

2020 Deepwater Horizon Oceanic Fish Restoration Project

SUPPORTING A HEALTHIER GULF OF MEXICO



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NFWF

Many oceanic, or pelagic, fish species in the Gulf of Mexico were injured during the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, including tuna, billfish and mackerel, as well as deepwater fish such as lancetfish. These natural resources are not only critical to the health of the marine ecosystem, but they also support the livelihood of fishing businesses and communities across the Gulf. In 2017, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) implemented a project to help restore some of the pelagic fish affected by the oil spill.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

NOAA, along with other federal and state agencies, is authorized under the Oil Pollution Act (OPA) to act as Trustees on behalf of the public to determine injuries to natural resources that result from an oil spill and carry out restoration efforts. The Deepwater Horizon Oceanic Fish Restoration Project was included as part of the plan in the fourth phase of early restoration for the 2010 oil spill, released in September 2015. The project is funded through the legal settlement with BP. NOAA has established a partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to work with the Gulf of Mexico pelagic longline fishery to help restore pelagic fish species injured by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The goal is to reduce fish mortality through a temporary, voluntary fishing repose.

During the repose, vessel owners participating in the project refrain from

pelagic longline fishing for six months, from January 1 through June 30, and receive compensation to help offset their potential loss in revenue. They are encouraged to use alternative fishing gear which specifically target yellowfin tuna and swordfish and result in lower bycatch of other non-target fish species. By fishing with the alternative gear, participating vessel owners will continue to bring fish to market.

In 2016, NOAA and NFWF began working directly with fishing vessel owners to get their feedback before implementing this temporary restoration project that launched as a pilot in 2017 and began its first full season in 2018. NOAA and NFWF anticipate the project will continue for an additional three to five years, with an expected annual six-month repose period beginning each January. The 2020 repose will begin on January 1, 2020.





THE U.S. PELAGIC LONGLINE FISHERY is one of the most sustainable longline fisheries in the world. Pelagic longline fishers in the Gulf of Mexico have a long history of helping to ensure their fisheries are sustainable, from utilizing new types of fishing hooks to adhering to fishing area closures.

REVIEW OF PROJECT YEARS

The *Deepwater Horizon* Oceanic Fish Restoration Project was launched as a pilot in 2017. Launching the project as a pilot (with a shortened repose period) allowed continued engagement with vessel owners, fish dealers and other stakeholders so that NFWF and NOAA could make adjustments and enhancements for the full rollout of the project in 2018. The 2018 project included a six-month pelagic longline repose from January 1 through June 30, 2018.

PARTICIPATION

In 2017, 2018 and 2019, half of the approximately 35 eligible vessel owners in the Gulf applied for the project. Most applicants were from Louisiana; the remainder were from Florida. All completed applications were considered.

For the 2017 project year, seven vessel owners from Louisiana participated in a four-month pelagic longline repose from March 1 through June 30. Participants fished using greenstick gear for a collective total of 280 sea-days.

In 2018 and 2019, the repose period took place from January 1 through June 30. In the 2018 project year, seven vessel owners from Louisiana and three vessel owners from Florida participated in the repose. In the 2019 project year, eight vessel owners from Louisiana and two vessel owners from Florida participated in the repose. Participants fished using greenstick, buoy and deep drop rod and reel gear for almost 500 sea-days in 2018, and more than 500 sea-days in 2019.

OUTCOMES

Data show clear bycatch benefits: the amount of bycatch species caught using alternative gear was minimal, and many of those that were caught were released alive.

All of the participants to date have provided positive feedback about the project:

“I found it very rewarding to be a part of the research and experiment with the new gear, as well as to be a part of something that could help restore fish in the Gulf,” one participant said.

According to another participant: “I am very invested in helping make alternative gear more effective for future generations of fishermen.”

NFWF and NOAA are excited about the future of this project based on the successful outcomes of previous project years.

Read more about the past project years here:
www.nfwf.org/pli.

AS WITH MOST COMMERCIAL FISHING GEAR, pelagic longline gear results in accidental catch of many non-targeted species (or bycatch). Additionally, some of the bycatch can die before the fishing line is hauled back or they can be discarded due to regulatory requirements or limited market value. The alternative fishing gear types provided through this project result in lower bycatch and bycatch mortality but are relatively underutilized in the Gulf of Mexico.



PROJECT BENEFITS

HELPING IMPROVE THE GULF: Restoring pelagic fish that were injured by the oil spill will benefit the Gulf of Mexico in the short- and long-term and will help compensate for some of the injuries to fish caused by the spill. Reducing fish mortality will allow fish to grow and reproduce, which will help support healthier populations of fish throughout the Gulf.

SUPPORTING VESSEL OWNERS: All participants are volunteers and are compensated to help offset their loss in revenue during the repose. They are also provided the option to continue to bring fish to market using alternative gear types that result in lower bycatch. Those pelagic longline vessel owners who are not participating (the majority of the fleet) will continue to land tuna and swordfish throughout the Gulf of Mexico using pelagic longline gear.

TESTING ALTERNATIVE GEAR: Participants have the option of using alternative gear to explore fishing strategies that provide alternative harvest opportunities. This portion of the project will provide participants with an opportunity to study and improve their proficiency with new gear types.

Photo credits: Jay Fleming Photography

The Deepwater Horizon Oceanic Fish Restoration Project is tailored to restore resources injured by the 2010 oil spill and does not change existing management practices or regulations. This is one of many projects designed by the Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group to benefit the natural resources in the Gulf of Mexico using funds from the legal settlement with BP. For more information, please visit www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/restoration-areas/open-ocean. To learn more about the project, please visit www.nfwf.org/pll.