



Open Ocean Restoration Area

Draft Restoration Plan 3



Northern gannets
Photo by Jonathan Fiely

U.S. Coast Guard

THE DEEPWATER HORIZON OIL SPILL

On April 20, 2010, the *Deepwater Horizon* (DWH) mobile drilling unit exploded and eventually sank in the Gulf of Mexico, resulting in a massive release of oil and other substances. This release caused extensive natural resource injuries across the northern Gulf of Mexico. Under the authority of the Oil Pollution Act, a council of federal and state Trustees was established to conduct a Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA), which includes assessing natural resource injuries resulting from the incident and working to make the environment and public whole for those injuries.

In accordance with OPA NRDA regulations, in 2016, the DWH Trustees issued a final programmatic plan to fund and implement restoration projects through a comprehensive, integrated, ecosystem approach. This programmatic restoration plan sets forth the process for DWH restoration planning and establishes a distributed governance structure that assigns a Trustee Implementation Group (TIG) for eight Restoration Areas. The Open Ocean TIG is responsible for making funding decisions to restore natural resources and services in the Open Ocean Restoration Area that were injured or lost as a result of the oil spill.

The Open Ocean TIG comprises the four federal DWH Trustee agencies:

- U.S. Department of the Interior
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

OPEN OCEAN RESTORATION

The Open Ocean TIG addresses a wide range of resources that make use of the open ocean, including water column and ocean bottom fish and invertebrates, sea turtles, birds, marine mammals, sturgeon, and deep-sea corals. Many species that spend part of their lives in the Gulf of Mexico also migrate to other places—as far away as Canada and the Mediterranean Sea. The Open Ocean TIG will address these species throughout their life stages and geographic ranges, including restoration in offshore, coastal, and inland areas, and outside of the Gulf of Mexico.

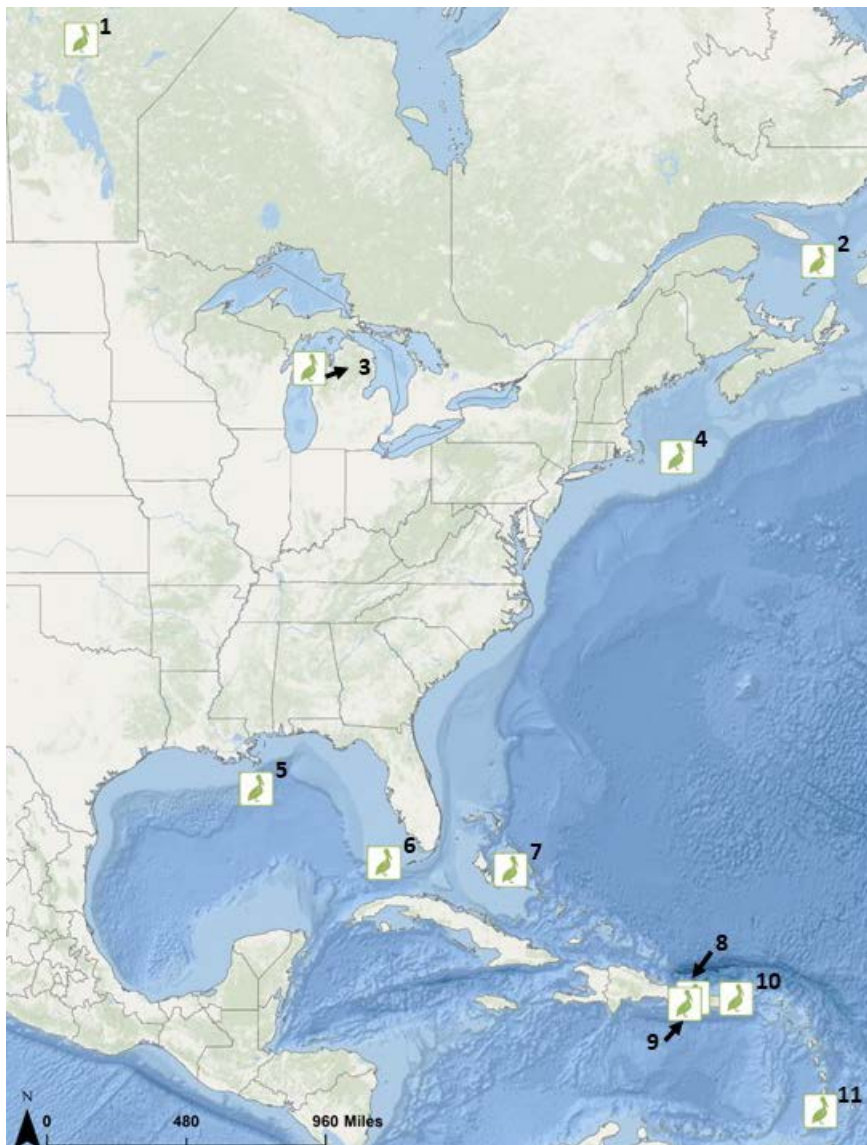


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RESTORATION PLAN 3 AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

In March 2021, the Open Ocean TIG began developing its third restoration plan by requesting restoration project ideas from the public. The Open Ocean TIG narrowed the list of project ideas received to 11 bird restoration projects and a no action alternative that are evaluated in this draft restoration plan. Based on the evaluation, the Open Ocean TIG is proposing 7 preferred alternatives for implementation.

This restoration plan prioritizes project ideas for seabird species that were injured by the spill, and for which DWH restoration projects have not yet been undertaken. The focal seabird species include the common tern, northern gannet, great shearwater, and Caribbean-nesting seabirds including Audubon's shearwater. While these species were documented as having been injured within the northern Gulf during the spill, they breed and spend substantial time outside of the Gulf.



RESTORATION PROJECTS

1. Common Tern Nesting Colony Restoration in Manitoba (*preferred*)
2. Northern Gannet Nesting Colony Restoration in Eastern Canada (*preferred*)
3. Common Tern Nesting Colony Restoration in the Great Lakes Region
4. Seabird Bycatch Reduction in Northeast U.S. and Atlantic Canada Fisheries (*preferred*)
5. Seabird Bycatch Risk Reduction in Gulf of Mexico and Southeast U.S. Pelagic Longline Fisheries
6. Seabird Nesting Colony Protection and Enhancement at Dry Tortugas National Park (*preferred*)
7. Seabird Nesting Habitat Restoration and Colony Reestablishment in the Bahamas
8. Seabird Nesting Colony Reestablishment and Protection at Desecho National Wildlife Refuge (*preferred*)
9. Predator Removal and Seabird Nesting Colony Restoration at Mona Island (*preferred*)
10. Predator Removal and Seabird Nesting Colony Restoration in the Culebra Archipelago
11. Invasive Goat Removal to Restore Seabird Nesting Habitat in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (*preferred*)



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Audubon's shearwater
Photo by Dominic Sherony



Brown noddy
Photo by Eric Dale, USFWS

PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT

In accordance with the NRDA regulations and National Environmental Policy Act, members of the public are encouraged to review and comment on the draft restoration plan. The plan is available for review for 45 days following public notification in the *Federal Register*. After the close of the comment period, the Open Ocean TIG will consider all comments received and finalize the restoration plan. A summary of comments received and the TIG's responses, where applicable, will be included in the final restoration plan.

Public comments can be submitted online, through the mail, or over the phone:

- Online: www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/openocean
- By mail:
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Gulf Restoration Office
1875 Century Blvd.
Atlanta, GA 30345
- Toll-free phone: 1-888-467-0009

In addition to the options above, the Open Ocean TIG is holding two public webinars to provide information on the draft restoration plan and to allow for public comment. Instructions on how to provide comment will be provided during the webinars. See the DWH Trustees' website (www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov) for more information and to register for the public webinars.

The draft restoration plan is available for public review and comment from March 14 to April 28, 2023. See www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/restoration-areas/open-ocean for more details.