Many oceanic, or pelagic, fish species in the Gulf of Mexico were injured by the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, including tuna, billfish, and mackerel, as well as deepwater fish such as lancetfish. The *Deepwater Horizon* Oceanic Fish Restoration Project, organized by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), is tailored to restore resources injured by the 2010 oil spill. Since it began in 2017, the project has successfully helped to restore fish in the Gulf thanks to participation from area pelagic longline fishermen who have helped reduce fishing pressure on pelagic fish species.

2022 DEEPWATER HORIZON OCEANIC FISH RESTORATION PROJECT

Fact Sheet

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.

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.

The goal of the project 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. During the repose, participants have the option to continue to fish using up to two of the three alternative gear types, which result in lower bycatch of other non-target fish species. This gear, which is provided for participants, includes: greenstick gear

for yellowfin tuna, buoy gear for swordfish and yellowfin tuna, and deep drop rod and reel gear for swordfish.

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.

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 that the 2022 repose will likely be the project's last year, although a final decision has not yet been reached. That decision will consider the level of participation needed to meet restoration goals.** The 2022 repose will begin on January 1, 2022.

The project 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.

Participation

The project has had broad participation from across the Gulf of Mexico. From 2017 through 2021, 19 unique vessel owners participated in the project, with some vessel owners participating for multiple years. Most applicants were from Louisiana; the remainder were from Florida. All completed applications were considered.

In total to date, participants fished using greenstick, buoy, and deep drop rod and reel gear for more than 2,550 sea-days. Please see more information based on project year in the table below.

Participants that used buoy gear were also able to apply for and receive an Exempted Fishing Permit to allow for power retrieval and deployment and the retention of yellowfin tuna on buoy gear. This exemption allowed for data collection using this gear to target yellowfin tuna and large swordfish at deeper depths during the day.

Summary of Participation, 2017-2021

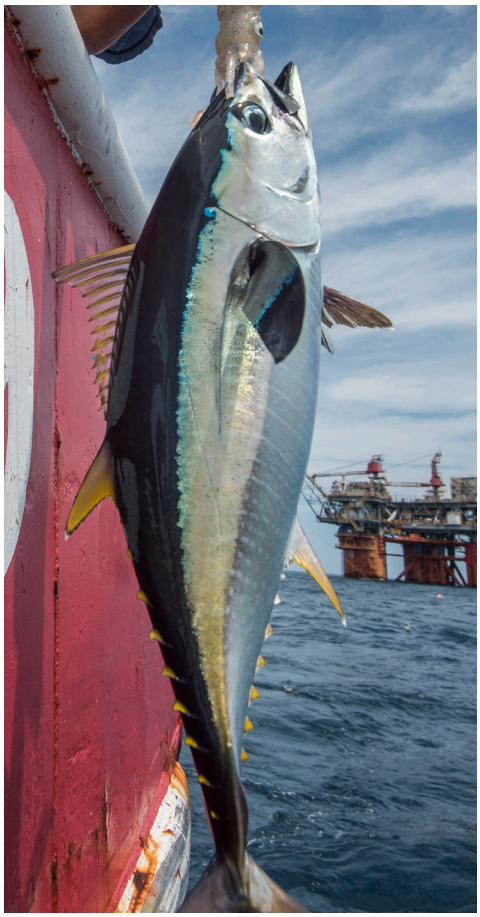
Project Year	Participants from Louisiana	Participants from Florida	Sea-days using alternative gear	Alternative gear used
2017 (four-month repose)	7	0	280	greenstick gear
2018	7	3	500	greenstick, buoy, and deep drop rod and reel gear
2019	8	2	500	greenstick, buoy, and deep drop rod and reel gear
2020	7	5	650	greenstick, buoy, and deep drop rod and reel gear
2021	7	4	650	greenstick, buoy, and deep drop rod and reel gear

Outcomes

Data collected by NOAA from the 2017-2019 project years shows that the project is on track to meet restoration goals to reduce fish mortality and help restore more than 60 species of pelagic fish in the Gulf. Other results of note:

- In total, participating vessel owners allowed approximately 23,000 individual pelagic fish (about one million pounds), including 10,600 individual tuna and swordfish, to remain in the water to grow, reproduce, and support future generations of fish.
- Although alternative gear was found to have lower catch rates than pelagic longline gear, almost 90% of all fish discarded from alternative gear were released alive.

Participants 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."



To learn more about the project, please visit **nfwf.org/programs/deepwater-horizon-oceanic-fish-restoration-project**. For more information about the oil spill restoration in the Gulf, please visit **gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/restoration-areas/open-ocean**.