Restoration Projects for Marine Mammals

Photo: Bottlenose dolphin pod with two calves. Credit: NOAA.

The DWH oil spill injured marine mammals in the Gulf of Mexico by contaminating prime marine mammal habitat in nearshore and offshore waters, which contributed to the largest and longest marine mammal unusual mortality event on record in the northern Gulf of Mexico. To help restore and partially compensate for the loss of DWH injured marine mammals, the Regionwide TIG will implement restoration projects that span across multiple jurisdictions and coastal and nearshore habitats in the Regionwide TIG's Final RP/EA 1. These projects are described in more detail below.

MARINE MAMMAL RESTORATION PROJECTS

In 2019, the Regionwide TIG compiled 5,149 project ideas submitted to the Trustee project portals and identified 171 that were specific to DWH-injured marine mammal species. Following an extensive screening process, the Regionwide TIG selected three marine mammal alternatives for implementation; see table below.

REGIONWIDE RESTORATION

Marine Mammal Restoration Projects in the Regionwide TIG Final RP/EA 1

Restoration Project	Project Description	Estimated Cost
Voluntary Modifications to Commercial Shrimp Lazy Lines to Reduce Dolphin Entanglements	This project will benefit Gulf of Mexico bottlenose dolphins by decreasing the number of entanglements and associated mortality of dolphins in the lazy lines of commercial shrimp trawl vessels (otter and skimmer) operating within state inshore and coastal waters. This project will involve researchers and the fishing community cooperatively testing the performance and usability of previously identified alternative lazy line materials.	$3.2 million
Reducing Impacts to Dolphins from Hook-and-Line Gear and Provisioning through Fishery Surveys, Social Science, and Collaboration	This project will reduce interactions between Gulf of Mexico bottlenose dolphins and hook-and-line fishing gear/fishing practices and reduce illegal feeding activities. Project activities will include systematic fishery surveys, social science studies, and characterization of gear found on stranded dolphins. Based on that information, the project will identify possible solution(s) to reduce interactions between dolphins and hook-and-line fishing activities.	$1.7 million
Enhance Marine Mammal Stranding Network Diagnostic Capabilities and Consistency across the Gulf of Mexico	This project will help the Marine Mammal Stranding Network (MMSN) make better rehabilitation/release decisions for live stranded animals, improve understanding of marine mammal population health, and increase consistency and accuracy of data availability to allow for rapid responses to emerging threats. Across the project area, the Gulf of Mexico MMSN includes 14 authorized organizations (3 in Texas, 1 in Louisiana, 1 in Mississippi, 1 in Alabama, and 8 in Florida). This project will focus on activities that could support or enhance MMSN diagnostic capabilities to improve treatment and care for live stranded cetaceans, support data collection and reporting, and increase management consistency across the Gulf of Mexico MMSN as a whole.	$2.3 million

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