

NRDAR



Left: Upper Arkansas River restoration in Colorado, courtesy of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; Center: An oiled Gannet is cleaned at Theodore Oiled Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Alabama, photo by Colin White, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; Right: Two rehabilitated Brown Pelicans are released into the wild after relocation to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, photo courtesy of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Restoring Resources

Releases of hazardous substances and oil spills pose a serious threat to our nation's natural resources. The purpose of the NRDAR program is to restore natural resources injured as a result of oil spills or hazardous substance releases into the environment. Damage assessments provide the basis for determining the extent of restoration needed to address the public's natural resource losses.

Origin

As a result of the concern over the influx of contaminants into the environment and to ensure that the responsible parties – not taxpayers – pay for cleanup and restoration, Congress passed the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA or "Superfund"), the Clean Water Act, and the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. These laws provide trustees with the authority to carry out the responsibilities of the program.

Trustees

The Department of the Interior is the nation's principal conservation agency and is the trustee for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. The DOI works with States, federally recognized Indian tribes, and other federal agencies with natural resource management responsibilities as co-trustees. Trustees seek to identify the natural resources injured, determine the extent of the injuries, recover damages from those responsible, and plan and carry out natural resource restoration activities. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, and the National Park Service are agencies within the Department that are responsible for the management of trust resources.



NRDAR PROCESS

The natural resource damage assessment and restoration process generally follows these steps:



Oil is spilled or a hazardous material is released into the environment. Many of these incidents involve discharges into bodies of water where the oil or hazardous material has the potential to spread far beyond the original source.

1. The Coast Guard, Environmental Protection Agency, state agencies, or a responsible party contains the source of the discharge and clean up the oil or hazardous material. Trustees collect preliminary data with the intent of preserving ephemeral information then determine if they have a viable case to move forward with assessment.



3. Once the trustees complete the plan, they perform injury assessment, which includes determining and quantifying resource injury and damages. Typically, the assessment can begin during response and cleanup or afterwards. Assessment is usually not completed before cleanup is finished because the full extent of the injuries cannot be determined until then.



5. In conjunction with or following a settlement, the trustees develop a restoration plan with public input that specifies the restoration projects to restore the injured resources. These restoration projects are then implemented.



6. Finally, the trustees monitor the restoration projects to assure that they continue to be properly managed and to ensure long-term success of the restoration.



Oiled Grebe during the Cosco Busan spill in 2007. Photo by Bob Dang, California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

2. Trustees decide on the assessment procedures to be used, develop a plan, and evaluate the costs of assessing injuries.



NPS staff and volunteers remove exotic species and add native plants at Crissy Field which was affected by the SS Cape Mohican oil spill in San Francisco. Photo courtesy of the U.S. National Park Service.



4. After the assessment, the trustees use collected information to finalize a claim in preparation for settlement or legal action with the responsible party. If a negotiated settlement cannot be reached, the trustees can take the responsible parties to court. Most cases are settled out of court.