

## Proposed 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 is proposing to implement restoration projects that span multiple jurisdictions and coastal and nearshore habitats in the Regionwide TIG's Draft RP/EA 1. These proposed 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*

### **PROPOSED 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 identified six sea turtle alternatives, of which five are preferred (i.e., proposed for funding in the Draft RP/EA 1); see table below.

# PROPOSED REGIONWIDE RESTORATION

## Preferred Sea Turtle Restoration Projects in the Regionwide TIG Draft 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 would 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. Enhanced understanding of these areas of overlap through the use of an AIS, an automatic tracking technology that uses transponders on vessels to provide information about spatial and temporal movements, would 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 would 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 would 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 would reduce bycatch of sea turtles at shore-based recreational fishing locations, such as fishing piers, bridges, and other shoreline structures. It would 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 ( <i>joint project with the Birds Restoration Type</i> )	This regionwide project would reduce the threat and impacts of marine debris to DWH-injured sea turtle and bird species. This project would 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)



# PROPOSED REGIONWIDE RESTORATION

Restoration Project	Project Description	Estimated Cost
Regionwide Enhancements to the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network and Enhanced Rehabilitation	This project would 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 would 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 would support the construction of a new rehabilitation facility on the upper Texas coast. This activity would address a gap in the network by replacing lost rehabilitation capacity due to the impending closure of an existing facility.	\$5.0 million

## PUBLIC INPUT

The Regionwide TIG's Draft RP/EA 1 is available for public review from March 22 through May 6, 2021. We encourage you to submit comments on the proposed sea turtle projects described above, or any other proposed projects described in the Draft RP/EA 1, during the 45-day comment period. Comments may be submitted during the comment period in three ways:

1. During the virtual public meeting on April 15, 2021
2. Online: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/RWTIGRP1>
3. By mail: Hard copy addressed to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 29649, Atlanta, GA 30345

To be considered, mailed comments **must be postmarked on or before the comment deadline** specified in the *Federal Register* and on the DWH Trustee website.

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

For additional information, contact:

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