



Buzzards Bay Oil Spill in Massachusetts

A cooperative natural resource damage assessment

On April 27, 2003, the Bouchard Barge 120 hit an obstacle in Buzzards Bay, creating a twelve-foot rupture in the hull and spilling an estimated 98,000 gallons of No. 6 oil. To date, the oil has impacted an estimated 90 miles of shoreline, numerous bird species, and recreational uses of the bay.

While response agencies are working to contain and clean up the oil, the natural resource trustees, NOAA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the State of Massachusetts, the State of Rhode Island, and the Wampanoag tribe have initiated a natural resource damage assessment (NRDA). Natural resource trustees are designated federal and state agencies who act on behalf of the public to assess natural resource injuries, identify potential projects to restore the injured natural resources and related service losses, and oversee the implementation of restoration projects. NRDA is the process by which the natural resource trustees accomplish these tasks.

NOAA, the lead administrative trustee for the Buzzards Bay oil spill, will be coordinating trustee efforts. Bouchard Transportation Company, the responsible party that owns the barge and the tug and was operating the vessels at the time of the incident, has been actively cooperating in preliminary NRDA activities with the trustees.

Injured Natural Resources

To evaluate the oil impacts, the trustees, in cooperation with Bouchard and its representatives, are surveying shorelines, collecting and analyzing oil, water, sediment, and shellfish tissue samples, monitoring data on oiled and dead birds, and examining recreational uses of Buzzards Bay. To date, the trustees have identified potential impacts to—

- Shoreline Habitat
- Birds/Wildlife
- Recreational Uses

The trustees have estimated that 90 miles of shoreline have been oiled to varying degrees. The trustees are in the process of collecting and analyzing water, sediment and shellfish tissue samples to determine

oil exposure. If these samples test positive, the trustees will initiate further damage assessment studies.

Approximately 450 birds have been killed by the oil spill. The affected birds include loons, scoters, mergansers, oyster catchers, terns (including roseate terns), eiders, and piping plovers. The two species of primary concern to the trustees because of their protected status are the roseate tern and the piping plover. Collection efforts for dead and oiled birds are still underway.

Trustees are also exploring potential impacts to the Northeastern beach tiger beetle (a Federally listed threatened species), the American burying beetle (a Federally listed endangered species), and the Diamondback terrapin (a State listed threatened species).

Shellfishing was closed by the State of Massachusetts soon after the spill (recently 50% of the shellfishing acres were re-opened). The closure demonstrates an injury to recreational shellfishing. The trustees are also looking at impacts to beach use, boating, and other recreational activities.

Next Steps

The trustees will develop a draft natural resource damage assessment and restoration plan when they have collected sufficient information regarding potentially impacted resources. This plan will describe the potential resource injuries and service losses and the types of restoration projects to address these injuries and losses. After a public review and comment period, the trustees will select appropriate restoration projects to be funded and implemented by the responsible party, or implemented by the trustees.



Workers clean up Buzzards Bay shoreline impacted by the oil spill.

The Public's Role

Trustees have begun meeting and will continue to meet with citizens, community and environmental groups, and local and regional officials to explain NRDA and identify restoration projects that both address the injury and fit the communities. The public will also have an opportunity to review and comment on the draft damage assessment and restoration plan.

Trustee agencies act on behalf of the public to restore coastal and marine resources injured by oil spills and hazardous substance releases. To learn more, please contact—

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