

Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource
Damage Assessment and Restoration
Trustee Council
2024 Annual Public Meeting
[held virtually]

ORIGINAL

Wednesday, June 26, 2024
1 p.m. Eastern Time

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

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3 MR. FRANKLIN: Good afternoon. My
4 name is Perry Franklin, and I will be serving as
5 your facilitator for the Deepwater Horizon
6 Natural Resource Damage Assessment Trustee
7 Council's ninth annual meeting. This meeting
8 also serves as the annual meeting of the
9 regionwide Trustee Implementation Group, or TIG,
10 as you may commonly hear it referred to today.

11 I am pleased to welcome more than 150
12 participants who have registered for today's
13 webinar. We are thankful for your
14 participation.

15 The Trustees and their representatives
16 will present a great deal of useful information
17 today, and then you'll have an opportunity to
18 give your feedback, if so desired. Whether you
19 are listening via telephone or your computer
20 audio, please know that we have all incoming
21 audio muted at this time. If you are
22 experiencing technical difficulties, please

1 simply type your name in the questions box
2 located at the bottom right of the webinar's
3 interface, and we will attempt to fix the
4 problem.

5 We have a court reporter who will be
6 transcribing the entire meeting, including your
7 comments. The PowerPoint presentation from
8 today and the transcript will be posted on the
9 Trustee Council website in the very near future.
10 We are providing, as you can see, an American
11 Sign Language interpreter via video.

12 The Trustees would also like to thank
13 the public for participating and also let you
14 know that there are many fact sheets located on
15 our website, gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov.
16 That's gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov.

17 When you registered for the webinar,
18 you should have received an email from
19 webinar@dwhtig.org confirming your registration.
20 That email also contains helpful information of
21 how to manage your audio during today's webinar.

22 Additionally, you were asked if you

1 would like to make public comment during today's
2 webinar. You should have also received some
3 information via that email.

4 Now, if you did not register to make
5 verbal comment, but you're so moved to, that's
6 not a problem. Following today's presentation,
7 I will give you instructions of how to register
8 to still give public comment.

9 So at this time, let's go ahead and
10 get started with today's meeting. I would like
11 to introduce you to Gareth Leonard, the Gulf
12 Spill Coordinator, who is with the Florida Fish
13 and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the
14 current chair of the Trustee Council.

15 Mr. Leonard?

16 MR. LEONARD: Thank you, Perry.

17 Good afternoon. Welcome, everyone, to
18 this annual meeting of the Deepwater Horizon
19 Trustee Council, and thank you for your interest
20 and attendance.

21 Since the settlement with BP in 2016,
22 the Trustees have held a meeting every year to

1 bring you up to speed on our work. This is our
2 ninth annual public meeting.

3 In today's presentation, I'm going to
4 go over a few slides that give you an update on
5 what the Trustee Council has been doing since
6 our last meeting. Then you'll hear an update
7 from each of the Trustee Implementation Groups.
8 After that, we want to hear from you. Perry
9 will facilitate the public comment portion of
10 the agenda.

11 Now I'll introduce the Trustee Council
12 representatives. We have a member representing
13 each of the five Gulf Coast states and a member
14 who represents each of the four federal agencies
15 involved. Many of these names may be familiar
16 to you since quite a few of them were also with
17 us last year.

18 Chris Blankenship is our Trustee
19 Council representative for Alabama. I am the
20 Trustee Council representative for Florida.
21 Glenn Ledet Jr. represents Louisiana. Chris
22 Wells represents Mississippi. Robin Riechers

1 represents Texas. Mary Josie Blanchard
2 represents the U.S. Department of the Interior.
3 Mary Kay Lynch represents the Environmental
4 Protection Agency. Chris Doley represents the
5 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration,
6 and Ronald Howard represents the U.S. Department
7 of Agriculture.

8 Just as a quick review of our
9 responsibilities, the Trustees came together
10 immediately after the oil spill. We've been
11 working together to restore the natural
12 resources that were damaged. These include
13 wetlands, fish, birds, and other resources that
14 were injured by the spill. We also focus on
15 restoring recreation opportunities and access to
16 outdoor recreation.

17 In 2016, the global settlement
18 determined how funds would be allocated across
19 areas impacted by the spill and those natural
20 resources. Those allocations were based on a
21 comprehensive and programmatic restoration plan
22 the Trustees developed. That plan indicated

1 which resources were injured and needed to be
2 restored. You can see a chart of these
3 allocations in the Trustee Council fact sheet
4 that is available to download from the webinar
5 interface or online at
6 gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov.

7 The Trustee Council, or TC, was
8 created following the settlement in 2016 and is
9 comprised of the representatives that I
10 introduced earlier. An important part of what
11 the TC does is ensuring that there is
12 coordination for restoration activities across
13 the restoration activities.

14 The Trustee Implementation Groups, or
15 TIGs, are shown on the bottom of this slide.
16 Each TIG has its own set of resources they are
17 charged with restoring and a corresponding
18 allocation of money from the settlement
19 agreement.

20 The Trustee Council provides
21 coordination and ensures transparency, fiscal
22 accountability, and consistency with the

1 programmatic plan and across the implementation
2 groups. The Trustee Council also directs the
3 Monitoring and Adaptive Management workgroup,
4 which helps fine-tune the restoration program
5 over time.

6 Each month the Trustee Council
7 receives regular updates from the TIGs so
8 everybody can stay current on restoration
9 progress. This helps the group consider issues
10 that cross state and jurisdictional boundaries.

11 The Trustee Council is committed to
12 proactively communicating and reporting about
13 our work to the public. We are continuing to
14 communicate progress through our annual
15 reporting. This year we produced more than 340
16 project reports and our annual fiscal summary,
17 all of which can be found on the Gulf Spill
18 Restoration website.

19 The heavy lifting of restoration work
20 is accomplished by the TIGs that were shown in
21 the previous slide. They are separate entities
22 under the umbrella of the Trustee Council. The

1 TIGs consider the Gulf as a large and
2 interconnected yet open-ended ecosystem.
3 Ecosystems do not have geographic boundaries.
4 Restoration work can be best accomplished
5 through coordination.

6 You've seen a timeline of events at
7 every one of our meetings. We all know the
8 spill occurred in 2010, and early restoration
9 work took place until the settlement in 2016.
10 Overall, the 2016 global settlement was for
11 \$20.8 billion. Of that, \$8.8 billion was
12 allocated to the work we do, which is known as
13 Natural Resource Damage Assessment restoration.
14 This is a legal term, but it essentially means
15 the process of evaluating damage to natural
16 resources from oil spills or toxic waste
17 releases, with the goal of restoring it. That's
18 a mouthful, so we often refer to this simply as
19 N-R-D-A, or NRDA.

20 But rather than spending time looking
21 back, let's look forward from the settlement.
22 As you can see on this timeline, we are roughly

1 halfway through the 15-year payment period by BP
2 of restoration funds.

3 As you can imagine, our restoration
4 work won't simply stop when the last payment
5 from BP is deposited. We expect to continue to
6 plan for and implement new projects as well as
7 conduct monitoring on existing and future
8 projects after the last payment is made. The
9 point is the Trustees will continue working on
10 ecosystem restoration well beyond 2031.

11 The Trustee implementation Groups, or
12 TIGs, have continued to implement previously
13 approved projects as well as finalized new
14 restoration work. In 2023, the TIGs finalized
15 one restoration plan and approved or updated 11
16 monitoring activities. To date, the Trustees
17 have approved more than 350 projects for a total
18 of \$5.23 billion. More details on these can be
19 found on our Gulf Spill Restoration website.

20 Let's have a look at some of the great
21 restoration work going on around the Gulf with a
22 brief video.

1 [Video plays]

2 MR. LEONARD: Now we will hear some
3 updates from the Trustee Implementation Groups
4 on what they are doing within their restoration
5 areas.

6 Across the Gulf, there are some common
7 themes. As we plan for future restoration, we
8 are collaborating with a variety of partners and
9 continuing to solicit restoration project ideas
10 from the public.

11 Generally speaking, the Trustee
12 Implementation Groups have focused on a variety
13 of activities, including restoring the Gulf's
14 coastal and deep-sea habitats and access to
15 those habitats. They are also looking to
16 improve water quality and addressing living
17 coastal marine resources, which includes birds,
18 oysters, fish, sea turtles, and marine mammals.

19 Perhaps, most importantly for many of
20 you, you will hear that restoration projects are
21 continuing to move forward, both on the ground
22 and into the water.

1 To begin with, Chris Blankenship will
2 share some updates from the state of Alabama.

3 MR. BLANKENSHIP: Good afternoon.
4 Thanks, Gareth.

5 Thank you for taking time to attend
6 this webinar to learn about the Trustee Council
7 activities over the past year. At this time, I
8 will provide you with a brief update about the
9 Alabama TIG progress.

10 As of March 2024, the Alabama Trustee
11 implementation Group has committed \$185 million
12 for restoration projects and activities in
13 Alabama and has approved 43 projects. In the
14 past year, the Alabama TIG has been busy
15 implementing 32 of the projects that are still
16 in progress.

17 In addition, on Monday, we released
18 Restoration Plan 4 for public comment. The
19 public webinar for that is July the 10th, and
20 then the public comment period will be open
21 until July the 24th.

22 The restoration types that are

1 included in Restoration Plan 4 include wetlands,
2 coastal and nearshore habitat, oysters, birds,
3 nutrient reduction, and provide and enhance
4 recreational opportunity.

5 We are also finalizing the supplement
6 to our Restoration Plan 2, which would provide
7 additional funding to support our marine mammal
8 stranding network.

9 We held our last annual public meeting
10 in December of 2023 and plan to hold our next
11 annual public meeting in December of 2024.

12 Next slide. The Alabama TIG is
13 excited to share the construction of the
14 recreational use amenities that's about to begin
15 in our Dauphin Island ecotourism project. The
16 project was approved as part of our Restoration
17 Plan 1 and first involved the acquisition of 95
18 acres of privately held land and water bottoms
19 on Dauphin Island. We are now ready to begin
20 construction on the parking, restroom, a
21 boardwalk, and a kayak launch.

22 The Department of Conservation and

1 Natural Resources of Alabama and the Town of
2 Dauphin Island are working together to complete
3 this project and hope to have it completed in
4 late 2024 or early 2025.

5 As you can see from the from the
6 picture, it is a beautiful, beautiful spot.

7 The Alabama TIG will continue the
8 implementation and monitoring of all projects
9 during the next year, including Gulf State Park
10 Pier renovations and Bayfront Park additions,
11 and we will be hosting our annual TIG meeting
12 this December. Please check our website where
13 you can sign up for email updates to receive
14 forthcoming information about this meeting and
15 other activities in the Alabama Trustee
16 Implementation Group. The web address is
17 alabamacoastalrestoration.org.

18 Thank you again for your time, and
19 I'll pass things over to my friend Sarah from
20 the Florida Trustee Implementation Group to
21 update you on their activities.

1 MS. KETRON: Thank you, Chris.

2 Good afternoon. I am Sarah Ketron
3 with the Florida Department of Environmental
4 Protection, and I'm currently serving as the
5 chair of the Florida Trustee Implementation
6 Group. I'm pleased to be here today to share
7 what the Florida TIG has been doing over the
8 last year.

9 The Florida TIG's funding update
10 highlights a current commitment of \$265 million
11 for restoration, planning, and project
12 implementation, as well as monitoring and
13 adaptive management activities out of the \$424
14 million received to date from BP.

15 Just as a reminder, the full
16 allocation to the Florida TIG is approximately
17 \$680 million, with the final annual payment of
18 \$36.5 million, scheduled to be received in 2031.
19 For additional details, please see the funding
20 chart that's located on the Florida Restoration
21 Area website.

22 Since the last Trustee Council

1 meeting, the Florida TIG has been busy. A quick
2 overview includes the following. We have been
3 working on implementing 59 projects and have
4 completed or closed 14 projects to date.

5 In August 2023, we issued a notice of
6 restoration planning for the third
7 post-settlement restoration plan for the Florida
8 TIG. In March 2024, we released the draft plan
9 and held a public webinar. The comment period
10 was open through April 2024. We have been
11 working on considering and addressing public
12 comments and should finalize the plan this
13 summer.

14 As of December 2023, the Florida TIG
15 has deployed 3,729 artificial reefs across 44
16 permitted areas in the Florida Panhandle through
17 two projects, a completed Phase 1 project
18 through early restoration and an ongoing Phase 2
19 project through Restoration Plan 2.

20 Types of reefs deployed include
21 piling-mounted snorkel reefs, or ecosystem
22 reefs, Florida limestone artificial reefs, or

1 FLARs, grouper reefs, super reefs, goliath reef
2 balls, and large octahedron modules.

3 Finally, we held our annual public
4 meeting via interactive webinar on December 7,
5 2023.

6 The featured project is Evaluating
7 Orientation Response of Sea Turtle Hatchlings to
8 Physical Cues on Nesting Beaches. This project
9 is investigating sea turtle hatchling
10 orientation to inform conservation and
11 restoration actions of nesting habitat on
12 Florida's developed beaches. It is improving
13 understanding of hatchling perception of and
14 response to visible light using laboratory and
15 field experiments.

16 The Florida Fish and Wildlife
17 Conservation Commission has conducted 525
18 laboratory trials with loggerhead turtles and
19 250 trials with green turtles.

20 Thus far, the project has found that
21 hatchling orientation accuracy increased with
22 nest proximity to the dune, taller dune heights,

1 lower artificial light intensity, and brighter
2 moonlight.

3 Project findings will help beach
4 managers and other stakeholders better manage
5 coastal areas to improve hatchling seaward
6 orientation.

7 Key management actions include
8 reducing the visibility of artificial lights,
9 improving coastal lighting regulations, and
10 restoring natural beach and dune profiles.

11 So what is next for the Florida TIG?
12 We will continue to implement and monitor
13 restoration projects selected in early
14 restoration, Restoration Plan 1 and Restoration
15 Plan 2, as well as implement our planning and
16 monitoring and adaptive management projects. We
17 will continue to assess progress and
18 appropriately adjust restoration planning
19 efforts as needed. We will finalize and approve
20 the Florida TIG's third restoration plan and
21 environmental assessment in summer of 2024.
22 Finally, we will hold the 2024 annual public

1 meeting later in the year.

2 At this point, I would like to hand
3 off the presentation to Maury Chatellier, who
4 is representing the Louisiana TIG.

5 Maury?

6 MR. CHATELLIER: Hey, Sarah. Thank
7 you. Good afternoon, everyone. Maury
8 Chatellier with the Coastal Protection and
9 Restoration Authority, here to provide you an
10 update on the Louisiana Restoration Area,
11 representing the Louisiana Trustees.

12 As with the other TIGs, we'll start
13 with our funding update. To date, the Louisiana
14 Trustees have approved or committed \$3.85
15 billion towards projects and restoration
16 efforts. We've received approximately \$2.8
17 billion to date. Once we receive our full
18 allocation over the 15 years, ending in 2031,
19 our allocation will be \$5 billion. That \$3.85
20 billion includes dollars allocated via
21 resolutions through May of this year.

22 So what have the Louisiana Trustees

1 been up to? Just a few of the projects we have
2 ngoing and activities, we'll start with Bayou
3 Grande Cheniere. The Bayou Grande Cheniere
4 Ridge and Marsh Creation Project is located in
5 Plaquemines Parish. This project has completed
6 construction. It created over 335 acres of
7 marsh and ridge habitat. Sediment for this
8 project was pumped from the Mississippi River.
9 This project was completed back in December of
10 2023.

11 The Trustees also began construction
12 on the Mid-Barataria sediment diversion back in
13 August of last year. The sediment diversion,
14 the TIG funded approximately \$2.26 billion
15 toward construction of this coastal restoration
16 effort. It'll take more than five years to
17 complete.

18 This project will harness nature to
19 reestablish processes that originally built and
20 sustained the coast of Louisiana. At its peak
21 capacity, the project will allow for controlled
22 transport of up to 75,000 cubic feet per second

1 of Mississippi River freshwater, sediment, and
2 nutrients into the Barataria estuary.

3 The Cypremort State Park improvements
4 in St. Mary Parish, this project included
5 reinforcing existing rock jetties, mainly along
6 the entry road, installing an RV campground and
7 mobile bathhouse, restoring the degraded beach,
8 installing a new marsh boardwalk to replace
9 destroyed fishing piers, and repairing and
10 upgrading existing roads damaged by repeated
11 flooding.

12 This project has been completed in
13 multiple phases, with the beach restoration
14 completed in 2021. The boardwalk and rock
15 revetment were completed in 2022, and
16 construction of the RV campground, mobile
17 bathhouse, and parking lot improvements began in
18 2023. And it completed March of this year. So
19 we can wrap this project up.

20 And then lastly, the Louisiana TIG
21 Restoration Plan No. 9, Chandeleur Island
22 restoration. So the TIG is preparing to build

1 upon the ongoing work, the Regionwide Trustee
2 Implementation Group's Restoration Plan No. 1,
3 in the development of a new plan for restoring
4 the Chandeleur Islands. The future draft RP9
5 will take the next step in planning to restore
6 and conserve the island's natural resources.

7 So because this project is moving from
8 one restoration group, the Regionwide TIG, to
9 another, the LA TIG, and it's going from
10 engineering and design to construction planning,
11 the Louisiana Trustees prepared the Opportunity
12 for Preliminary Public Engagement document to
13 inform the public of this transition and the
14 next steps toward the restoration of the
15 Chandeleur Islands. This document was made
16 available for public review and comment in
17 January, and comment closed in February of this
18 year.

19 So the future project for the
20 Louisiana Trustees is the large-scale Barataria
21 Marsh and Ridge project. This is also located
22 in Plaquemines Parish. The project was

1 initially evaluated for engineering and design
2 funding in 2018 in the strategic restoration
3 plan for Barataria Basin. We released the draft
4 restoration plan in March of 2020.

5 This project, approximately 1,200-acre
6 marsh creation and ridge restoration project,
7 was implemented by NOAA in partnership with
8 other federal and state Trustees on the
9 Louisiana TIG. The project included filling
10 areas to create intertidal marsh and enhance
11 existing ridge features. The project utilized
12 an existing pipeline corridor that was created
13 with the state's previously completed
14 long-distance sediment pipeline project.

15 Again, Mississippi River borrow was
16 used and hydraulically dredged and pumped
17 through a pipeline with--and its furthest
18 reaches reached over 13 miles to the project
19 site. The estimated cost of the project is a
20 little over \$170 million, including the design
21 efforts, and the project created and provided
22 more than 140 construction-related jobs for the

1 state.

2 So what do we have on the horizon for
3 the Louisiana Trustees? Construction of the HNC
4 Bird Island. This is a small spoil island in
5 Terrebonne Bay. Habitat restoration will be
6 accomplished by raising the elevation of the
7 island with dredging material from a borrow area
8 near Cat Island Pass. Also, existing degraded
9 perimeter rock dike will be restored and
10 breakwaters constructed on the northeast side to
11 provide further protection.

12 This project recently bid for
13 construction, and it has a scheduled
14 pre-construction meeting for July 10th.

15 As we mentioned, the Chandeleur
16 Islands, the LA TIG is preparing to build upon
17 the ongoing work and initiate RP No. 9 for the
18 development and selection of alternatives for
19 construction for the Chandeleur Island project.
20 This process is anticipated to take up to 12
21 months, and a notice of intent should go out
22 very shortly.

1 And as with the other Trustees,
2 Louisiana TIG will continue their planning
3 efforts for future restoration. No timelines as
4 of yet, but we could possibly see something
5 underway by the end of this year or early 2025.

6 So that concludes the Louisiana TIG
7 update. At this point, I'll turn this over to
8 Mr. Chris Wells, representing the Mississippi
9 Trustees.

10 Chris?

11 MR. WELLS: Thank you, Maury. This is
12 Chris Wells. I'm the Executive Director of the
13 Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality,
14 and I appreciate the opportunity today to
15 provide an update on behalf of the Mississippi
16 TIG, as with the others.

17 I'll start with--as the others did
18 with the funding update, as you'll see from, I
19 guess, the next slide. We have received \$216
20 million out of \$295 million total allocation to
21 the Mississippi TIG. To date, we have 27
22 restoration projects across the restoration

1 types that have been approved by the Mississippi
2 TIG, and that includes new projects that were
3 included in our Restoration Plan 4, which going
4 to the next slide, you see here that there--I
5 mentioned there are 27 total projects that have
6 been approved. Twenty-two of those are in
7 progress currently. We've got seven new
8 projects included in the Restoration Plan 4.
9 Those projects cover these three restoration
10 types that you see listed here: Wetlands,
11 coastal, and nearshore habitats; nutrient
12 reduction; and recreational opportunities.

13 A couple other things that we've done
14 is--and one of our main events each year is the
15 annual TIG--the TIG annual meeting, which is
16 part of our Mississippi Restoration Summit in
17 November. We held that back in November of
18 2023.

19 And that segues to the next slide of
20 what we'll be doing coming up next. We will
21 continue restoration project implementation and
22 monitoring. We'll hold the annual meeting again

1 at our--as part of our summit in November, and
2 we will be engaging in restoration planning for
3 the next plan, which is slated for publication
4 next spring.

5 Our featured project for the
6 Mississippi TIG, you saw a little bit in the
7 video earlier about some footage related to some
8 habitat management work, but the Mississippi TIG
9 has been active in acquiring land through
10 various NRDA-funded projects at Grand Bay
11 National Wildlife Refuge, Grand Bay National
12 Estuarine Research Reserve, Grand Bay Complex
13 and the Graveline Bay Coastal Preserve.

14 MDQ, along with its state partners,
15 the Department of Marine Resources and the
16 Mississippi Secretary of State, work together to
17 identify and prioritize ecologically significant
18 habitats for acquisition that help restore
19 injuries resulting from the spill. To date, a
20 little over 1,500, a total--more accurately,
21 1,540 acres of coastal habitat have been
22 acquired and 611 acres of coastal habitat--I'm

1 sorry--1,540 acres in Grand Bay and 611 acres in
2 Graveline Coastal Preserve.

3 With that, I will turn the mic over to
4 Robin Riechers with the state of Texas.

5 MR. RIECHERS: Thank you, Chris, and
6 good afternoon, everyone. Again, my name is
7 Robin Riechers, and I'm with the Trustee agency
8 of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. I'm
9 here today representing the Texas Trustee
10 Implementation Group for our federal Trustee
11 agencies as well as my sister agencies at the
12 state level, the General Land Office and the
13 Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

14 As far as Texas funding goes, Texas is
15 set to receive a total of \$238 million. To
16 date, we've received \$175 million, and
17 approximately \$150 million of that, or 62
18 percent of the \$238 million of the total
19 allocation has been spent or encumbered for
20 projects or planning activities as of May this
21 year.

22 Today I will be highlighting some of

1 the accomplishments inside the Texas restoration
2 area and some of the activities that the TIG has
3 been working on during this past year.

4 To date, the Texas TIG has completed 9
5 projects and has 25 projects in the process of
6 being implemented. Additionally, we have
7 enhanced our coastal area by preserving 4,568
8 acres of coastal lands.

9 I'm now briefly going to update you on
10 three highlighted projects. The first, we've
11 talked about in the past, but work continues to
12 go on there at the Bahia Grande Hydrologic
13 Restoration Project. That's located in the
14 southern Texas coast in the Laguna Atascosa
15 National Wildlife Refuge.

16 The project aims to enhance 800 acres
17 of wetland and shallow open waters by increasing
18 tidal flow into the system. Since the
19 2,200-foot-long pilot channel was enlarged from
20 34 feet wide to 250 feet wide and deepened to 9
21 feet in summer of 2022, there haven't been any
22 fish kill events, and we've observed fishers

1 taking advantage of the improved habitat in the
2 area. Ongoing monitoring efforts in the Bahia
3 Grande show increases in seagrasses, oysters,
4 and fish.

5 Our second featured project today is
6 the Pierce Marsh Restoration Project, which you
7 saw earlier on the video. We used dredge
8 material to create 115 acres of wetland habitat
9 for a variety of plants, fish, birds, and other
10 wildlife. To complete construction of this
11 restoration project, more than 280,000 cubic
12 yards of sediment were dredged from federally
13 managed navigation channels and diverted into
14 the site during two dredging phases. This is a
15 great example of how we are helping to divert
16 material from disposal sites and are using it to
17 restore habitat.

18 The next phase of the project will
19 involve monitoring site elevation as the
20 sediments compact and then vegetation planting.

21 As another featured project, starting
22 in the spring of 2024, the Texas TIG began

1 implementing breeding bird stewardship project
2 activities to protect breeding birds and reduce
3 human disturbance to nesting shore birds and
4 other bird species during the nesting season
5 along the Texas coast.

6 Personnel recently conducted bird
7 nesting surveys to identify where the birds are
8 likely to nest, and we expect intervention
9 activities will help to protect bird nesting and
10 foraging habitat. Intervention activities can
11 include things like the installation of
12 temporary fences that let the public know birds
13 are now nesting. The nesting activity will be
14 monitored throughout the breeding season and
15 activities will continue through 2029.

16 Looking forward, we are currently
17 developing our third restoration plan focused on
18 restoring wetlands, coastal, and nearshore
19 habitats. The restoration plan will build upon
20 the priority locations identified as part of the

1 dredged material planning for restoration
2 project that we had earlier done. Engineering
3 and design were conducted as part of that
4 previous project, and the upcoming restoration
5 plan will consider funding for the construction
6 of the identified sites. The construction
7 activities would involve using dredged material
8 beneficially to create and restore marsh
9 habitat, much like you saw with Pierce Marsh.

10 We expect to release a draft
11 restoration plan and environmental assessment
12 for public comment in early 2025.

13 Again, I want to thank each of you for
14 the opportunity to present the work of the Texas
15 Trustee Implementation Group and for you being
16 with us today.

17 With that, I'll turn the presentation
18 over to Laurie Rounds of the Open Ocean TIG.

19 MS. ROUNDS: Thank you, Robin.

20 Hello, everyone. My name is Laurie
21 Rounds, and I'm NOAA's representative on the
22 Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group, or TIG.

1 Thank you for joining us this afternoon. I will
2 be providing an update today on behalf of the
3 Open Ocean Trustees, which include
4 representatives from NOAA, the Department of the
5 Interior, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency,
6 and U.S. Department of Agriculture.

7 The Open Ocean TIG is implementing a
8 total of 45 planning, restoration, and
9 monitoring projects that have been approved
10 since May of this year. Through these projects,
11 we have committed approximately \$414 million of
12 the \$679 million in settlement funds that the
13 TIG has received from BP. The full allocation
14 to the Open Ocean TIG is about \$1.2 billion,
15 which we will receive in annual payments through
16 2031.

17 Next, I'd like to share some
18 highlights of our restoration activities.
19 Following the release of our third restoration
20 plan last September, we got to work with our
21 many partners to begin implementation of the
22 seven approved seabird projects. The first

1 project, Taking Flight, will reduce seabird
2 bycatch in Northeast U.S. and Atlantic Canada
3 fisheries. This project will help restore
4 species such as great shearwater and northern
5 gannet that winter in the Gulf of Mexico and
6 breed in the Northeast. By working with fishing
7 communities, the project will develop voluntary
8 strategies to reduce the accidental catch of
9 seabirds during fishing operations.

10 We also continue to work
11 collaboratively with fishing communities to
12 restore oceanic fish. Through our Better
13 Bycatch Reduction Devices project, we provided
14 more than 130 courtesy gear inspections for
15 interested shrimp fishermen in the Gulf of
16 Mexico. During these inspections, our team
17 assists with installation and use of devices to
18 reduce unintentional catch of non-targeted fish.
19 This project is one of the six ongoing fish
20 restoration projects working with several
21 partners and fishing communities to reduce fish
22 mortality.

1 The Open Ocean TIG also conducts
2 monitoring projects to better understand
3 restoration needs. Last year, we conducted
4 surveys in the northern Gulf of Mexico to
5 understand the abundance and distribution of
6 whales, dolphins, and seabirds. During the
7 survey, there were about 400 sightings of 16
8 species of marine mammals and 3,800 sightings of
9 22 species of seabirds. There were also several
10 sightings of the rare Rice's whale, which is
11 endemic to the Gulf of Mexico. This project is
12 conducting the second year of surveys now, and
13 we look forward to sharing their results.

14 The TIG is also restoring deep-sea
15 habitats that support cold water corals, fish,
16 and invertebrates across the Gulf seafloor.
17 Last year, our four deep-sea habitat restoration
18 projects completed eight expeditions, totaling
19 over 150 days at sea. The projects were able to
20 connect audiences on land to these at-sea
21 restoration efforts by installing two Starlink
22 antennas on the NOAA Ship Nancy Foster. Using

1 this technology, the team hosted 13 live-stream
2 events, reaching over 750 people. These events
3 are now being held for broader public audiences
4 to share the exciting work happening in the deep
5 waters of the Gulf.

6 These are just a few project
7 highlights. Please see our 2023 annual reports
8 for much more information.

9 So this year we are featuring the
10 Restoration of Common Loons in Minnesota
11 project, which began implementation in 2019.
12 Common loons nest in the northern U.S. and
13 migrate south to the warm waters of the Gulf of
14 Mexico in winter months. This project conducts
15 restoration and stewardship activities in
16 Minnesota where loons nest. It's managed by the
17 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in partnership
18 with the U.S. Geological Survey and the
19 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The
20 project team works together to acquire priority
21 loon breeding habitat, provide artificial
22 nesting platforms, and engage Minnesota lake

1 associations in loon conservation.

2 Based on their surveys and other
3 information, the project team identified 10
4 priority parcels of habitat for protection.

5 Because of the positive response from landowners
6 that want to help conserve loons, the team
7 anticipates completing acquisition for three
8 parcels from that priority list this year. This
9 will protect approximately 42 acres with more
10 than 4,800 feet of shoreline habitat.

11 The project team also works to enhance
12 nesting lakes by conducting loon nesting surveys
13 and deploying artificial nesting platforms.

14 Last year the project deployed 42 artificial
15 nesting platforms and recruited 21 lake
16 associations to become partners in conserving
17 and monitoring loon nesting areas.

18 Loons are also vulnerable to ingesting
19 lead fishing tackle, which can result in
20 poisoning and death. To help reduce this
21 threat, the project team works with the
22 Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Get the Lead

1 Out program, to help reduce the use of
2 lead-based fishing tackle. Get the Lead Out
3 program staff attended 111 in-person events,
4 recruited 113 Get the Lead Out partners, and
5 distributed approximately 850 lead collection
6 kits while continuing to implement a successful
7 lead-free tackle rebate program. The program
8 estimates they have reached nearly 11,000
9 members of the public through in-person events.

10 The success of the Common Loon
11 Restoration Project lies in the dedication and
12 work of our many partners. We look forward to
13 seeing what we can accomplish together in the
14 coming year.

15 So what's next for the Open Ocean TIG?
16 We will continue to conduct restoration planning
17 and implement restoration and monitoring
18 projects to restore oceanic resources injured by
19 the spill.

20 The TIG anticipates releasing our
21 fourth draft restoration plan and environmental
22 assessment for public comments this year. We

1 screened over 80 submitted ideas to develop a
2 range of restoration project alternatives for
3 fish and water column invertebrates and sea
4 turtles, which will be described in the draft
5 plan. We will also hold a public meeting during
6 the public comment period and look forward to
7 hearing your input.

8 I've only been able to talk about just
9 a few examples of the work being conducted to
10 restore the oceanic resources injured by the
11 spill. We regularly share stories about our
12 work through the Gulf Spill Restoration website,
13 so please sign up to receive updates.

14 We will also hold our annual public
15 webinar in the fall and hope you'll be able to
16 join us.

17 So thank you for your continued
18 participation in Open Ocean Restoration.

19 Next, Erin Plitsch will provide an
20 update for the Regionwide TIG.

21 MS. PLITSCH: Thanks, Laurie.

22 Good afternoon. I'm Erin Plitsch with

1 the Department of the Interior, and I'm
2 currently serving as the chair of the Regionwide
3 TIG with Jaime Miller from the Alabama
4 Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
5 serving as the vice chair.

6 Our TIG's funding update highlights
7 the commitment of approximately \$156 million to
8 date for restoration planning and project
9 implementation out of the \$198 million we've
10 received from BP so far. Just as a reminder,
11 once the Regionwide TIG receives its full
12 funding after 15 years, that allocation will be
13 \$350 million. For additional details, please
14 see the funding chart that's located on the
15 Regionwide Restoration Area website.

16 During the past year, the Regionwide
17 TIG has continued to implement the 11 projects
18 selected in the TIG's first restoration plan as
19 well as two early restoration projects. One of
20 those early restoration projects, the Improving
21 Habitat Injured by Spill Response Restoring the
22 Night Sky Project, has installed or retrofitted

1 3,115 light fixtures to sea turtle-friendly
2 lighting to date, with still more to come.

3 We also conveyed a 99-acre tract of
4 land to the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge
5 for bird habitat conservation and restoration
6 and are now beginning management activities on
7 that property.

8 A state and federal Trustee work group
9 has continued planning for implementation of the
10 Marine Debris Removal Project. And work is
11 underway on bird stewardship and sea turtle
12 nesting projects.

13 Also, as we heard from Maury earlier,
14 alternatives have been developed for the
15 Chandeleur Island Engineering and Design, and
16 we're currently evaluating those.

17 We're featuring our Colonial Waterbird
18 Monitoring Project, which wrapped up this year.
19 This effort included a comprehensive summary of
20 49,000 high-resolution aerial photographs taken
21 between 2010 and 2021 of colonial waterbirds
22 across northern Gulf of Mexico. A new avian

1 data monitoring portal makes the information
2 available to the public in a user friendly
3 format that's compatible with other major bird
4 databases.

5 The Trustees aim to create a
6 functional and easy-to-use information platform
7 to help address ongoing and future needs for
8 waterbird restoration and monitoring. To do
9 this, the project team engaged with a diverse
10 array of organizations of individuals who might
11 use the portal. The resultant avian data
12 monitoring portal is easily searchable and makes
13 the aerial photographs, which are marked with
14 dots indicating number of waterbird nests,
15 available in a graphic display. Users can also
16 view the search results via a dashboard that
17 displays species diversity and nesting abundance
18 across multiple spatial and temporal scales.

19 The portal was made possible by the
20 collaborative efforts of the Deepwater Horizon
21 Trustee agencies, the Water Institute, and
22 Colibri Ecological Consulting LLC, and the

1 Regionwide Trustees envision that the database,
2 when combined with state-specific waterbird
3 information, will be valuable for evaluating the
4 effectiveness of existing restoration projects,
5 informing adaptive management decisions,
6 updating future restoration project design and
7 construction guidance, and supporting future
8 Trustee restoration, conservation, and
9 management efforts.

10 So what's next for us? As for future
11 activities, we anticipate continuing the
12 implementation of the 11 projects approved in
13 Restoration Plan 1 as well as our early
14 restoration projects. We'll also continue to
15 discuss and plan for current and future
16 Regionwide restoration priorities.

17 Thank you so much for your time and
18 attention, and with that, I'll hand the floor
19 back to Perry.

20 MR. FRANKLIN: Thank you, Erin, and
21 thank you to all of today's presenters. That
22 was a wealth of information.

1 At this time, we'll proceed on to the
2 public comment portion of today's meeting.

3 Next slide. At this time, I'd like to
4 remind you that the Trustee Council
5 representatives shown on this slide or here on
6 the webinar and as in previous Trustee Council
7 public meetings, they will be listening only.
8 You may also want to comment on the work of the
9 Regionwide Trustee Implementation Group because
10 this meeting is also serving as that TIG's
11 annual meeting.

12 As a reminder, all attendees are muted
13 automatically, and we will unmute you.

14 If I can also ask you to take a quick
15 look at the questions and chat area of the
16 webinar's interface. We are attempting to
17 communicate with a few of you, and if you could
18 just see if there's a message in that area, we
19 sure would like to address your concerns and
20 questions.

21 So at this time, we'll proceed on with
22 the public comment portion of today's public

1 meeting. Everyone will be given three minutes
2 to speak, and if you are representing an
3 organization, if you would also be kind enough
4 to state the name of the organization you're
5 representing, that would be greatly appreciated.

6 At this time, I'd like to see if
7 Karima Cherif is available to make public
8 comment.

9 [Pause.]

10 MR. FRANKLIN: Okay. We'll give
11 Karima a moment.

12 MS. CHERIF: Can you hear me okay?

13 MR. FRANKLIN: Yes, I can hear you.
14 Please proceed.

15 MS. CHERIF: Great. Thank you so much
16 for putting this together today, and it's been
17 very, very informative.

18 One of the questions that I had was,
19 are any of the current restoration projects
20 doing any kind of water analysis or use of
21 enzymes to remove any existing oil residues in
22 the water?

1 MR. FRANKLIN: And again, I'll remind
2 everyone that the Trustee Council
3 representatives are listening only, and so that
4 question/comment will be placed into the public
5 record.

6 MS. CHERIF: Thank you.

7 MR. FRANKLIN: There were several
8 others who had pre-registered and indicated that
9 they would like to make public comment, and we
10 have not gotten confirmation that they still
11 desire to do so. So if you would just kindly
12 take a look at the comments chat portion of the
13 webinar's interface, you can communicate with us
14 to let us know your pleasure.

15 And if there are any others who would
16 like to make public comment who did not
17 pre-register to do so, just simply type your
18 name into the comments portion of the webinar's
19 interface in the bottom right corner, and we
20 will pick you up and introduce you.

21 All right. It will give us about 15
22 to 30 seconds. It seems like those that have

1 pre-registered have indicated that they no
2 longer care to give comment. I guess that's an
3 indication that our presenters covered a lot of
4 information and answered a lot of questions in
5 advance.

6 Again, I'd like to call your attention
7 that if today's information--there are a number
8 of fact sheets that are available related to
9 this program and this process, and I'd like to
10 direct your attention to that website
11 gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov. You can find the
12 fact sheets related to many of the projects that
13 were talked about today on that website,
14 gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov.

15 All righty. Well, presenters, I think
16 you have done a wonderful job, as I think we
17 have the all-clear on individuals willing to
18 provide public comment.

19 So, with that said, we will pitch back
20 to Gareth Leonard, who will close out today's
21 session. Gareth?

22 MR. LEONARD: Thanks, Perry.

1 We, the Trustees, are committed to
2 restoring the natural resources of the Gulf of
3 Mexico for years to come and will continue to
4 keep you updated as we strive to maintain our
5 rapid rate of progress.

6 Thank you all for attending this
7 annual meeting. We hope you found this meeting
8 informative.

9 Finally, I'd like to remind folks that
10 if you haven't already, a good way to keep up on
11 all the Trustee Council and Trustee group
12 activities is to sign up for our emails. If you
13 go to gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov and find the
14 teal box with the envelope icon that says "Get
15 the latest news updates from the Deepwater
16 Horizon Trustees."

17 Thank you, and have a good rest of
18 your day.

19 [Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource
20 Damage Assessment and Restoration
21 Trustee Council 2024 Annual Public Meeting
22 concluded]

1 CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

2 I, CHERYL NICHOLSON, Certified Court
3 Reporter, Certified LiveNote Reporter, and
4 Certified Realtime Systems Administrator, hereby
5 certify that the foregoing proceedings were
6 recorded by me stenographically and
7 electronically at the time and place mentioned
8 in the caption hereof and thereafter transcribed
9 by me; that said proceeding is a true record of
10 the testimony given by said participants; that I
11 am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed
12 by any of the parties to the action in which
13 this proceeding was taken; and further, that I
14 am not a relative or employee of any counsel or
15 attorney employed by the parties hereto, nor
16 financially or otherwise interested in the
17 outcome of this action.

18 *Cheryl Nicholson*

19 Cheryl L Nicholson

CHERYL L. NICHOLSON

20 Electronic Notary Public in and for
21 the Commonwealth of Virginia
22 Notary Registration Number- 270604
My Commission expires July 31, 2024.

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