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# A Guide to Participating in the *Deepwater Horizon* Natural Resource Damage Assessment Process

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A Guide to Participating in the *Deepwater Horizon* Natural Resource Damage Assessment Process.

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When an oil spill occurs, natural resources like fish, birds, and marshes may be injured. A natural resource damage assessment (**NRDA**) is a process focused on figuring out what those injuries are, coming up with a plan to fix those injuries, and then fixing them.

This document is intended to help guide you as you determine how to engage in the *Deepwater Horizon* NRDA process. Following some brief background, the document is divided into two parts. The first part provides a general overview of points in the process where you can participate; the second part identifies some specific ways to engage in the process, depending on your priorities, along with resources that are available to help. We focused on four priorities: Stay Informed about the NRDA Process, Help Get “Good” Projects In the Ground, Share Information Among Citizens and With Trustees, and Involve the Community in Project Selection, Implementation, and Monitoring. Note that links to many of the resources have been included. They, along with other resources, can also be found at [www.eli-ocean.org/gulf/eli-resource-repository](http://www.eli-ocean.org/gulf/eli-resource-repository).

Keep in mind that these are just some of the ways the public may be able to participate. You can find more information on the *Deepwater Horizon* NRDA, as well as on some current opportunities to participate, at [www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov](http://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov).



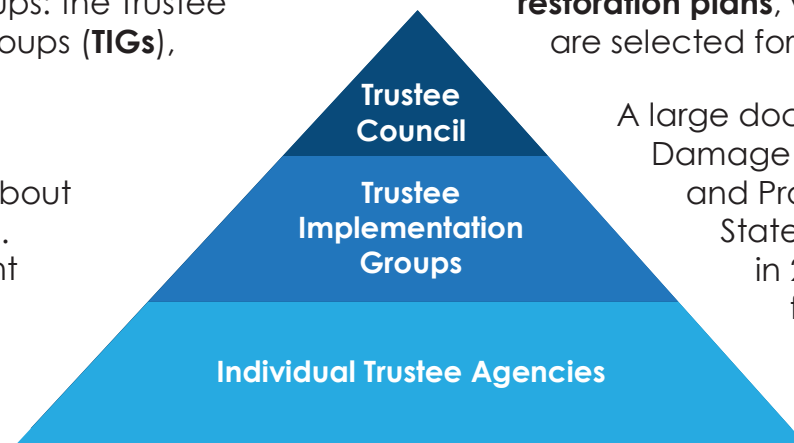
## Background

Shortly after oil started to flow into the Gulf in 2010, a NRDA started. It is being managed by a group of federal and state representatives called “**trustees**.” Responsibilities are divided among three main groups: the Trustee Council, Trustee Implementation Groups (**TIGs**), and individual trustee agencies.

Each of these groups has different responsibilities, but most decisions about restoration will be made by the TIGs. There is one TIG for each of the eight different “restoration areas” (one for each Gulf state, open ocean, region-wide, and unknown conditions).

Within each restoration area, the natural resource damages money will be divided among different restoration types (e.g., oysters, wetlands), and the TIGs will develop **restoration plans**, where specific restoration projects are selected for funding.

A large document called the “Programmatic Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan and Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement” (PDARP), which was finalized in 2016, gives “guidance for...selecting future restoration projects to be carried out by [the TIGs].”



# General Opportunities To Participate

There are different ways the public can participate in the NRDA process. Some of these opportunities are highlighted below:

## GENERAL

- Annual meetings (TC, TIGs)
- Standard Operating Procedures (TC, TIGs)

There are some general opportunities for the public to participate. For example:

- **Public meetings:** the trustees have committed to an annual public meeting for the trustee council (TC) and for each of the trustee implementation groups (TIGs).
- **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):** the Trustee Council has already released its SOPs, but these procedures will continue to be revised, and each TIG may produce its own SOPs. Although the SOPs have not been open to the public for comment, there may be a way to informally participate in their future development (e.g. writing letters, meetings).

## PLANNING

- Project development
- Strategic Frameworks
- Restoration Plans

There are ways for the public to participate in restoration planning:

- **Project development:** the public can suggest project ideas (e.g. on the trustees' website). The public will be notified when a TIG is starting restoration planning, and may be updated on those efforts.
- **Draft restoration plans:** the public will have the opportunity to comment on draft restoration plans as they are released, and possibly on draft strategic frameworks.

## IMPLEMENTATION

- Other consultation and permitting processes
- Program review (five-year)

There may also be opportunities to engage during implementation:

- **Other laws:** the restoration projects may trigger other laws and regulations that provide the public with opportunities to engage.
- **Program review:** according to the PDARP, “[t]he Trustee Council may re-examine the restoration program approximately every 5 years...” While no public role has been defined in that review, it will likely be an important point to try to engage.

## MONITORING & ADAPTATION

- Monitoring data
- Strategic Plans

The public will have access to at least some monitoring data, and may possibly have the opportunity to comment on draft monitoring and adaptive management strategic plans.

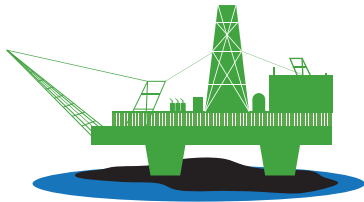
# Specific Ways to Participate

## Stay Informed about the NRDA Process

What can I do?

What are some actions I can take?

What resources are available to help?



**Understand  
the basics of  
the Deepwater  
Horizon NRDA**

Review what has  
already taken place

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Review a summary  
of what the process  
will look like moving  
forward

### TRUSTEE RESOURCES

- [Plan for Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Natural Resource Injury Restoration: An Overview](#) (summarizes the damage assessment and restoration plan)
- [Final Restoration Plan for the Gulf of Mexico](#) (four-page overview of the PDARP)
- [Story Archive](#) (lists major developments dating back to 2010)
- Annual reports (trustees will release annual reports that report on progress)

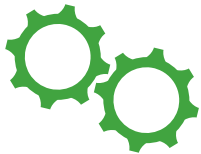
### OTHER RESOURCES

- ELI's "[Overview of the Natural Resource Damage Assessment](#)"
- ELI's [TIG fact sheets](#)
- Ocean Conservancy's "[Flow of Deepwater Horizon Funds](#)" charts (includes sections on NRDA by state)
- ELI webinars (ELI and its partners periodically conduct webinars; sign up for [our listserv](#) to receive updates)

## What can I do?

## What are some actions I can take?

## What resources are available to help?



**Keep up  
with new  
developments**

Sign up for updates  
from the trustees

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Monitor key websites

### TRUSTEE RESOURCES

- Trustees' website
  - On the homepage, you can [sign up](#) to receive updates
  - The [home page](#) and [Story Archive](#) highlight recent developments
  - The [events calendar](#) lists upcoming public participation opportunities
- State trustee resources
  - State-run websites and listservs can be a source of updates (note that they cover all of the restoration processes, not just the NRDA process; links can be found [here](#))

### OTHER RESOURCES

- ELI's [Public Participation Bulletin Board](#) tracks public participation opportunities, including comment periods (note that it tracks opportunities for other restoration processes as well)



**Understand the  
environmental  
impacts of the  
spill**

Review what we  
know so far

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Review recent  
developments

### TRUSTEE RESOURCES

- [Plan for Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Natural Resource Injury Restoration: An Overview](#) (see the section on "Injury")

### OTHER RESOURCES

- Sea Grant's [publications and presentations](#) provide information about science related to the spill
- [Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative](#) (focused on "[i]nvestigating the effect of oil spills on the environment and public health")
- [Gulf of Mexico Coastal Training](#) workshops are offered regularly and cover "priority issues" in the Gulf region (not limited to Deepwater Horizon oil spill and NRDA)

## What can I do?

## What are some actions I can take?

## What resources are available to help?



### Follow NRDA projects in your area

Identify and track the progress of NRDA projects in your area

### TRUSTEE RESOURCES

- [Story Map](#) (maps, describes, and tracks projects that have been approved)
- [Florida](#) and [Mississippi](#) have state-specific *DWH* project tracking tools
- NOAA's [DIVER](#) website (publicly accessible repository for technical information and monitoring data)

### OTHER RESOURCES

- The [DWH Project Tracker](#) and ELI's [Restoration Projects Database](#) both map and sort a wider array of Gulf restoration projects by location, category, and/or funding program (e.g., NRDA)

**Remember** that Gulf restoration is proceeding through several different funding processes, one of which is the NRDA process. To understand how this NRDA process fits into the larger *Deepwater Horizon* restoration effort, review ELI's [Introduction to Gulf Recovery](#) page and access our related educational materials.

# Help Get “Good” Projects in the Ground

What can I do?

What are some actions I can take?

What resources are available to help?



Identify “good” projects

Review projects that are proposed in draft restoration plans

## OTHER RESOURCES

- ELI will be releasing a “Good Projects Checklist,” which can help you identify “good” projects
- Gulf Restoration Network’s [“Sunshine on the Gulf II”](#) sets forth a “criteria framework for evaluating and selecting projects” (focuses on RESTORE projects, but criteria may be more generally applicable)
- Ocean Conservancy’s [Framework for Ecosystem Restoration](#) in the Gulf of Mexico sets forth criteria for selecting “the best and most appropriate” Gulf ecosystem restoration projects (see in particular page 26)



Support “good” projects

Submit written or oral comments to the trustees to show your support for projects you like

## TRUSTEE RESOURCES

- Public notices announcing draft restoration plans will have instructions on how to comment in person, online, or by mail (including deadlines)
- The government’s [“Tips for Submitting Effective Comments”](#) are intended to “help the public submit comments that have an impact”

## OTHER RESOURCES

- ELI’s [“Tips for Public Commenting”](#) includes guidance for giving verbal and written comments
- Examples of prior comments can help you get a sense of what a letter might look like (click [here](#) for some examples)



## What can I do?

## What are some actions I can take?

## What resources are available to help?



### Share your concerns about a project's flaws

Submit written or oral comments to the trustees to share your concerns

- See the resources above in the "Support 'good' projects" category



### Submit your own project ideas

Submit your project idea(s) on the trustees' website

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Submit your project idea(s) on the relevant state website (e.g. if your project is taking place in Mississippi, submit your idea to Mississippi's [Project Portal](#))

### TRUSTEE RESOURCES

- Public notices from TIGs requesting project ideas will identify the project types sought and deadlines for submitting ideas
- The trustees' website includes an [online form](#) for you to submit your ideas
- State websites provide information about submitting ideas to the states (note that these are generally for all the restoration processes, not just the NRDA process; links can be found [here](#))

**Remember**, even if your idea isn't selected right away, submissions remain in the trustees' database for future consideration. You can also update an existing submission.

## Share Information among Citizens and with Trustees

What can I do?

What are some actions I can take?

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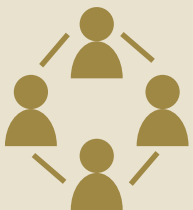
**Connect with other citizens and groups engaged in the NRDA process**

At NRDA-related events (e.g. public meetings), meet and exchange contact information with other attendees

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Start a listserv or other online network for people who are involved or interested in the restoration process

- Recent public comments and letters submitted to the trustees can help you get a sense of some of the groups working on the NRDA process and the issues they are focused on (some examples of recent letters can be found [here](#))
- [Google Groups](#) and [Facebook Groups](#) are examples of social networking tools you can use to create public or private groups for free



**Work with other citizens and groups on joint actions**

Send joint letters or comments

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Look for ways you can help fill the gaps in your partners' capacities, and ways they can help fill yours

- [Examples of prior comments and letters](#) can help you get a sense of what they might look like

## What can I do?

## What are some actions I can take?

## What resources are available to help?



### Reach out to the trustees

You can contact the trustees to, for example:

- Introduce yourself
- Ask questions about the NRDA
- Explain what you like about the public engagement process
- Give some ideas about how the public engagement process could be improved
- Share concerns about projects not performing as intended
- Request a meeting or a telephone conversation

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When the trustees hold an event (e.g. a public meeting), take time to introduce yourself or talk to the trustee representatives. There is often time before and after the meeting to do so

- A list of the trustees and their contact information can be found [here](#) (ELI's [TIG fact sheets](#) also provide contact information)

**Remember**, you can provide input to the trustees at any time, but the trustees will not be required to respond to you unless it is during a formal comment period (for example, on a draft restoration plan).

# Involve the Community in Project Selection, Implementation, and Monitoring

What can I do?

What are some actions I can take?

What resources are available to help?



**Engage your community in the NRDA process**

Help community members understand the NRDA process taking place in their region

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Pass along updates to your community

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Help your community appreciate the importance of their participation

## TRUSTEE RESOURCES

- Trustees' [website](#)
  - There are fact sheets to help the community understand the NRDA process (e.g., "[Intro to NRDA](#)")
  - Project-specific fact sheets may be available (e.g., there are [fact sheets](#) for the projects proposed in Alabama's first draft restoration plan)

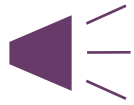
## OTHER RESOURCES

- ELI's [public educational materials](#), which include materials on this NRDA, are intended to help you in your outreach efforts
- ELI's "[NRDA in Action](#)" summarizes key lessons from public involvement in past NRDA cases

## What can I do?

## What are some actions I can take?

## What resources are available to help?



**Help your community take advantage of public participation opportunities**

Help get the word out about upcoming public meetings and/or comment opportunities

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Provide community members with tips on how to comment and/or talking points

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Help community members submit their own project ideas

### TRUSTEE RESOURCES

- Trustees' website
  - The [events calendar](#) shows upcoming meetings
  - You can [sign up](#) to receive updates from the trustees; this will help ensure you're aware of participation opportunities
- The government's "[Tips for Submitting Effective Comments](#)" are intended to "help the public submit comments that have an impact"

### OTHER RESOURCES

- ELI's [Public Participation Bulletin Board](#) tracks public participation opportunities, including comment periods (note that it tracks opportunities for other restoration processes as well)
- ELI's "[Tips for Public Commenting](#)" includes guidance for giving verbal and written comments
- See the section on "Submit your own project ideas" above for some resources that can help with submitting project ideas

## What can I do?

## What are some actions I can take?

## What resources are available to help?



### Identify opportunities for ongoing public involvement

After projects are approved, look for ways the public can be involved; for example:

- Look for public educational components in projects
- Watchdog projects in your community (e.g. monitor projects to ensure they are achieving their objectives)

### TRUSTEE RESOURCES

- Project descriptions (in restoration plans, on Story Map, etc.) may indicate opportunities for public involvement (e.g., a public educational component)
- [Story Map](#) (tracks the status of approved NRDA projects)
- NOAA's [DIVER](#) website is a publicly accessible repository for technical information and monitoring data

### OTHER RESOURCES

- The [Public Lab website](#) houses open source tools for "[DIY environmental monitoring](#)"

**Remember**, you can “retweet” and forward updates from the trustees to interested community members; you can also use existing communication channels in your community (e.g., a neighborhood newsletter) to provide a brief NRDA update to a wider audience.





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