Deepwater Horizon Activity Updates 2024

Highly Migratory Species Advisory Panel
Deepwater Horizon Restoration Program
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Purpose

- Provide a brief overview of Fish and Water Column Invertebrate restoration activities, to answer any quick questions and provide information for follow up as needed.

Overview of Activities

- Hotspots Mapping Initiative
- Bluefin Tuna Restoration Project
- Characterization of Caribbean Fisheries Interactions with HMS
- Oceanic Fish Restoration Project
- Open Ocean Restoration Plan 4

The Hotspots Mapping Initiative

A Voluntary Opportunity to Help **Improve Fishing Efficiency**

Project overview: Five-year VOLUNTARY project, being managed by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to evaluate the feasibility of fisheries hotspot communication networks to improve fishing in and around the Gulf of Mexico using technology. When fishermen and anglers use technology to tell each other what they are seeing on the water, confidential daily maps can be created to show "hotspots" to avoid.

Mapping hotspots will:

- Improve commercial and recreational fishing experiences through less sorting time and fewer dead discards.
- Keep unwanted catch in the water so the can continue to grow and reproduce for future fishing opportunities.

The Hotspots Mapping Initiative

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Update and Next Steps:

- Project has hosted meetings with the shrimp trawl fishery and multiple segments of the for -hire reef fish fishery to discuss specific design elements and goals of networks.
- Drafted implementation plans for hotspot communication tools, ranging from messaging networks to real time mapping of voluntary fishermen submitted data.
- Brought on a Data Specialist contractor to help visualize data and design mapping or other tools.
- Plan is for more meetings with different fishery segments including the Gulf PLL and commercial reef fish fisheries.
- Exploring future, including support to implement networks, as this phase comes to a close in the next 6 to 12 months.

This project is managed by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

BLUEFIN TUNA RESTORATION PROJECT

- Project Goal: Reduce bluefin tuna bycatch and bycatch mortality rates in the Gulf of Mexico by presenting a developing fishing approach to U.S. and Mexican pelagic longline fleets.
- Project Updates: One pelagic longline fishermen participated in the 2023 pilot study. Two fishermen are contracted for the 2024 fishing season. Preliminary data analysis is ongoing.
- Expected Outcomes: Setting gear deeper is expected to reduce bluefin tuna interactions, enabling them to grow and reproduce, and ultimately helping to restore this resource. Additionally, we anticipate pelagic longline fishermen will voluntarily adopt this new fishing approach.

Objectives

- Collect and evaluate existing fisheries data to identify restoration opportunities and support restoration planning in the Caribbean.

- The overarching objective has 3 steps 1) compile data into a data system, 2) evaluate the breadth and limitations of the data, and 3) identify the greatest threats (fisheries, geography) in the Caribbean and potential areas of restoration.

Budget

- The project duration is scheduled over 3 calendar years (January 2023 – June 2025) with a total budget of $382,000.

Initial Activities

- Finalized a Memorandum of Understanding with the International Commission for Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) - Provides a mechanism to provide contracts to carry out work in a collaborative fashion

- Participated in Feb 2024 ICCAT workshop - The general objective of this workshop is to improve the monitoring and reporting of artisanal tuna and tuna-like fisheries, namely of billfishes, small tuna and tropical tuna artisanal fisheries statistics in the Caribbean region, brought together representatives from Caribbean countries.

- Call for Tenders ICCAT published April 30th to support data gathering and analysis activities

Oceanic Fish Restoration Project

- The project included two separate, and complementary components: (1) a repose period, and (2) optional use of alternative fishing gear
- Fishing activities ended in 2022.
- Currently analyzing environmental and economic data to understand project impact including restoration and the economics of alternative gear.
    - Expect reports to be available to public later in 2024 – approximately August.
    - Initial results indicate the project surpassed its restoration goals, with the repose allowing nearly 35,000 pelagic fish like YFT and BFT to remain in the Gulf of Mexico.
- All made possible due to the efforts of 20 Gulf of Mexico vessel owners voluntarily participating between 2017 and 2022.

Restoration Activities Being Considered

- Expansion of recreational angler education program
- Cooperative fishing, education, outreach, and gear distribution
- Communication networks and spawning aggregation conservation
- Addressing diverse stressors such as marine debris, water quality, invasive species
- Deter illegal fishing in the Gulf of Mexico
- Supporting cross-project communication, adaptive management, planning and integration
- Preventing depredation in the Gulf of Mexico

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