DWH Texas Trustee Implementation Group 2021 Annual Public Meeting Script

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Slide 1	Welcome to the 2021 Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment, or NRDA, public meeting for the Texas Trustee Implementation Group, or Texas TIG. My name is Mike Cave. I'm the Natural Resource Trustee Program Manager with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and a member of the Texas TIG. All the TIG members, some of whom I will introduce later in the program, appreciate you taking time out of your day to be here with us.
Slide 2	Today I will provide a quick refresher on NRDA in general, the Deepwater Horizon NRDA process, and describe how our Deepwater Horizon NRDA restoration funds are structured in Texas. Next, I'll provide a status update on the Texas TIG's restoration planning efforts, and finally highlight some of our current restoration projects that are being implemented right now.
Slide 3	As in previous years, this public meeting provides everyone an opportunity to submit comments or questions to the Texas TIG. There is a comment box on your screen where you can provide feedback or ask a question. This "Questions" box can be found at the bottom of the control panel – where the green arrow is pointing. If you have questions about the presentation topics along the way, we encourage you to enter those in the "Questions" box at any time. If you enter your questions early in the presentation, it can help us organize them ahead of time. At the end of the presentation, we will answer as many questions as we are able. Please give us feedback and ask any questions you have. The Texas TIG members read every comment. We value and rely on public input.
Slide 4	First, some background information. Natural Resources Damage Assessment, or NRDA, is authorized under the Oil Pollution act of 1990, or OPA. The goal is to determine injuries to natural resources due to events like the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and eventually restore and replace ecosystem services lost while the habitat was contaminated. This effectively makes the environment and the public whole. NRDA is a legal process under OPA, whereby state and federal trustees are designated to represent the public interest to ensure that natural resources injured in an oil spill are restored. This process includes the assessment of oil spill impacts on natural resources. In this case, assessment took place from 2010 to 2015. Restoration for the Deepwater Horizon oil spill began in 2012 and is ongoing.

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Slide 5	On April 20, 2010, the oil drilling rig *Deepwater Horizon*, operating in the Macondo Prospect in the Gulf of Mexico, exploded and sank, resulting in the death of 11 workers. Deepwater Horizon is the largest oil spill in the history of marine oil drilling operations. Over three million barrels of oil flowed from the damaged Macondo well over an 87-day period, before the well was finally capped on July 15, 2010. In addition to the tragic deaths, the oil spill directly and indirectly injured wildlife, habitats, and the ecosystem as a whole, all along the Gulf coast. Recreation and recreational opportunities in the area were negatively affected. The goal of NRDA is to make the environment and the public whole for the loss of environmental services caused by this catastrophic event.
Slide 6	The federal and state trustees developed a programmatic restoration plan before final settlement of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The Final Programmatic Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan, or PDARP for short, was completed and released in early 2016. In the PDARP, all five Gulf states and four federal Trustees defined the injuries caused by the spill, and developed guidance for restoration efforts in the Gulf. To implement the PDARP, different groups of state and federal trustees called Trustee Implementation Groups, or TIGs, develop Restoration Plans for specific areas of focus. These restoration plans are developed consistent with the overarching Gulf ecosystem restoration goals identified in the PDARP and evaluate projects to be implemented to restore natural resources and recreational opportunities. The TIGs then implement the projects selected in final restoration plans, continuing to adhere to the requirements in OPA, the PDARP, and the individual restoration plans. Because of the scope of the damages and restoration, multiple restoration plans are released over time, and most plans identify multiple projects. This phased approach allows the Trustees to maximize restoration, take advantage of unique opportunities, and ensure there is always firm documentation and guidance to refer to through this long-term restoration process. This phased approach also has frequent, defined milestones, and opportunities for public input.

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Slide 7	The PDARP comprehensively evaluates the injuries to natural resources and ecosystem services, addressing the wide range of linked resources over the larger area of impact. This is a higher-level planning document, not a list of individual project proposals. The PDARP presents the Trustees' findings of injury and identifies the type and amount of restoration needed to compensate the public for the impacts. The PDARP identifies five restoration goals; Restore and conserve habitat like wetlands, coastal, and nearshore habitats. Restore water quality through reduction of nutrient nonpoint source pollution, such as runoff from farms, forests, and other nonpoint sources. Replenish and protect living coastal and marine resources such as birds and sea turtles. And to provide and enhance recreational opportunities, such as the early restoration funds that provided for a new campground at Galveston Island State Park. Finally, it is a foundational goal to provide monitoring, adaptive management, and administrative oversight to support restoration implementation. This is to ensure project success, and to track the compensation for the damage to the natural resources.
Slide 8	The Texas TIG is responsible for planning and implementing restoration activities within the Texas Restoration Area. We identify, develop, and evaluate project alternatives. We draft restoration plans which proposed projects. We engage the public for comment on restoration plans, and most importantly, we select and implement restoration projects, and conduct monitoring and adaptive management.
Slide 9	The Texas TIG agencies include the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Department of the Interior, the United States Department of Agriculture, the United States Environmental Protection Agency, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and the Texas General Land Office.
Slide 10	This pie chart shows the allocation of funds between restoration areas and their corresponding TIGs. As you can see, the Texas restoration area received an allocation of two hundred, thirty-eight million dollars. Approximately forty-nine million dollars of that amount was previously received as part of early restoration.

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Slide 11	This graphic shows how the Texas TIG has allocated their funds to the overarching restoration goals identified in the Consent Decree. Starting from the top and moving clockwise, One hundred million dollars is allocated to restore and conserve habitats. Twenty-three million dollars is allocated to restore water quality. Ninety-one million dollars is allocated to replenish and protect living coastal and marine resources. Nineteen million dollars is allocated to provide and enhance recreational opportunities. And finally, seven million dollars is allocated for monitoring, adaptive management, and administrative oversight.
Slide 12	This bar graph shows the total amount of NRDA funding allocated to each restoration goal within the Texas Restoration Area. It also shows the percentages of funds the Texas TIG has already committed to restoration projects within those goals (the filled in portion); as well the amounts remaining for future restoration projects (the empty portion). The Texas TIG has committed around 44% of the two hundred thirty-eight million dollars for restoration and related activities. The Texas TIG committed all funds for recreational opportunities, and most of the funds for sea turtle restoration during the early restoration time period. Roughly half of the funds for restoration of birds remains.
Slide 13	To learn more about everything I talked about, please visit https://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov. That website has all the information I just covered in even more detail. It is kept up to date with current news and information related to each TIG's restoration efforts. The webpage dedicated to the Texas Restoration Area has up to date information on project implementation, funds allocation, and ongoing TIG activities. The page also has links to an interactive project map, and a table that summarizes the environmental compliance status for each project.
Slide 14	That brings us to the next portion of this annual update: the Texas TIG's current activities. Right now, we are drafting our second Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment (or RP/EA 2) for the Texas Restoration area, which will describe how we propose to allocate a portion of our remaining funds and implement more restoration projects in Texas. On October 1st, 2020, the Texas TIG released a public notice for the solicitation of project ideas for our next restoration plan. The Texas TIG is evaluating the project ideas we received, and we anticipate that we'll release the Draft RP/EA 2 in February 2022 for a 30-day public comment period. In March 2022, during the public comment period, the Texas TIG will hold a public meeting to present and discuss the Plan. The public will have an opportunity to provide comment during the public meeting. The Trustees will review all public comments we receive and modify the draft RP/EA 2 as needed before releasing the final version, which we anticipate will be in late July 2022.
Slide 15	Next, we'd like to present some updates on some of the projects that are currently being implemented in Texas.

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Slide 16	In 2017, the Texas TIG adopted its first Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment, or RP/EA 1, which identified 13 restoration projects for implementation. The Texas TIG is currently implementing 20 projects along the Texas coast, including the thirteen projects from the first RPEA, as well as seven early restoration projects. Projects are concentrated in the upper coast; the middle coast near the Corpus Christi area; and the lower coast near the Texas/Mexico border. The projects fall into three broad activities: acquisition, restoration, and construction. We have several Trustees ready here tonight to give updates on projects for which their agencies are leading implementation. First, Erin Chandler from the Department of the Interior will provide an update on the Bahia Grande Acquisition Project.
Slide 17	The Bahia Grande Acquisition Project includes acquisition of important coastal habitat that has been conveyed to the USFWS and will be managed as part of the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. This tract includes 1,322 acres of tidal wetlands, thorn scrub, and coastal prairie with more than a mile of frontage on the Lower Laguna Madre and almost two miles frontage on a tidal inlet called Laguna Vista Cove. The cost for the project was $6,900,000, including $2,273,000 provided by the Texas TIG. The acquired land will be managed by USFWS as part of the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge and has added acreage to the Bahia Grande Coastal Corridor. The acquisition and protection of these habitats benefits numerous species, including wading birds, migratory birds, and the federally endangered ocelot. Now I'm going to hand it over to Jamie Schubert from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to discuss the Beneficial Use of Dredged Material Project.
Slide 18	The engineering and design step is an important step between an initial project idea, and when a restoration project is shovel-ready. The Texas TIG partnered with Ducks Unlimited to conduct the engineering and design for eight sites along the Texas Coast. These marsh restoration sites will be restored through the beneficial use of sediments dredged from federal and private navigation channels. Ducks Unlimited and their project team have collected over 20,000 survey points at these eight sites to inform project design The eight sites are located on National Wildlife Refuges, Texas Wildlife Management areas and on private property This engineering and design project will result in 8 shovel-ready tidal marsh restoration projects that will restore over 2,900 acres of coastal habitat Now we'll hear from Allison Fischer of the General Land Office on several different restoration projects that the Land Office is implementing.

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Slide 19	The Texas General Land Office is the implementing Trustee for the Bahia Grande Hydrologic Restoration Project. I am Allison Fischer and I manage this project. The project is located off the highway 48 bridge, between Brownsville and Port Isabel, in Cameron county, Texas. A construction contractor is enlarging and stabilizing the existing Joe Gayman Channel which allows tidal exchange between the Bahia Grande and the Brownsville Ship Channel. The Bahia Grande was historically a prolific wetland, but in the 1950s construction of the highway and the Brownsville Ship Channel cut off the flow of water to the wetland, choking the beneficial environment, and creating a health and public safety hazard. This project seeks to reconnect tidal flow to the estuary. Researchers at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley are conducting monitoring to ensure that the project meets its environmental goals of increasing tidal exchange and reducing the occurrence of low dissolved oxygen events, which cause algae blooms and fish kills. Construction on the project began earlier in 2021, and is expected to be completed by the end of January, 2022. Anecdotal reports from the researchers and local fishers indicate that even though construction is only partially completed, flow has already increased, water flows further into the wetlands, and that fish and birds in the area seem to be increasing.

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Slide 20	The McFaddin Beach and Dune Restoration Project includes restoring and nourishing around 17-miles of shoreline along an extremely degraded portion of the McFaddin National Wildlife Refuge. The Project will restore the beach barrier which has historically protected the interface of the Gulf of Mexico and adjacent wetlands. The adjacent wetlands, or Salt Bayou ecosystem, contains the largest continuous estuarine marsh complex in Texas including freshwater marshes, coastal grassland prairies, tidal flats, creeks, basins, and associated aquatic vegetation. This diverse array of ecosystems creates an extremely productive complex for fish and wildlife resources and provides various outdoor recreational opportunities from fishing to birding. These wetlands frequently experience inundation by seawater and permanent alteration of historic hydrologic patterns as the wetland marsh fluctuates from emergent to open water with every step of the erosion process. The current Project includes engineering, design, planning, construction and construction administration, planting, debris removal, and post-construction monitoring. Over 94 million dollars is budgeted for the total project. The Texas TIG is providing 18 million dollars. The restoration of the shoreline will provide new habitat and recreational opportunities. The Project is modeled after an extremely successful Pilot Project which completed 2.9 miles of restored shoreline along the McFaddin National Wildlife Refuge in May of 2017. Up to 500 least tern nests were observed at the Pilot Project site approximately 30 days post-construction. The Pilot Project also created enough restored habitat to allow the beach to begin a more natural sand cycle, which increases resiliency through tropical storms. Lessons learned during the Pilot project have helped the current project team develop a more effective and efficient restoration project along one of the most inaccessible and degraded reaches of the Texas shoreline. The Project will be the largest beach nourishment and planting project in the state of Texas. Construction is expected to begin in late 2021 and be completed in late 2022. Now I'll pass the presentation over to Dr. Ben Wilson to cover some other GLO-led projects.
Slide 21	The Texas General Land Office is the implementing Trustee for the Dickinson Bay Bird Island II project. This project will construct a 4-acre bird rookery island in Dickinson Bay with the goal of increasing colonial waterbird nesting success. The new island will be located adjacent to another bird island in Dickinson Bay that was created in 2004. This project will involve placing fill material to create new island mass, planting native scrub-shrub vegetation to enhance habitat, and building armored levees to protect the island from erosion. Construction on this project began in late 2021 and is expected to be completed in February 2022, just in time for bird nesting season.
Slide 22	The Texas TIG is leveraging resources to fund oyster restoration in East Galveston Bay Texas. In our 2017 plan we funded the site selection, modelling, engineering, and design for paired intertidal and subtidal reefs in East Galveston Bay. Funding to construct these reefs was secured in the Regionwide TIGs first restoration plan. These sites are the Texas component of the Gulf Wide Linking Brood Reefs and Sink Reefs project funded in September 2021. Now back to Mike Cave.

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Slide 23	Thank you, Ben! If you'd like to find out more information on the projects that we just discussed, as well as all the other projects being implemented in Texas, please visit the Texas Restoration Area page on the NOAA Gulf Oil Spill Restoration website – that's https://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/. And now the Texas TIG would like to hear from you! In a few moments, we're going to start a live Q&A session with members from the Texas TIG available to answer your questions. Please enter any questions you may have into the "Question" box located in the webinar panel, and we will answer as many of your submitted questions as possible. To manage the Q&A session, I'm going to hand it over to Lena Flannery.
Slide 24	Thank you, Lena! That concludes our annual update for 2021. Again, more details on all the information we presented tonight can be found online at https://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov. Look for more information from us in the future as the Texas TIG moves forward with the upcoming restoration plan. The entire Texas TIG appreciates you taking time out of your day so that we could share with you what we've been working on.