Open Ocean Restoration Area

June 2022

RECENT ACTIVITIES

In the past year, we continued to implement a range of restoration projects and monitoring activities. Working with partners, our projects are conserving important habitats, reducing impacts that can cause mortality such as bycatch, and filling critical information gaps to restore Open Ocean resources. We began drafting our third restoration plan to help restore for injuries to seabirds. We also reached a planning milestone in April 2021 with the release of the Fish and Water Column Invertebrates Strategic Plan. The plan incorporates stakeholder input to identify priority species and set restoration objectives for future planning. Public engagement also continues to be a priority. In 2021, we held two public webinars and several stakeholder outreach efforts through our restoration projects.

WHAT WE DO

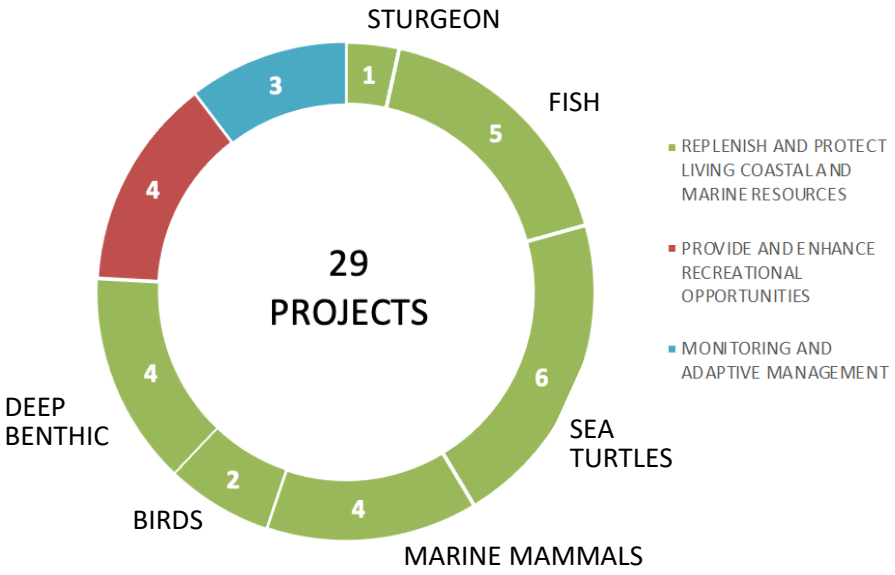
We are working to restore wide-ranging and migratory species throughout their life stages and geographic ranges, including inland, coastal, and offshore areas. Therefore, we may fund some restoration projects outside of the Gulf of Mexico. We coordinate with state trustees, especially when proposed projects overlap their jurisdictions.

The Trustee representatives for the Open Ocean Restoration Area are:

- Ashley Mills, U.S. Department of the Interior
- Laurie Rounds, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Ron Howard, U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Gale Bonanno, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Restoration Overview

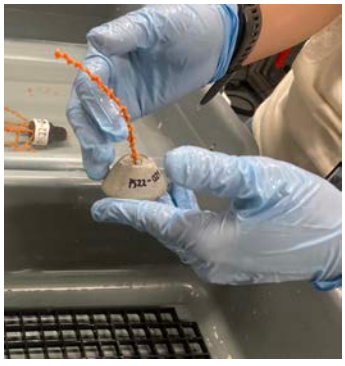
PROJECTS BY RESTORATION GOAL



$340 million committed to approved projects

FISH AND INVERTEBRATES STRATEGIC PLAN // Check out the strategic plan factsheet for more details on future fish restoration.

RECENT NEWS // CORAL PROPAGATION PROJECT SPAWNS PROMISING RESULTS



In 2021, small coral colonies were carefully collected and successfully reared in the NOAA Hollings Marine Lab and the USGS Wetland and Aquatic Research Center using two different techniques - 'assisted' fragmentation and 'unassisted' spontaneous spawning. Lab staff produced 18 small coral fragments from six colonies. Unexpectedly, one species of these corals, *Swiftia exserta*, spawned naturally in two labs on the same day. The smart and quick acting lab staff obtained fertilized eggs that settled and attached onto cured ceramic tiles provided to mimic natural substrates used by coral. Currently ten new recruits continue to thrive and grow, with the help of the Florida Aquarium.

This may be the first time that this coral species has successfully spawned and recruited in a lab. This helps us learn and share more about methods to support coral reproduction. It will also help us develop settlement substrates for coral recruitment at restoration sites. Since July 2021, coral colonies have had a 97% survival rate among all the colonies collected. The team is closely monitoring and collecting data on the coral's health and condition in anticipation of expanding these efforts to a network of aquaria that will help grow coral and test techniques for their restoration in the Gulf of Mexico.

Funding Overview

Restoration Type	Settlement Allocation	Funds Committed Through May 2022	Percent Funds Committed	Percent Funds Remaining
Fish and Water Column Invertebrates	$400,000,000	$78,681,216	20%	80%
Sturgeon	$15,000,000	$3,054,466	20%	80%
Sea Turtles	$55,000,000	$19,466,838	35%	65%
Marine Mammals	$55,000,000	$23,501,256	43%	57%
Birds	$70,000,000	$14,374,206	21%	79%
Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities	$273,300,000	$126,816,161	46%	54%
Provide and Enhance Recreational Opportunities	$22,397,916	$22,388,991	100%	0%
Monitoring and Adaptive Management	$200,000,000	$7,320,169	4%	96%
Administrative Oversight and Comprehensive Planning	$150,000,000	$56,472,253	38%	62%
Total	$1,240,697,916	$352,075,555	28%	72%

The Open Ocean Trustees are drafting Restoration Plan 3 to restore seabirds. We anticipate releasing the plan for public comments this winter.

MORE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE ONLINE
www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/restoration-areas/open-ocean