NRDA Potential Restoration Approaches

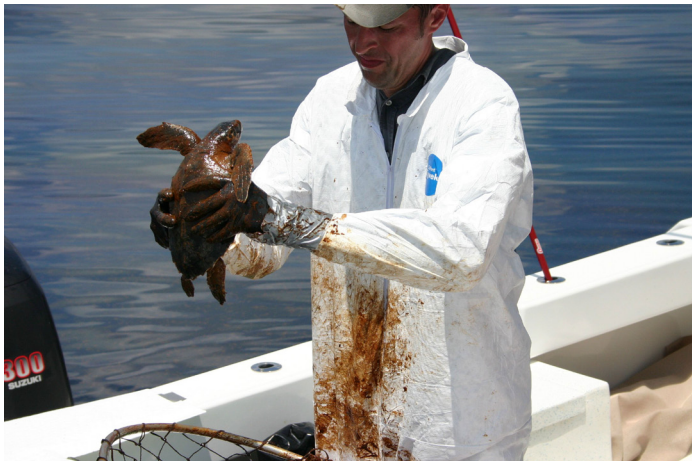
What is NRDA?

A Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) is a legal process under the Oil Pollution Act that natural resource trustees use to:

- Assess natural resource injuries and lost services caused by an oil spill.
- Determine the appropriate type and amount of restoration needed to compensate the public for these impacts.
- Ensure that responsible parties implement or fund the appropriate restoration activities to compensate the public.

Who are the Natural Resource Trustees?

The trustees are the designated federal, state, and tribal agencies who are responsible for the natural resources impacted by an oil spill. Federal trustees are designated by the President; state trustees are designated by governors; tribal trustees are designated by the affected tribes' governing bodies. Trustees for the spill include the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for the Department Commerce, the Department of the Interior, Department of Defense, multiple Gulf states, and tribal entities.



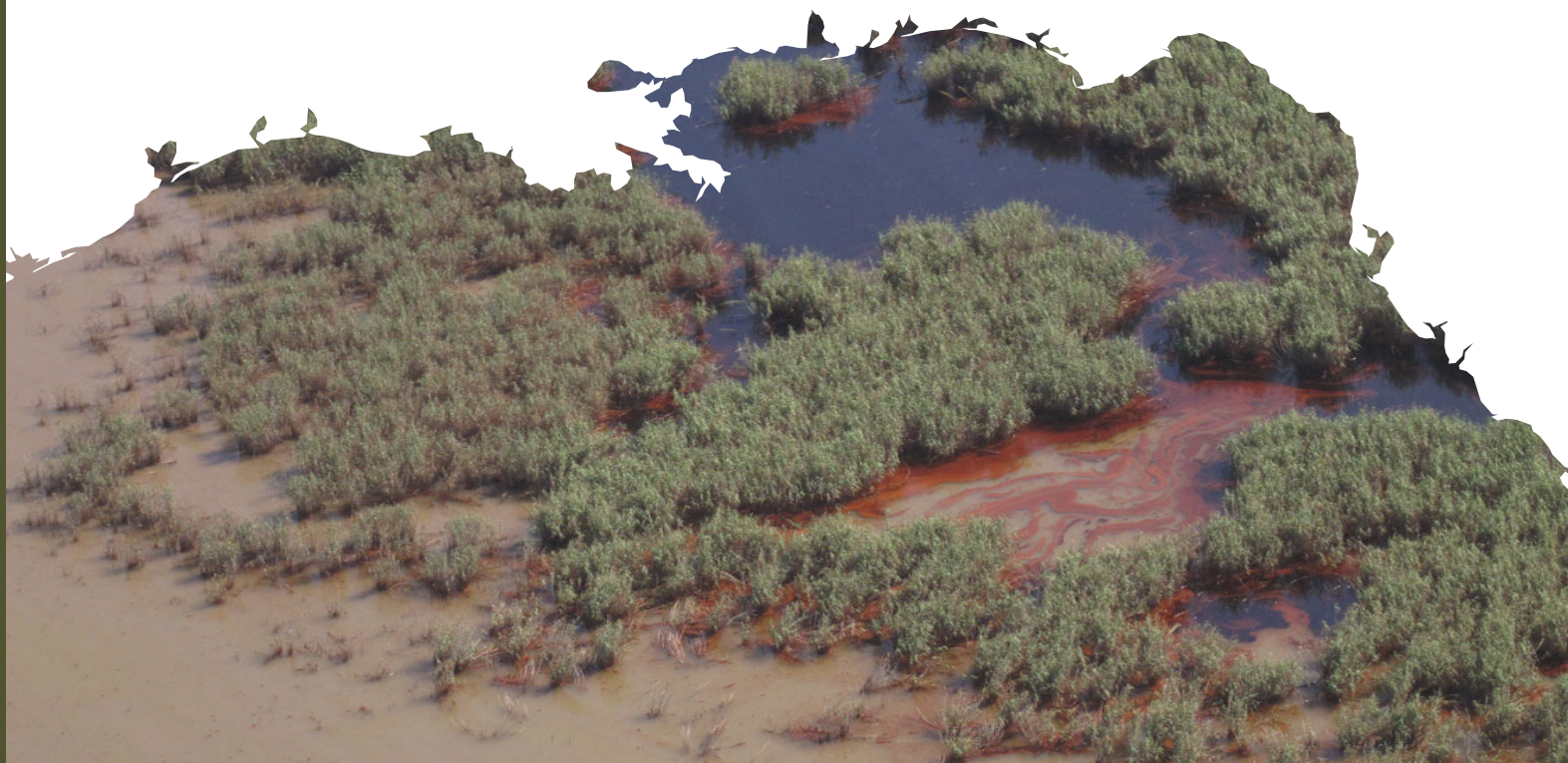
Dr. Brian Stacy, NOAA veterinarian, prepares to clean an oiled Kemp's Ridley turtle. Credit: NOAA and Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

What is NRDA Restoration?

NRDA restoration means any action, or combination of actions, to restore, rehabilitate, replace, or acquire the equivalent of injured natural resources and services.

What is Emergency Restoration?

Emergency restoration includes actions that are taken by the trustees prior to the completion of the damage assessment and restoration planning process to prevent or reduce continuing natural resource injuries and/or avoid a potential irreversible loss of natural resources or their services.



What is Primary Restoration?

Primary restoration includes actions conducted by trustees to return injured natural resources to the condition that would have existed if the incident had not occurred. Some natural resources might recover very slowly, or not even recover at all, from injuries due to an oil spill. Trustees are authorized to conduct primary restoration to speed the recovery of the injured resources, such as reconstructing physical habitat that was destroyed or taking measures to protect or increase the population of an endangered species.

What is Compensatory Restoration?

Compensatory restoration includes actions conducted by the trustees to address the natural resource injuries and services lost that accrue from the date of injury until recovery to pre-spill conditions is completed. While the resource is impaired, it is unable to provide services on which other parts of the ecosystem and the public rely. Trustees are authorized to ensure that compensatory restoration projects are implemented to compensate the public for these interim losses.

EXAMPLES: Restoration Approaches

In the case of an oil spill in a stream, the trustees may engage in emergency restoration to prevent or reduce injuries to a threatened downstream wetland by damming or diverting the stream to prevent further oiling.

To address injuries to a wetland that has already been oiled, the trustees may:

- Replant marsh vegetation to help restore the marsh to the condition it would have been in had the spill not occurred (also called primary restoration).
- Create or protect additional marshland to compensate for lost recreational use of the marsh, such as hunting and fishing, and to compensate for lost ecological services from the time of the spill until recovery through compensatory restoration.