



News Release

From the Luckenbach Trustee Council

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\$2.8 million awarded to restore seabirds and otters after oil spills

State and federal agencies have been awarded \$2.8 million to restore natural resources injured by the *Luckenbach* oil spills and other mystery spills in the Gulf of the Farallones. The funding will be used to implement five restoration projects. Additional funds associated with these same spills may be forthcoming in the next few months.

The five restoration projects, designed to address the injuries to a variety of seabird species and sea otters, have been subject to public review and comment. In order to provide the greatest benefit to the injured bird species, each of the bird projects is located at the breeding grounds for the various species. For some of the long-distance migratory seabirds, the breeding grounds and restoration projects are located in Alaska and at lakes in interior northern California. The five projects are designed to:

- Restore and enhance nesting habitat for common murrelets and other seabirds at Reading Rock, off the Humboldt County coast;
- Reduce human disturbance at grebe nesting colonies at northern California lakes;
- Reduce human disturbance at waterfowl, loon and shorebird nesting areas at Kokechik Flats, Alaska;
- Restore nesting habitat for seabirds at Año Nuevo Island, off the San Mateo County coast; and
- Conduct education and outreach programs to reduce human and livestock effluent and associated pathogens that are impacting sea otters in Monterey Bay.

These projects are intended to restore some of the species impacted by oil which leaked from the sunken freighter *S.S. Jacob Luckenbach*. This vessel sank in 1953 approximately 17 miles southwest of the Golden Gate Bridge. In 2002, state and federal officials identified it as the source of many mystery oil spills that occurred periodically during winter storms. These spills resulted in the oiling of thousands of seabirds along northern California beaches from Bodega Bay to Monterey Bay. In the summer of 2002, the U.S. Coast Guard provided oversight for a \$19-million effort to remove oil from the wreck and to seal it to prevent further oil releases.

The government agencies estimate that more than 50,000 seabirds were killed by the leaking oil between 1990 and 2003. Impacted species include waterfowl, loons, grebes, pelicans, cormorants, gulls, shorebirds and murrelets. Affected threatened or endangered species include brown pelicans, snowy plovers, marbled murrelets and sea otters.

The federal and state trustees for the injured natural resources are the U.S. Department of the Interior (represented by the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) Office of Spill Prevention and Response. Together they form the Luckenbach Trustee Council. As designated Trustees, they are authorized to act on behalf of the public under state and/or federal law to assess and recover natural resource damages and to plan and implement actions to restore, rehabilitate, replace or acquire the equivalent of the affected natural resources injured as a result of a discharge of oil.

While the owners of the *Luckenbach* no longer exist, the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund, sustained by fees from the oil industry and managed by the U.S. Coast Guard's National Pollution Funds Center (NPFC), allows for the payment of claims for costs associated with oil spill cleanup and the restoration of natural resources impacted by oil spills when there is no responsible party.

The Trustees have proposed 14 restoration projects, with an estimated total cost of more than \$20 million, to address the injuries of the spills. The NPFC has currently approved funding for the above five projects. The remaining nine projects are still under review.

These five projects will cost an estimated \$2.8 million. The NPFC also awarded \$1 million to reimburse the Trustees for their assessment costs and to support administrative oversight of the projects.

To obtain a copy of the Final Restoration Plan, including injury assessment and restoration project details, please visit <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/ospr/spill/nrda/nrda.html>, or contact Steve Hampton, DFG, at (916) 323-4724 or at shampton@ospr.dfg.ca.gov.

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