will continue through early 2022 and we look forward to sharing the results of this effort through the Gulf spill restoration website and future public webinars.

Next, Ashley Mills with the Department of the Interior will provide an update on the Trustees efforts for our third restoration plan.

Links Provided in the Chat:

FWCI Strategy Fact sheet link:

<https://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-3-5%20Open%20Ocean%20Fish%20Strategy%20Factsheet.pdf>

Slide 9: Restoration Plan 3 Priorities

Speaker: Ashley Mills

Thank you, Laurie. I'm Ashley Mills. I serve as DOI's Representative on the Open Ocean TIG.

I'll provide an update on the TIG's planning activities for our third restoration plan.

We began planning for our third restoration plan by releasing a call for Bird and Sturgeon restoration project ideas that ran from March 25th through May 10th of this year.

For birds, we requested project ideas that would help to address the injury to bird species that are unlikely to be addressed by other TIGs. Some seabird species in particular were heavily impacted in the open water, but these species rarely spend time in the Gulf states. Northern gannets and Audubon's shearwaters are just two examples. For sturgeon, we are interested to learn of any new restoration ideas or changes to previously submitted ideas.

A total of 76 project ideas were submitted or updated in response to our call for project ideas. Thank you to everyone who submitted restoration project ideas.

59 of those ideas are focused on birds and include activities to reduce predation on nesting seabirds, to re-establish breeding colonies, and to reduce bird mortality from threats such as fisheries bycatch. Geographic areas for project ideas range from Northeastern Canada and the U.S. to the Caribbean and South Atlantic.

Twelve project ideas were provided for sturgeon. Project ideas focus on restoring access to spawning habitat by removing in-stream barriers and projects that proposed additional monitoring and tracking of sturgeon throughout their range.

Slide 10: Restoration Plan 3 Next Steps

Speaker: Ashley Mills

Following the May 10th deadline, we began reviewing project ideas. We are applying a series of screening criteria to evaluate each idea for its benefits to injured bird or sturgeon resources, its technical feasibility, and several other factors. Once our review is complete, we'll work to further develop project ideas or combinations of ideas into project alternatives that will be included in a draft restoration plan. The draft restoration plan will be released for public review and comment. And we'll hold a public meeting during the comment period to present the range of projects in the draft plan and provide opportunities for public comment. We are anticipating that we'll have a Draft Restoration Plan out for public review around summer 2022.

After considering all public comments we receive, we'll finalize the plan and then project implementation can begin.

During and after implementation, the outcomes and progress of the restoration projects will be monitored and reported publicly.

Slide 11: Open Ocean Project Highlights

Speaker: Ashley Mills

So, now that we've provided updates on the TIGs restoration planning activities, we would like to provide updates on some of the projects we are currently implementing.

In the next several slides, we will highlight a project for each of our restoration types. We've asked the project managers for each of these projects to share some of their recent activities and to answer any questions you may have following the presentation.

Please refer to the fact sheet linked in the chat for information on all our projects. And if you have a question about any of projects, please enter your question into the Questions box in your control panel and we'll try to get to your question following the presentation.

Slide 12: Bike and Pedestrian Use Enhancements Project

Speaker: Ashley Mills

We'll begin project highlights with one of the Early Restoration projects.

The Open Ocean TIG is implementing a project at the Davis Bayou area of Gulf Islands National Seashore in Mississippi, to restore lost recreational opportunities by improving future visitor use and experiences. The project will improve the roadway to benefit bicyclists and pedestrians by widening the park road and adding multiple-use bicycle-pedestrian lanes on each side of the road. Traffic calming structures will also be added to the road.

The 100% design for the project was completed in January of this year. Originally, we had planned to make improvements to the entire 2.2-mile roadway, but the project budget was not sufficient to cover the entire length of the road. As a result, we have shortened the project to cover 1.8 miles of the road, the part shown in blue dots on the figure to the right.

The construction contract was awarded in August, and construction on this project will begin soon in November, to be completed in summer of 2022.

Slide 13: Restoring Common Loons

Speaker: Ashley Mills

Next, we'll provide an update on the Common Loon Restoration Project.

Beginning last year, the TIG has been implementing a project to restore common loons in Minnesota. Common loons were one of the bird species most injured by the Deepwater Horizon incident. Activities in the Minnesota project include acquiring and protecting loon breeding habitat, providing artificial nesting platforms for loons, engaging with lake associations to coordinate loon conservation activities, and reducing loon exposure to lead-based fishing tackle.

Today I'd like to provide some highlights about our activities to reduce loon exposure to lead-based fishing tackle through the "Get the Lead Out" program.

Through our partners at the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and Minnesota Green Corps, we've been doing a variety of outreach to anglers, fishing tackle retailers, and youth and school kids. At youth fishing clinics, summer camps, and other community events, we have distributed sample kits with lead-free tackle and provided opportunities for anglers to exchange their lead-based tackle for lead-free tackle.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency has a new social media strategist that is helping with the loon project and is using Facebook and Instagram to convey our Get the Lead Out message as well. The reach of those social media accounts has been terrific; Facebook reach has increased by 18,000 and Instagram has increased by almost 27,000.

Now I'd like to introduce Adam Kaeser with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the next project highlight.

Slide 14. Characterizing Gulf Sturgeon Spawning Habitat, Habitat Use and Origins of Juvenile Sturgeon in the Pearl and Pascagoula River Systems

Speaker: Adam Kaeser

Thank you, Ashley. I'm Adam Kaeser and I serve as the Recovery Coordinator for Gulf Sturgeon for the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Gulf Sturgeon is an anadromous species, migrating hundreds of kilometers from the Gulf in search of hard, rocky substrates required for successful spawning. In the case of the Pearl and Pascagoula river systems, several barriers exist that may impede access to spawning habitat, yet the location and extent of these habitats remains undetermined. Detecting spawning habitat is challenging in large, turbid rivers, but can be done at the landscape level using relatively new techniques that employ side scan sonar, a type of sonar that produces picture-like imagery of the underwater environment. One of the primary objectives of this project is to locate, map, and characterize spawning substrates over more than 1500 KM of river channel, thereby providing insights on whether spawning habitat is limited by existing barriers.

Slide 15. Characterizing Gulf Sturgeon Spawning Habitat, Habitat Use and Origins of Juvenile Sturgeon in the Pearl and Pascagoula River Systems

Speaker: Adam Kaeser

Mapping habitat features from side scan sonar data is currently a manual process that requires high-level expertise in sonar image interpretation and cartography. To accomplish our goals over the broad geographic extent of this project, we are employing a PhD student and other researchers to develop machine learning techniques that will instead automate the mapping process. These tools will be made freely available to the natural resource community through a program called PingMapper. Successful development of an automated approach to sonar habitat mapping represents a significant, breakthrough advance in this field, with applications that extend well beyond the identification of Gulf Sturgeon spawning substrates.

Now I'll turn it over to Laurie Rounds of NOAA for the next project highlight.

Slide 16. Better Bycatch Reduction Devices for the Gulf of Mexico Commercial Shrimp Trawl Fishery

Speaker: Laurie Rounds

Thank you, Adam. I'm going to tell you about one of the projects that we have coming online – the Better Bycatch Reduction Devices for the Gulf of Mexico Commercial Shrimp Trawl Fishery.

The objective of the project is to restore for fish species by reducing bycatch in the commercial shrimp trawl fishery by partnering with industry to identify, develop, test, and certify new bycatch reduction devices and get them in use in the fishery in an all-volunteer effort. Bycatch Reduction Devices, or B.R.D.s or BiRDs, are used in shrimp trawls to allow fish to escape from the nets and currently BRDs that are certified for use in the Gulf reduce bycatch by about 30%. But we know that there are new innovations in BRD technology that can reduce bycatch even more. We want to learn about these innovations, certify new BRDs, and get them in use in Gulf as restoration tool for fish.

Slide 17. Better Bycatch Reduction Devices for the Gulf of Mexico Commercial Shrimp Trawl Fishery

Speaker: Laurie Rounds

I want to tell you a little about the criteria for the new BRDs. Since this is an all-volunteer effort, these BRDs must provide benefit to the industry or we wouldn't have any volunteers.

So, the new BRDs must:

- Improve shrimp retention
- Must be simple to use
- Must be cost effective
- They must improve bycatch reduction
- Their use must be voluntary

The improved bycatch reduction is where we'll get the restoration benefit. If we identify new better BRDs and get them into use, fish that would have been caught in shrimp trawl nets, simply aren't caught and so fish mortality in the fishery will be reduced. A suite of fish species will benefit including red snapper, croaker, porgy, pinfish, and Gulf menhaden.

I want to point out that the photo here is one of the BRDs that we already know of that has potential to be a good candidate for this project, the Tom's fisheye which was developed in Australia.

Slide 18. Better Bycatch Reduction Devices for the Gulf of Mexico Commercial Shrimp Trawl Fishery

Speaker: Laurie Rounds

We also know that there are BRDs that have been developed in the Gulf and in other places in the U.S. that have great potential for this project. So, we are planning the following activities to get these BRDs certified & in use in the Gulf.

Right now, we're here at step one, the first bullet point – the project team is working to identify new advances in BRD technology, both domestically and internationally, through outreach – workshops, dockside outreach, talking to shrimpers and net makers – to get information and input on new BRDs. We're also partnering with Sea Grant – who have been working with the shrimp industry for decades – to facilitate the outreach efforts.

The next steps will be to test the new BRDs and certify them for use in the Gulf.

Then we'll get them in use in the Gulf shrimp fishery voluntarily through outreach and incentives.

Finally, we'll continue to provide training and monitor the use of the new BRDs through dockside outreach to maximize the benefits of the new BRDs.

Now I'd like to turn the presentation over to Dennis Klemm with NOAA for the next project highlight.

Slide 19. Developing Methods to Observe Sea Turtle Interactions in the Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Purse Seine Fishery

Speaker: Dennis Klemm

Thank you, Amy. My name is Dennis Klemm, and I am the Sea Turtle Recovery Coordinator at the NOAA Fisheries South East Regional Office. Today, I am presenting information on the project, Developing Methods to Observe Sea Turtle Interactions in the Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Purse Seine Fishery.

What is the fishery?

- A purse seine fishery that targets Menhaden in the northern Gulf of Mexico and typically operates from mid-late April through November 1st. Operates in bays, sounds, and nearshore coastal waters along the GOM coast. Most of the fishing effort is concentrated off Louisiana and Mississippi, with lesser effort in Alabama and Texas state waters.

Slide 20. Developing Methods to Observe Sea Turtle Interactions in the Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Purse Seine Fishery

Speaker: Dennis Klemm

Why are we doing this project?

The project supports the Trustees' goal to restore sea turtles injured by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill by addressing primary threats to sea turtles, such as bycatch in commercial fisheries.

Sea turtles are known to utilize the same waters, at the same time, as the fishery operates. However, despite this overlap, we don't have information on the level of interaction this fishery may have with sea turtles (and although sea turtles are the project focus, we are also interested in looking at bottlenose dolphin interactions)

Despite this lack of information, we do not currently have an effective methodology for observing this fishery to assess the level of interactions.

Slide 21. Developing Methods to Observe Sea Turtle Interactions in the Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Purse Seine Fishery

Speaker: Dennis Klemm

Project Objectives:

Therefore, our project objectives are to work with the Menhaden Fishery to improve observer approaches for monitoring sea turtle interactions during fishing operations.

Evaluate and test observer methodologies, ultimately by implementing a pilot monitoring program within the Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Purse seine fishery for sea turtle interactions during their fishing interactions.

Finally, based on what we learn from our work and the data collected, we will recommend next steps to support efforts to reduce interactions in this fishery, if determined to be necessary.

Slide 22. Developing Methods to Observe Sea Turtle Interactions in the Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Purse Seine Fishery

Speaker: Dennis Klemm

This project is divided into three distinct phases:

1. Planning and industry engagement: A project plan was developed and a steering committee consisting of both NOAA and industry representatives was formed. We have regular steering committee meetings during which activity planning and results are discussed.
2. The next phase is the proof-of-concept testing to evaluate the various options for observing this fishery: During the week of Oct. 11 – 15, 2021 we completed our proof-of-concept testing. This involved five days of field trials employing human observers, video cameras, and drones to determine which of these methods, and what specific placements, were found to be feasible and worthy of carrying forward into the full pilot observer program. We are still analyzing data from the proof-of-concept testing, but initial discussion with field

staff indicates that one or more methods are likely to allow effective observations of the fishing operation.

3. The next phase is a pilot observer program, which will place over 1-2 fishing seasons and will implement the most promising methods based on our analysis from the proof-of-concept testing. The pilot effort will take place across the entire fishery, over the entire fishing season to make sure we capture variability among vessels, and over time, as conditions and fishing locations change throughout the season. If enough information is gathered in one season, we will end the pilot at that point.

This is a cooperative effort between NOAA and the Gulf of Mexico menhaden purse seine industry. There has been full participation from all the menhaden fishing companies, actively working with NOAA to understand fishery operations and plan field work. Observers and video monitoring equipment were contracted with Saltwater, Inc.

Within NOAA we have also worked with the Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO), who provided drones and drone pilots during the proof-of-concept testing to test the feasibility of drones for observing this fishery.

Thank you.

Next, we will hear from Erin Fougères, with NOAA.

Slide 23. Reducing Impacts to Cetaceans during Disasters by Improving Response Activities

Speaker: Erin Fougères

Thank you, Dennis. I'm Erin Fougères, the Marine Mammal Stranding Program Administrator for NOAA's Southeast Region, and a project manager on the "The Reducing Impacts to Cetaceans during Disasters by Improving Response Activities project", referred to as the Disaster Response Project

The Disaster Response project began implementation in the summer of 2020. Since then, the project has picked up steam including minor project changes approved by the OO TIG. These changes included clarifying the Disaster Response Coordinator's ability to travel onsite to disasters, if needed, for improved coordination and to implement protocols developed through this project. So far, the DRC hasn't had to travel. Additionally, a second change clarified the inclusion of coastal and bay, sound, estuary bottlenose dolphin stocks for some project activities. While this project focuses on open ocean whales and dolphins, many response protocols are similar across open ocean and coastal areas, and many disasters affect coastal/BSE stocks. This inclusion will greatly enhance project success.

The Disaster Response Working Group was established to participate in a series of workshops throughout the nine-year project. The first Disaster Response Working Group meeting was held virtually in May of 2021 due to COVID 19 restrictions. This workshop was the first in a two-part series during the first two years of project implementation and are key to helping achieve the goals of the project, which are to perform an area specific disaster response gap analysis and

risk assessment, and to develop individual protocols that will help in identifying and executing improvements during response efforts.

The DRWG was led by the Disaster Response Coordinator and included 17 participants with various expertise and backgrounds, including the USGS, National Park Service, the Marine Mammal Stranding Network, NOAA, and academic colleagues specializing in algal biotoxins and oiled wildlife care.

Following the first Disaster Response Working Group meeting and the drafting of its summary report, the Expert Working Group made up of just NOAA marine mammal experts, met to prioritize topics and decide a path forward for the second Disaster Response Working Group meeting. This meeting will be the second and final of the two-part series of initial workshops and is scheduled to be held in March 2022. This workshop will target specific disaster issues and will involve experts in those focal topics from the Disaster Response Working Group participant list. The final report will come out after this two-part series is completed and will be reviewed by the DRWG and distributed to the broader marine mammal stranding and research community in the Gulf region.

As part of the larger Disaster Response project, a smaller data gap study is also being implemented. This study began implementation in 2021.

Slide 24. Studies to Improve Cetacean Disaster Response

Speaker: Erin Fougeres

This first data gap study (called Data Gap One) is intended to characterize the risk of exposure to cetaceans during breathing events (inhalation and exhalation) that take place in areas of surface oil and/or dispersants. For this project, we are partnering with the Office of Response and Restoration who are serving as the technical lead for Data Gap One implementation. They are working closely with the Disaster Response Coordinator to manage and supervise the many aspects of this project. Initially, Data Gap One is broken down into two phases.

In Phase 1a, which takes place in a controlled setting, dolphins are being trained to perform certain breathing events. These events mimic wild animal breathing behavior, such as resting breaths, breaths after exercise, chuffs (which are more forceful breaths), etc. We are working with Johns Hopkins University, who has built an apparatus involving high speed cameras to film and analyze these breathing events to conduct droplet analysis.

As of now, training is underway, and the dolphins are learning the behaviors quickly.

Phase 1b of Data Gap One will begin in mid-2022 and involves the construction of an apparatus, or fake blowhole, that mimics a dolphin's exhalation and inhalation as analyzed in Phase 1a. This apparatus will be tested in a controlled setting using oil and dispersants to identify the amount of oil and dispersants that dolphins are at risk of inhaling.

Finally, in phase 2, data will be collected in the field to measure volatile compounds at the air water interface.

Web stories will be developed and posted to our Gulf spill Restoration website at the completion of each of these parts.

Thank you for your attention. Now I'll turn the presentation back to Ashley Mills.

Slide 25. Open Ocean Partnerships and Engagement

Speaker: Ashley Mills

Thanks Erin.

I'd like to touch on partnerships. Partnerships are a critical way in which we plan and implement Open Ocean restoration. As we've mentioned throughout the project highlights presented today, we work with a range of partners including federal, state, and local agencies, non-governmental organizations, universities and other research organizations, fishermen and fishing industry representatives, and local community groups.

Next, Susan Fleck with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will highlight a long-term partnership with multiple groups that are involved in our Open Ocean restoration project to protect globally significant, high-density sea turtle nesting habitat on the east coast of Florida. Susan?

Slide 26. Open Ocean Partnerships Highlight

Speaker: Susan Fleck

Thank you, Ashley.

My name is Susan Fleck. I am a project manager with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Gulf Restoration Office in Fairhope, Alabama.

This project was years in the making with coordination between the landowner, The Conservation Fund, the Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Gulf Restoration Office, the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge, the State of Florida, as well as other partners.

As part of the Long-term Nesting Beach Habitat Protection for Sea Turtles Project, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in partnership with The Conservation Fund, completed the acquisition of a 3.25-acre privately-owned parcel on July 31, 2020 within the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge in Florida.

The acquired parcel will be managed for sea turtle nesting habitat by the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge Partnership, which includes the State of Florida, as well as Indian River and Brevard Counties.

This parcel included approximately 400 feet of beachfront, high-density sea turtle nesting habitat. This parcel is surrounded by a network of State of Florida and County owned and

managed lands. Thus, the acquisition of this parcel helped protect approximately 2,050 linear feet of continuous beachfront nesting habitat.

This project works alongside a Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund project in Florida in partnership with The Conservation Fund to acquire priority inholdings in the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge to protect important sea turtle nesting habitat.

Next, I'd like to introduce Jon Morton with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Slide 27. How to Access Open Ocean Project Information

Speaker: Jon Morton

Thank you, Susan. Good morning everyone. As mentioned, my name is Jon Morton and I work for USDA's Gulf Coast Restoration Office located in Madison, MS. I'll be going over some of features of the Gulf Spill Restoration website and how you can find more information on some of the great projects that you heard about today.

From the home page, in the "Projects Near You Box" you can click the "View Project Details" button, shown here with the green arrow, to explore our interactive map to see details on restoration projects. This tool provides a map of all the projects approved by the NRDA Trustees and allows you to search by Restoration Area and open or download project data. Once you locate a project you would like to read more about, you can select it to easily access project specific information. Project records include progress reports, budgets, and monitoring and adaptive management plans.

Links Provided in the Chat:

For reference you can find information about our projects here:

<https://www.habitat.noaa.gov/storymap/dwh/?openOcean>

Slide 28. Stay Connected to Open Ocean Restoration

Speaker: Jon Morton

You can also stay informed about Open Ocean restoration news and all our activities through the recently updated Open Ocean Restoration Area webpage on the Gulfspill Restoration dot NOAA dot gov website.

On the Open Ocean TIG page, you can find links to our restoration plans, projects, and recent news stories. There are also links to our planning projects and monitoring activities.

Now I'll turn it back to Stephen Heverly.

Slide 29. Questions?

Speaker: Steven Heverly

Thank you, Jon. This is Stephen Heverly with NOAA and now it's time for the questions and answers portion of the meeting.

Slide 30. Questions

Speaker: Stephen Heverly

Ok. We've been collecting your questions along the way and we're going to paraphrase some of them or combine similar themes to try to answer as many questions as possible.

Remember, if you still have a question at this point, you can plug it into the "Questions" box at the bottom of the GoToWebinar control panel (where the green and blue arrow is pointing on this slide).

And if you didn't do it earlier, click on the links in the chat to the Open Ocean Restoration Area webpage and fact sheet to help you follow along. Both the webpage and fact sheet list all the projects approved as of earlier this year.

We'll take a few minutes to give you time to enter any additional questions before we begin. Next, we'll pass them on to someone on our team that can best respond, and they'll provide an answer if they can. We may not get to all the questions, but we'll try to get to as many as possible.

[See Question and Answer Summary for Q&A portion of the webinar.]

Next: Jon Morton with U.S.D.A. will talk about how you can access information about the Open Ocean TIG's projects and activities.

Slide 31. Thank you

Speaker: Stephen Heverly

Thank you, Jon. And we'd like to thank everyone for joining today's annual meeting.

We'll post the presentation and written transcript from today's webinar to the Trustee's website. To find the meeting materials, please go to gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov, and click on the Open Ocean icon, which is shown in the upper right of this slide.

Finally, if you're not signed up for our email blasts, please consider signing up. Aside from visiting the website, it's the best way to stay up to date on all the Deepwater Horizon NRDA restoration activities. You can easily do that on our home page by scrolling down to the green boxes and clicking the 'sign up now' button.

We'll now conclude our annual meeting webinar. Thank you all very much for participating. Please stay with us for the special session on Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities Restoration that will begin in just a few minutes.

October 2021 Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group

October 28, 2021 Webinar – Summary of Questions and Answers

Question: When can we expect the next restoration plan?

Response [from Ashley Mills, DOI]: Last spring we released a call for projects ideas for bird and sturgeon restoration. Since then, we have been reviewing the project ideas that were submitted or updated in the portal. Once we are ready to start drafting the restoration plan, we'll post a notice online on the Trustees website. That will give you a better idea of timing. But right now we are anticipating that we'll release a Draft Restoration Plan sometime next summer for public review and comment.

Question: What are the main steps being taken to prevent future oil spills?

Response [from Treda Grayson, EPA]: The Deepwater Horizon Trustees support ongoing federal and state efforts to prevent future oil spills. That being said, the Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group is not responsible for preventing future oil spills. The Open Ocean TIG's efforts are focused on restoring injuries to natural resources caused by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Together, federal and state efforts to restore Gulf of Mexico natural resources and to prevent future oil spills will benefit the Gulf coast ecosystem and communities.

Comment: These detailed descriptions of projects were extremely useful. They provided so much more information on individual projects than available in the fact sheets. These updates and the "progress reports" were so informative and enlightening. I encourage the trustees to provide these type of detailed project presentations for more of the projects that are underway.

Question: Common loon is a freshwater bird - northern US and Canada - why are Deepwater Horizon funds being used again for a freshwater bird? And why are funds being used to reduce lead-based fishing tackle?

Response [from Ashley Mills, DOI]: Many species that spend part of their lives in the Gulf of Mexico also migrate to other places, some pretty far away such as the northern U.S. and Canada. The Open Ocean Restoration Area addresses species throughout their life stages and throughout their geographic ranges. We may use some of the Open Ocean Restoration Area funds for restoration outside of the Gulf of Mexico as long as there is a link back to that injured species. There may be a project that is better suited outside the Gulf if there is a strong benefit to the injured species. The common loon project is one of those projects. At least several thousand individuals of these species were injured or died because of the spill. Common loons breed and spend substantial time outside of Gulf of Mexico. Back when we

were screening project ideas for the first Open Ocean restoration plan under the Birds Restoration Type we considered the goals described in the Trustee’s programmatic plan, which include restoring lost birds by facilitating additional production and/or reduced mortality of injured bird species and restoring and protecting habits on which injured birds rely. Additionally, we prioritized project ideas for bird species that were injured in the greatest numbers but did not have Deepwater Horizon funded restoration projects approved for them at that point.

Question: Why not include multiple objectives in the sea turtle interaction with Gulf Menhaden Fishery study to also monitor other species interactions, such as economically important fish species affected by the oil spill? With the major gap in bycatch studies overall in this fishery, not including fish and other species would be a huge, missed opportunity. Funds could have come from multiple Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group funding silos to broaden the project. Regardless, lessons learned from the sea turtle observer study should be used to develop and implement an ongoing observer program in the menhaden fishery that monitors all bycatch.

Response [from Dennis Klemm, NOAA]: We wanted to conduct a sea turtle-focused project based on the likelihood of differences in methods and observation focal points that would be required for observing smaller bycatch species as compared to sea turtles and bottlenose dolphins. There are different points along the fishery operation that would need to be observed, and we really wanted to keep this focused on sea turtles and bottle nose dolphins. You are correct that general information learned regarding human observers and electronic monitoring could be later used as a foundation for future development of methods specifically suited for fish and smaller bycatch.

Question: What kind of sea turtles nest on the east coast of Florida?

Response [from Susan Fleck, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service]: Loggerheads and green sea turtles both nest on the eastern coast of Florida. Specific to loggerheads, there’s research that shows that the Peninsular Florida subpopulation of loggerheads nest at Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge. In addition, the Northwest Atlantic Population of Loggerhead Recovery Plan specifically notes the importance of protecting habitat at the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge as a vital step towards recovery for that species.

Question: This bike/ped path is part of the ecological restoration?

Response [from Ashley Mills, DOI]: Part of the injury from the oil spill was the loss of recreational uses. Natural Resource Damage Assessment allows these types of injuries to also be addressed through restoration. So the allocation for Deepwater Horizon includes funds to enhance and improve recreational access and visitor experience. In the Open Ocean TIG our projects related to the loss of recreational uses focus on lost uses on federally protected public lands, such as the bike and pedestrian enhancement project we talked about earlier in the presentation.

Question: There are two questions related to reducing and mitigating vessel strike mortality on cetaceans. What efforts are in place to minimize vessel collisions with whales? Can you provide an update on the project to “Reduce and Mitigate Vessel Strike Mortality of Cetaceans”.

Response [from Christy Fellas, NOAA]: The Open Ocean TIG has funded a specific project in Restoration Plan 2 and the title of that project is “Reduce and Mitigate Vessel Strike Mortality of Cetaceans”. So that

is a project that we are going to be working on. We expect that project to kick off in the next year or so. The first step of that project will be to conduct a risk assessment to identify high risk areas that we need to work on reducing vessel collisions and then think about voluntary restoration options for reducing vessel strikes in those areas. We are expecting to kick that off. We have another project related to noise reduction and there is probably going to be some helpful information coming out of that risk assessment. So we expect to take that information and lessons learned there into this vessel strike reduction project.