



# REFUGIO BEACH OIL SPILL

## Natural Resource Damage Assessment Updates

### About the Oil Spill

Ten years ago, on May 19, 2015, a pipeline owned and operated by Plains All American Pipeline, L.P., and Plains Pipeline, L.P. (Plains) ruptured near Refugio State Beach in Santa Barbara County, California, sending oil into the ocean. In response, state and federal natural resource trustee agencies conducted a Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA). A NRDA assesses exposure to spilled oil, documents spill-related injuries to the environment and its public uses and provides compensation through environmental restoration projects. The Responsible Party, Plains, is responsible to pay the NRDA costs, known as damages, for implementing restoration projects.

### Settlement and Restoration Plan

Following final settlement of the case in June 2021, the natural resource trustee agencies formed a "Trustee Council" to oversee the implementation, monitoring, and completion of restoration projects and a human use grants program outlined in the Final Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan/Environmental Assessment (DARP/EA) for the spill. Settlement details are as follows:

Birds	\$2.2 Million
Marine Mammals	\$2.3 Million
Subtidal and Fish Habitats	\$6.1 Million
Shoreline Habitat	\$5.5 Million
Human Use	\$3.9 Million
Restoration Planning and Implementation	\$2.0 Million

**SETTLEMENT TOTAL: \$22 MILLION**

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# TRUSTEES



Natural resource agencies are identified as Trustees under state and federal laws to act on behalf of the public to recover natural resource damages after oil spills. Trustees plan and implement restoration actions that rehabilitate or replace natural resources equivalent to the natural resources injured as a result of the oil spill.



The following natural resource trustee agencies are working together to implement restoration projects outlined in the Refugio Beach Oil Spill DARP/EA:

- Bureau of Land Management
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife
- California State Lands Commission
- California Department of Parks and Recreation
- University of California
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- National Park Service

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# RESTORATION PROJECT UPDATES

Over the past four years, the Trustee Council has authorized and funded the implementation of several biological, habitat enhancement, and recreational human use projects



## BIRD PROJECT UPDATES

### Brown Pelican Colony Protection on Anacapa Island

The Trustees allocated \$395,751 over two years for restoring brown pelican nesting habitat on Anacapa Island by removing the invasive Cape Ivy weed. The Channel Islands National Park conducted initial eradication efforts in the Fall of 2022. Currently in 2025, the National Park continues to implement Cape Ivy removal and conduct annual monitoring of brown pelican nests on Anacapa Island with the funds.



Plot 12 in 2022

Photo Credit: NPS



Plot 12 in 2023

Photo Credit: NPS

### Coal Oil Point Snowy Plover Management

Photo Credit: USFWS



The Trustees allocated \$16,415 to Coal Oil Point Preserve (COPR) in 2023 for managing and monitoring the western snowy plover population there. They collected 30 abandoned eggs and transported them to the Santa Barbara Zoo for captive rearing; of those chicks, 19 were rehabilitated and released at COPR. In addition, the reserve installed symbolic fences during breeding season and monitored the nests and chicks three times a week. Lastly, COPR created biological outreach resources on plovers for the public.

# Fishing Injury Reduction Projects

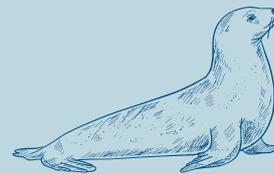


The goal of fishing injury reduction projects are to decrease the probability of seabirds becoming entangled in fishing gear and to improve the likelihood of survival in seabirds who do interact with recreational fishing. The Trustees have allocated \$138,585 to wildlife rehabilitation centers to respond to emergency brown pelican stranding events in 2022 and 2024. During the stranding events brown pelicans were showing signs of starvation, and many had fishing hook, line, and fishing related blunt force trauma injuries.



Photo Credit: International Bird Rescue

## MARINE MAMMAL PROJECT UPDATES



### Pinniped Rehabilitation and Survival Improvement



Photo Credit: NOAA

The Trustees allocated \$1.8 million over a three-year period for the Channel Islands Marine Wildlife Institute (CIMWI) to enhance existing stranding network capabilities along the Gaviota Coast. This project began in June 2022. The funding is supporting salaries for key staff members, the purchase and upgrading of critical equipment and facility upgrades which allow for increased ability to respond to stranded marine mammals and provide necessary medical care and rehabilitation.

These upgrades were critical in increasing CIMWI's capacity to respond to the unprecedented number of strandings of marine mammals due to the domoic acid events that have occurred over the last several years. Domoic acid is produced during certain harmful algal bloom events by a type of algae called *Pseudo-nitzschia australis*. This neurotoxin accumulates in small fish, like sardines and anchovies, which are then eaten by marine mammals like sea lions in large quantities. CIMWI was able to rescue stranded animals and treat them with fluids to flush the toxin from their bodies and provide anti-seizure medication if needed. After proper care, many of the animals were able to be released back into the wild.



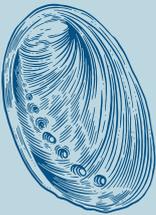
# Cetacean Entanglement Response



Photo Credit: SR3, MLS-WET, CRC, TMMC-NOAA Permit 18786

Entanglement in fishing gear is a source of mortality to whales and dolphins off the California coast. The Trustees' allocated \$500,000 to a program that will enhance an existing permitted and authorized program within the National Marine Fisheries Service by providing additional gear and personnel to disentangle cetaceans in areas not currently covered off the Southern California coast. This project aims to rescue entangled whales and prevent future entanglements in California by strengthening the entanglement response network with additional responders.

Cascadia Research Collective is leading the project. Cascadia staff will lead and support disentanglement efforts and trainings in Santa Barbara and other critical areas, especially during peak entanglement periods. The proposed activities, including enhancing documentation and data analysis from these responses, will generate valuable reports and publications for Federal and State managers, fisheries, and researchers. This effort will ultimately reduce the impacts from entanglement on whales and conserve their populations in these waters.



## SUBTIDAL AND FISH HABITAT PROJECT UPDATES

### Red Abalone Restoration

The goal of the project is to outplant 40,000 red abalone and create a self-sustaining population at Naples and Isla Vista reefs in Santa Barbara County. The project is being implemented by The Bay Foundation (TBF) and the Paua Marine Research Group (PMRG), Rincon Consulting and The Cultured Abalone Farm (TCAF).

In November 2023, 73 wild red abalone were collected on San Miguel Island and carefully transferred to TCAF. In June 2024, the wild captured animals spawned, resulting in 1,672,600 larval abalone at the TCAF hatchery. The spawn was a huge success, and it represented the first generation of juvenile abalone that could be released to the selected restoration sites in 2026 after growing at the farm for over 18 months.

In March 2024, abalone that were between 25mm and 50mm in size were selected for outplanting at the restoration sites. Over 2 days in July project partners, members of the Trustees Council, and community volunteers, tagged 5,000 juvenile abalone. Divers from TBF, PMRG, Rincon and NOAA deployed temporary infrastructure and sensors, and conducted baseline surveys at the two restoration sites. A total of 5000 individual red abalone were outplanted in August – 2,500 to each site. Project partners are conducting ongoing monitoring of the initial outplanted abalone until 2033, and additional outplantings will occur for the next five years.

Photo Credit: NOAA

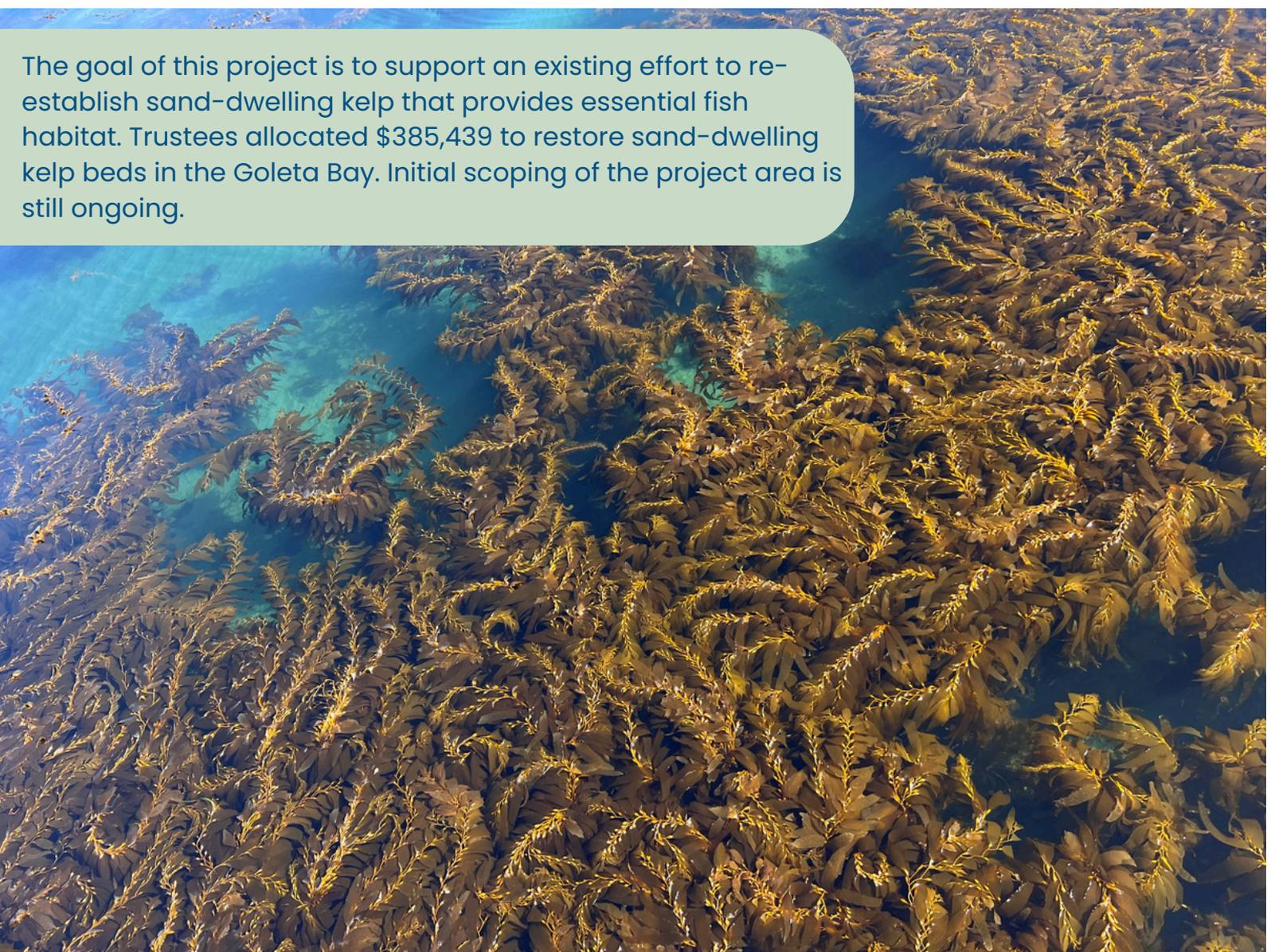


# Coastal Eelgrass Restoration



Eelgrass and surfgrass provide essential food and habitat for marine animals in the subtidal zone. The Trustees allocated \$839,626 over 7 to 11 years for restoring eelgrass beds along the Gaviota Coast. Initial scoping, including underwater surveys, of potential areas that would benefit from eelgrass restoration are ongoing.

## Sand-Dwelling Kelp



The goal of this project is to support an existing effort to re-establish sand-dwelling kelp that provides essential fish habitat. Trustees allocated \$385,439 to restore sand-dwelling kelp beds in the Goleta Bay. Initial scoping of the project area is still ongoing.

# SHORELINE HABITAT PROJECT UPDATES



## Black Abalone Restoration and Relocation



Photo Credit: USFWS

Numbers of the federally and state protected black abalone have declined over the years, especially in rocky intertidal habitats along the Gaviota Coast. To begin restoring black abalone populations in Santa Barbara County the Trustees allocated \$316,438 to University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) over three years to translocate black abalone. In March and October of 2023, UCSC collected a total of 246 black abalone from donor sites on Santa Cruz Island and translocated them to two sites at Government Point in Santa Barbara County.

UCSC is conducting ongoing monitoring at each relocation site and recently found a total of 85 abalone (4 confirmed transplants, 12 residents, and 69 unknowns) and 98 abalone (16 confirmed transplants, 13 residents, and 69 unknowns) at each site.

## Santa Monica Dune and Beach Restoration



The Trustees' allocated \$300,000 to a project that aims to restore and enhance native beach dune vegetation that has been degraded by intensive mechanical grooming. The Bay Foundation (TBF), with assistance from 457 volunteers, began work in June 2024. TBF hosted 9 volunteer events, including one with the Santa Monica chapter of the Girl Scouts, LA Surfrider, and Climate Action Santa Monica Climate Corps. to help with seed collection, seed scattering, transplanting container plants, and plant watering. In total, over 8.4 kilograms of seed were throughout the site from seven California native plant species.

Snowy Plovers returned to the site in mid-August 2024 in larger numbers than before the restoration project started. Plovers have been observed roosting within and in front of the site in a mixed-species flock with Sanderlings. Since the Palisades Fire, a large amount of wrack debris has washed up on the beach; fortunately, no debris and minimal ash entered the restoration site. TBF is continuing ongoing maintenance of the restoration site.

## Ellwood Seawall

Due to the inability to obtain a release of liability from the private landowner that owns the affected land abutting the Ellwood Seawall for any bluff erosion that may have resulted following the project, the Trustees are proposing termination of the Ellwood Seawall Removal project. No project funds have been expended. The Trustees will use the funds originally allocated for the Ellwood Seawall Removal project to increase the funding for the Ventura County Dunes and other potential shoreline projects as consistent with the DARP/EA.



Photo Credit: USFWS

# Ventura County Dune Restoration Projects



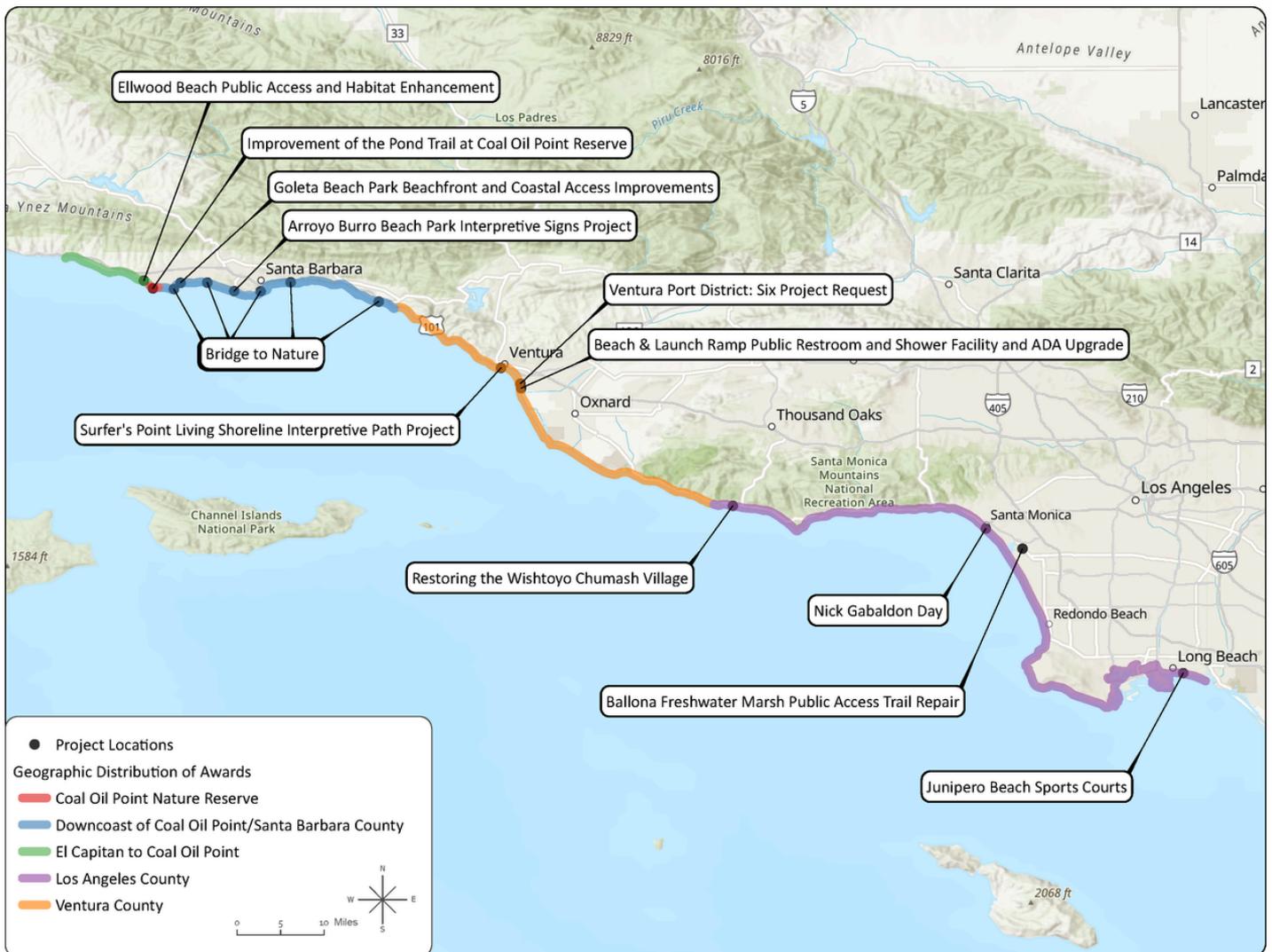
The goals of the Ventura County beach dune enhancement projects are to enhance the degraded beach dune ecosystem by removing invasive plants, improve natural beach physical processes, and restore habitat for sensitive species. The three projects that are proposed to occur would be located at Ormond Beach in Oxnard and McGrath and San Buenaventura beaches in Ventura. To measure success of the projects, ecological indicators would be evaluated before and after restoration to determine success. No money has been allocated by the Trustee Council at this time.



Photo Credit: USFWS

## HUMAN USE PROJECT UPDATES

The Refugio Beach Oil Spill Settlement includes \$3.9 million dollars to compensate for human use injuries, including impacts to recreational fishing, swimming, surfing, and beach access. The State Trustees allocated \$1,545,000 to 12 projects selected through a competitive South Coast Shoreline Parks and Outdoor Recreation Grants Program process. Project names and locations are shown in the map below.



As of March 2025, 3 of the 12 funded projects have been completed



# Arroyo Burro Beach Park Interpretive Signs



Photo Credit: CDFW

The Trustees allocated \$49,900 to Santa Barbara County Parks Division for the installation of nine interpretive panels along the boardwalk of the coastal creek and estuary at Arroyo Burro Beach. The new signs are located at three separate lookout areas and provide information about the watershed, estuary, ocean ecosystems, and local wildlife species like the endangered Tidewater Goby, to educate and enhance the recreational experience for the visitors of the beach.

## Bridge to Nature

The Trustees allocated \$24,995 to the Wilderness Youth Project to continue facilitation of their Bridge to Nature program for the 2022-2023 school year. This program provided nine field trips to 600 marginalized students with the goal of increasing access to nature, provide outdoor education, mentorship, recreational enjoyment, and environmental stewardship. These trips focused on exploration and education on beach ecology, mesa ecology, tide-pools, and ocean play.



Photo Credit: Wilderness Youth Project



Photo Credit: Wilderness Youth Project

## Ventura Port District

The Trustees allocated \$93,301 to Ventura Port District to enhance the recreational amenities at Ventura Harbor, Harbor Cove Beach, and Surfers Knoll Beach. This project installed three new light poles at Harbor Cove Beach parking lot, purchased a mobile traffic sign to provide public messaging, purchased a radio repeater for use by Ventura Harbor Patrol and beach lifeguards, and purchased two beach access wheelchairs and mats for enhanced ADA accessibility to the beaches.



Photo Credit: Ventura Port District

# REFUGIO BEACH OIL SPILL TRUSTEE COUNCIL BUDGET



Settlement Category	Project	Amount Allocated as of May 2025
Birds	Sea Bird/Fishing Conflict Reduction	\$138,585
	Anacapa Cape Ivy Removal	\$395,751
	COPR Plover Management	\$16,415
Marine Mammals	Pinniped Rehabilitation	\$1,800,000
	Cetacean Entanglement Reduction	\$500,000
Subtidal and Fish Habitat	Red Abalone Subtidal Restoration	\$2,581,312
	Sand-dwelling Kelp	\$385,439
	Eelgrass Restoration	\$839,626
Shoreline Habitats	Santa Monica Dunes	\$300,000
	Ventura County Dune Restoration	-
	Black Abalone Restoration	\$316,438
	Ellwood Seawall*	-
Human Use Projects	State Parks Human Use Projects	-
	South Coast Rec Grants Program - NFWF	\$1,544,999
	U.C. Educational Use	\$26,000
Trustee Council Administration	Trustee Oversight and Restoration Planning	\$1,783,575

\*Ellwood seawall removal funds will be reallocated to other shoreline habitats projects discussed in the DARP/EA.

**Total Settlement: \$22,386,381**  
**Total Spent: \$10,628,141**  
**Total Remaining: \$11,758,240**

