



Open Ocean Restoration Area

June 2025



Technical divers test a new technique to collect age and growth data from live corals.
Credit: Jonathan Langham/Georgia Aquarium

RECENT ACTIVITIES

In the past year, we continued to implement 32 restoration projects and 10 monitoring activities. Working with partners, our projects conserve important habitats, reduce impacts—such as bycatch, and fill critical information gaps to restore open ocean resources injured by the oil spill. Our deep-sea restoration projects completed a successful third year of implementation. With two years remaining, the Trustees began assessing future priorities to continue restoration of the Gulf's deep sea coral communities. We released our fourth draft restoration plan for public input. The plan proposed ten projects that would commit over \$210 million to restore sea turtles and fish and water-column invertebrates. The Open Ocean and Louisiana Trustees began drafting a joint restoration plan to restore resources within the Chandeleur Island ecosystem. We also shared our progress through two public webinars.

WHAT WE DO

We work to restore wide-ranging and migratory species throughout their life stages and across geographic ranges, including inland, coastal, and offshore areas. Therefore, we may fund restoration projects outside of the Gulf of America (formerly 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:

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



Restoration Overview

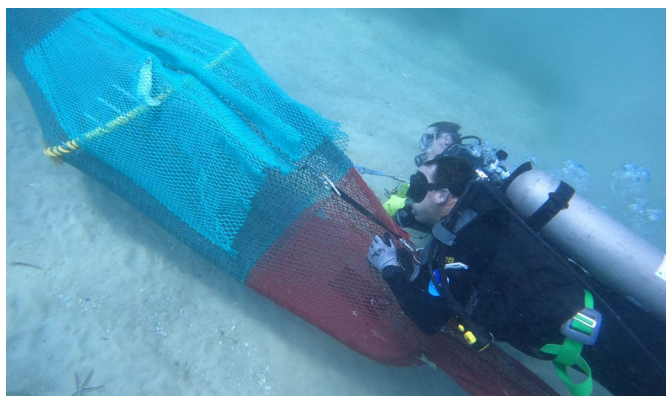
Reducing Sea Turtle Bycatch

Sea turtles are vulnerable to what's called bycatch, or accidentally getting caught in fishing gear. In an effort to reduce the occurrence of bycatch, we completed two projects focused on voluntary, innovative solutions. One worked with shrimp fishers to test whether Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) with bar spacing less than the 4" standard would reduce juvenile sea turtle bycatch while maintaining shrimp retention rates. The TED prototypes designed to help small turtles escape from trawl nets were tested over two years. Two of these were fully successful in preventing small turtles from getting caught while also retaining the fisher's shrimp catch. We hope to continue collaborating with fishers to provide tools like these "small bar" TEDs.

We also partnered with the menhaden fishery to better understand how sea turtles interact with fishing gear. The fishery and NOAA tested observation methods to improve detection of turtles during fishing operations. The project found that electronic monitoring using vessel mounted cameras was the most efficient way to observe if sea turtles are trapped in the net during fishing operations.

More Sea Turtle Restoration News

- We conserved 4.3 acres with over 450 feet of beach front in the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge for long-term protection of critical nesting habitat.
- We completed a Gulf-wide plan for in-water sea turtle monitoring to coordinate data collection.



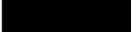
Diving Deep for Deep Sea Habitat Restoration

Educators are bringing the wonder of deep Gulf habitats to the public through the Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities Active Management and Protection project. To do so, we collaborate with partners to develop interactive educational materials, lesson plans, and immersive exhibits that increase awareness of and connection to these important habitats. In 2024, two major exhibits at the Audubon Aquarium in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Mississippi Aquarium in Gulfport opened, drawing hundreds of visitors. Made possible through a collaboration with the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, these exhibits showcase corals collected as part of ongoing restoration efforts and is the first time these corals have been on display to the public.

Behind the scenes, the deep sea corals are cared for by expert aquarists in partnership with the Coral Propagation Technique Development project. Collaborating with these and other aquariums helps the team develop best practices for caring for these corals. We also work together to test propagation techniques in the lab to better understand how to restore deep sea coral communities in the wild.



Funding Overview

Restoration Type	Settlement Allocation	Funds Committed Through May 2025	Percent Funds	
			Committed	Remaining
 Fish and Water Column Invertebrates	\$400,000,000	\$80,218,106	20% 	80%
 Sturgeon	\$15,000,000	\$3,055,220	20% 	80%
 Sea Turtles	\$55,000,000	\$20,789,198	38% 	62%
 Marine Mammals	\$55,000,000	\$23,371,443	42% 	58%
 Birds	\$70,000,000	\$47,889,974	68% 	32%
 Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities	\$273,300,000	\$139,407,747	51% 	49%
 Provide and Enhance Recreational Opportunities	\$22,397,916	\$22,388,991	100% 	0%
 Monitoring and Adaptive Management	\$200,000,000	\$23,690,883	12% 	88%
 Administrative Oversight and Comprehensive Planning	\$150,000,000	\$71,579,536	48% 	52%
Total	\$1,240,697,916	\$432,391,099	35% 	65%

The *Open Ocean Final Restoration Plan 4 and Environmental Assessment: Fish and Water Column Invertebrates and Sea Turtles* is planned for release in 2025. The plan proposes ten projects and over \$210 million for restoration.

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

