

Restoring Habitat in New Bedford Harbor, Massachusetts

Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program



The Problem

New Bedford Harbor is a major commercial fishing port and industrial center in southeastern Massachusetts. From the 1940s to the 1970s, electrical parts manufacturers discharged wastes containing polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and toxic metals into the harbor. Hundreds of acres of marine sediment were highly contaminated, resulting in reproductive impairment and death of marine life. Investigation and clean up of the contamination continues today.

Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program

When hazardous substances enter the environment, fish, wildlife, and other natural resources can be injured. The Department of the Interior, along with State, Tribal and other Federal partners, acts as “trustee” for these resources. Trustees seek to identify the natural resources injured and determine the extent of the injuries. Trustees work with the responsible parties to carry out restoration activities, or recover funds from responsible parties to carry out the restoration activities. These efforts are possible under the Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program (NRDAR), the goal of which is to restore natural resources injured by oil spills or the release of hazardous substances.

Restoring the Resources

In 1992, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) (Trustees) reached a settlement with the Responsible Parties for \$20.2 million. Priorities for restoration include marshes and wetlands, shellfish, anadromous fish, endangered species, and recreational areas. To date, the Trustees have applied money toward 38 restoration projects in the New Bedford Harbor environment.

Highlights

- Protected 388 acres of wildlife habitat in the New Bedford Harbor environment;
- Restored 6.5 acres of saltmarsh in Dartmouth, Massachusetts;
- Enhanced federally-listed endangered roseate tern habitat;
- Implemented a variety of actions to improve New Bedford Harbor shellfisheries;
- Restored herring access to 200 acres of spawning habitat in the Acushnet River; and
- Restored four eelgrass beds in New Bedford Harbor.

B. Bryant, The Coalition for Buzzards Bay



Land protected at Popes Beach, Fairhaven, MA will preserve limited remaining beach front habitat.

B. Bryant, The Coalition for Buzzards Bay



Padanaram saltmarsh in Dartmouth, Massachusetts following restoration.

Accomplishments

Land Preservation

- Permanently protected 388 acres of land in the New Bedford Harbor environment through purchase or conservation restrictions. A variety of habitats, including tidal and riverine wetlands, beach, and forested uplands, were protected.
- Partners: Fairhaven/Acushnet Land Preservation Trust, Town of Fairhaven.

Salt Marsh Restoration

- Restored 6.5 acres of saltmarsh in the Town of Dartmouth in 2003. An additional 110 acres will be restored in Dartmouth and Fairhaven by four upcoming projects.
- Partners: Dartmouth Natural Resources Trust, Town of Dartmouth, University of Rhode Island, Town of Falmouth, Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management Wetland Restoration Program, Coalition for Buzzards Bay, and Fairhaven-Acushnet Land Preservation Trust.

Shellfish

- Purchased and planted adult and seed quahogs, bay scallops and soft shell clams, relayed contaminated quahogs to clean areas to allow depuration to take place, and developed a regional shellfish management plan with monitoring and enforcement activities.
- Partners: City of New Bedford, Town of Fairhaven, Town of Dartmouth.



Willet benefit from salt marsh restoration.

Bill Majoros



Common Tern incubating its three eggs.

Terns

- Monitoring, managing and enhancing federally-listed endangered roseate and common tern nesting locations at Bird, Ram and Penikese Islands to increase local tern populations. Greater nesting opportunities are also being created by filling and stabilizing portions of Bird Island.
- Partners: State of Massachusetts, Division of Fish and Wildlife.

Anadromous Fish

- Restored herring access to 200 acres of spawning habitat by constructing fish passage ways at three dams in the Acushnet River.
- Partners: Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Division of Marine Fisheries.

Eelgrass

- Surveyed and assessed the distribution and condition of eelgrass throughout the New Bedford Harbor estuary and transplanted eelgrass from established beds to four priority restoration areas.
- Partners: University of New Hampshire, volunteers.

Other

- Dedicated \$4.4 million for the construction of two parks in the City of New Bedford.
- Funded the New Bedford Harbor Wetlands Restoration Plan, which was released in 2003. The Plan identified 69 potential wetland restoration sites in the New Bedford Harbor environment.



The newly constructed fishway at the New Bedford Reservoir restores herring access to 200 acres of spawning habitat.



River herring returning to spawning habitat.

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