



Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA)

After a significant spill, the responsible party is required to pay for restoration projects to return the environment and wildlife to pre-spill conditions. The process of evaluating environmental injuries caused by the spill and developing restoration projects is called the Natural Resources Damage Assessment (NRDA).

The goal of an NRDA is to examine the natural resource injuries from oil spills, toxic waste sites, and other pollution events to quantify the damages, seek compensation from the responsible parties, and both restore the injured resources and compensate the public for the lost interim ecological benefits and uses of these resources.

This process is initiated in the early stages of the response. A team of environmental scientists, wildlife biologists, lawyers and others from the state and federal government, as well as representatives for the responsible party, work together in this process.

Steps in the NRDA Process

- 1. Spill** -- When a spill occurs that poses a threat to wildlife or habitat, CDFW biologists respond to evaluate the threat, assist with response operations, and document the injury.
- 2. Data Collection** – During and after a spill, data will be collected in order to evaluate the injury. Examples include macroinvertebrate surveys, water and sediment samples, and vegetation surveys. Following federal guidelines, this is often done cooperatively with the responsible party, as well as with fellow trustee agencies.
- 3. Injury Quantification** – Once the necessary data is collected, the injury is quantified in terms of the area of habitat impacted, the degree of the impact, and the time until recovery. Impacted animal populations may be evaluated separately, in terms of the number of individuals impacted and the time needed for population recovery.
- 4. Restoration Scaling and Damage Quantification** – This process involves evaluating potential compensatory restoration projects and “scaling” them to the size of the injury. The cost of these projects becomes the measure of damages.
- 5. Settlement with Responsible Party** – Once the damage claim is completed, OSPR and the other trustees attempt to reach a settlement with the responsible party. This is usually successful without going to court.
- 6. Restoration and Implementation** -- After a case is settled, a “trustee council” is established to manage the funds and oversee the restoration work. The first step is to involve the public in project selection. Once a Restoration Plan is finalized, work may begin.