Restoration Projects for Sea Turtles

The *Deepwater Horizon* (DWH) oil spill injured sea turtles, specifically nesting (including nesting females, eggs, and hatchlings), small juvenile, large juvenile, and adult sea turtles throughout the Gulf of Mexico. Sea turtles were injured by oil or response activities in open ocean, nearshore, and shoreline environments, and the resulting mortalities spanned multiple species (see below). To help restore and partially compensate for the loss of DWH-injured sea turtles, the Regionwide TIG will implement restoration projects that span multiple jurisdictions and coastal and nearshore habitats in the Regionwide TIG's Final RP/EA 1. These projects are described in more detail below.

Five species of sea turtles inhabit the Gulf of Mexico. *Clockwise from top left: Kemp's ridley, loggerhead, green turtle, hawksbill, and leatherback. Sources: Dawn Witherington; DWH NRDA Trustees 2016; Strategic Framework for Sea Turtle Restoration Activities 2017*

SEA TURTLE RESTORATION PROJECTS

In 2019, the Regionwide TIG compiled 5,149 project ideas submitted to the Trustee project portals and identified 297 that were specific to sea turtles. Following an extensive screening process, the Regionwide TIG selected five sea turtle alternatives for implementation; see table below.

REGIONWIDE RESTORATION

Sea Turtle Restoration Projects in the Regionwide TIG Final RP/EA 1

Restoration Project	Project Description	Estimated Cost
Pilot Implementation of Automatic Identification System (AIS) in the Gulf of Mexico Inshore Shrimp Fishery to Inform Efforts to Reduce Sea Turtle Bycatch	This pilot project will focus on the inshore and nearshore Gulf of Mexico shrimp trawl fishery to better understand the overlap of fishing efforts, sea turtle distribution, and sea turtle mortality. Enhancing understanding of these areas of overlap through use of an AIS, an automatic tracking technology that uses transponders on vessels to provide information about spatial and temporal movements, will better inform actions to restore sea turtles by reducing bycatch in this fishery regionwide.	$2.2 million
Restore and Enhance Sea Turtle Nest Productivity	This project will develop and implement restoration actions to improve hatchling production for loggerhead, Kemp's ridley, and green sea turtles (e.g., removing barriers to beaches, managing nests to protect eggs and hatchlings when necessary and appropriate, monitoring beaches to prevent predation and poaching, reducing lighting near beaches, and restoring beach habitat). These actions will occur on sandy beaches throughout the northern Gulf of Mexico (Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida); on high-density nesting beaches in and adjacent to Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge on the east coast of Florida; and in northern Mexico.	$7.7 million
Reducing Sea Turtle Bycatch at Recreational Fishing Sites	This project will reduce bycatch of sea turtles at shore-based recreational fishing locations, such as fishing piers, bridges, and other shoreline structures. It will assess and identify factors contributing to sea turtle bycatch at shore-based recreational fishing sites and implement voluntary angler education and other programs to reduce bycatch and associated sea turtle injuries.	$3.6 million
Reducing Marine Debris Impacts on Birds and Sea Turtles (*joint project with the Birds Restoration Type*)	This project will reduce the threat and impacts of marine debris to DWH-injured sea turtle and bird species. This project will entail a coordinated effort among Trustees, non-governmental organizations, and other partners to compile data on marine debris to identify hotspots, conduct marine debris removal, and engage in debris prevention through public outreach.	$3.5 million ($7.0 million total project cost, split between Birds and Sea Turtles Restoration Types)

REGIONWIDE RESTORATION

Restoration Project	Project Description	Estimated Cost
Regionwide Enhancements to the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network and Enhanced Rehabilitation	This project will enhance the capabilities of project partners conducting stranding and rehabilitation activities in the Gulf of Mexico by supporting critical enhancement needs for the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network (STSSN). The project will provide support for responding to stranding events, recovering and necropsying dead stranded sea turtles to better understand mortality sources, and/or filling other gaps in STSSN response coverage where sea turtles would benefit from increased response effort and/or capacity. In addition, this project will support the construction of a new rehabilitation facility on the upper Texas coast. This activity will address a gap in the network by replacing lost rehabilitation capacity due to the impending closure of an existing facility.	$5.0 million

For additional details, please see the DWH Trustee website:
www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/restoration-areas/regionwide