

Mississippi Moving Forward with \$13.6 Million in Coastal Restoration Projects

JACKSON, MISS. (Wednesday, April 18, 2012) ----- Two Mississippi projects aimed at restoring marine resources damaged in 2010 by the Deepwater Horizon (DWH) Oil Spill are moving forward as part of Phase I of the DWH Early Restoration Plan/Environmental Assessment (Phase I plan), according to Mississippi Trustee Trudy D. Fisher, Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ). The projects include oyster reef restoration and enhancement of nearshore artificial reefs.

“The Phase I projects are an important first step, but only a first step, toward addressing the full extent of injuries caused by the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill,” Fisher said. “I want to stress that this is a down payment on restoration projects. We are already actively involved in the formulation of additional projects to go forward as a part of early restoration. Our intent is to swiftly address injuries while also securing essential scientific data that will fully quantify the longer-term injuries.”

The Phase I plan, which was presented to the public for comment earlier this year, provides for implementation of eight early restoration projects, across five Gulf states, totaling approximately \$60 million. The Phase I plan, as well as public comments and responses, can be reviewed at www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov and www.doi.gov/deepwaterhorizon.

Funding for this first round of projects is the result of a negotiated commitment from BP made a year ago to fund \$1 billion in early restoration projects. The agreement is the largest of its kind ever reached and represents an initial “down payment” toward fulfilling the responsible parties’ obligation to fund the complete restoration of injured natural resources. Mississippi is due a minimum of \$100 million in projects from the \$1 billion down payment. This money, Fisher says, will be used aggressively in targeting early restoration projects that range from marshes and estuaries, to human-use losses.

“Mississippi will spend every dollar of its allotted early restoration funding to restore Gulf resources,” according to Fisher. Mississippi’s oyster reef project, valued at an estimated \$11 million, will restore and enhance oyster cultch within the existing footprint of the oyster harvest areas in the Mississippi Sound. This will assist the state in recovering its “lost oyster crop.” Of Mississippi’s existing 12,000 acres of oyster cultch, the project will enhance approximately 1,430 acres areas by placing cultch material (oyster shell, limestone or crushed concrete, or some combination thereof) as needed. In the enhanced areas, Mississippians can expect to see harvestable oyster production within three to six years following placement of the cultch.

The artificial reef habitat project, valued at an estimated \$2.6 million, will enhance nearshore artificial reefs in the coastal waters of Mississippi. Enhancement of these reefs, which provide valuable hard bottom foraging and shelter sites for smaller encrusting organisms, will restore injured shallow-water resources and fragile estuaries. Currently there are 67 existing reef areas (each approximately three acres in size) that will be enhanced with clean, crushed concrete. As a result of this project,

habitat for small crustaceans and mollusks, such as juvenile shrimp, crab and oysters that live on the reef and in the sediment

(secondary productivity), will increase overall reef productivity, which is the base of the food web.

Together, these projects are anticipated to involve the planting of over 17 thousand dump truck loads of shell and other

suitable material. The MDEQ, which will manage both, anticipates using clean Katrina rubble for a large part of the projects.

“Our foremost goals, since the spill occurred, have been to (1) fully determine and understand the damages caused by the

spill and (2) recover every single dollar we are due,” Fisher said. “While we are gratified by the approval of these projects,

we look forward to promoting a number of additional projects for early restoration across the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Simultaneously, we will continue to work through the damage assessment of natural resources. As important as it is that we

move quickly, it is more important that we ‘get it right,’ however long that takes.”

Assessment efforts are driven by data and science, Fisher said, both of which take time to collect and understand.

“We are

focused on guaranteeing the health of the Gulf for centuries to come, not just for today.”

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NOTE TO THE MEDIA: Hard copies of Phase I of the Early Restoration Plan/Environmental Assessment can be reviewed

by the public at the locations noted on the attached document. The plan should be available there by Friday, April 20, 2012.

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