Portland Harbor
Natural Resource Trustee Council

PHOTO BY ERIC BLISHCHKE, ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

Portland Harbor Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration

Portland Harbor is the subject of several efforts to clean up industrial contamination and restore habitats for fish and wildlife. The Portland Harbor Natural Resource Trustee Council (Trustee Council) was formed in 2002 to develop and coordinate damage assessment activities at Portland Harbor and to plan for the restoration of its natural resources. The Trustee Council has completed a draft Assessment Plan for Portland Harbor and is in the process of developing a draft Restoration Plan.

This handout outlines how Portland Harbor became contaminated, why it is important and what the Trustee Council is doing about it. It specifically focuses on the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) process and the Trustee Council's restoration planning efforts. Your thoughts and comments about the Portland Harbor assessment and restoration will help the Trustee Council develop plans to best meet the needs of everyone who uses the lower Willamette River.

Portland Harbor Setting

Portland Harbor is a highly industrialized section of the Willamette River (river mile 1 to 11.8) that also provides important habitat for sensitive, threatened, and endangered species. Many of these plants and animals hold value for and provide beneficial services to the public. This portion of the river has always been important. For thousands of years, native people have used the resources of the lower Willamette River for subsistence as well as cultural and religious activities. Tribal members harvest fish and eels (lamprey) as important sources of food.

The area also supports extensive commercial, recreational, and cultural opportunities for the region. The lower river remains a popular area for recreational activities such as swimming, boating, and wildlife viewing. Portland Harbor is a dynamic and important junction of ecosystems and development linking the Willamette Basin with the Columbia River and ultimately the Pacific Ocean.

Trust Resources in Portland Harbor

Portland Harbor serves as habitat and a critical migratory corridor for many species of fish and wildlife including:

- Pacific salmon
- Pacific lamprey
- White sturgeon
- Bald eagle
- Osprey
- Double-crested cormorant
- Great blue heron
- Belted kingfisher
- Mergansers
- Cliff swallow
- Spotted sandpiper
- Mink
- River otter
- Northern red-legged frog
- Pacific treefrog

Portland Harbor Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration

Trustee Council Members

U.S. Department of Commerce, acting through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

U.S. Department of the Interior, acting through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

State of Oregon, acting through the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon

Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon

Nez Perce Tribe

Portland Harbor Project Background

Since the early 1900s, industries along the lower Willamette River have released dozens of contaminants into the river and onto the land around it. Substances released include polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), metals, pesticides (e.g., DDT), dioxins, and furans. Many of these contaminants can harm the environment for many decades. Even small amounts of these contaminants can be hazardous to fish and wildlife. Larger animals like osprey and river otter that have eaten contaminated smaller animals (e.g., fish) can build up high levels of contamination through their food.

In 2000, Portland Harbor was declared a federal Superfund site. Because of its Superfund status, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and a group of Potentially Responsible Parties (PRPs) are currently investigating how the contaminants could be harmful to humans and the environment. The EPA is expected to issue a decision about cleanup of contaminated river sediments in 2012. Meanwhile, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality is working to reduce the amount of contamination entering the water from the land.

In 2002, the Trustee Council was formed to develop and coordinate damage assessment activities at Portland Harbor and to plan for the restoration of natural resources through the NRDA process. The NRDA process is separate from the EPA clean-up activities. Under NRDA, the Trustee Council will evaluate how the natural resources were harmed over the time that the area has been contaminated and will develop a restoration program to compensate for those losses.

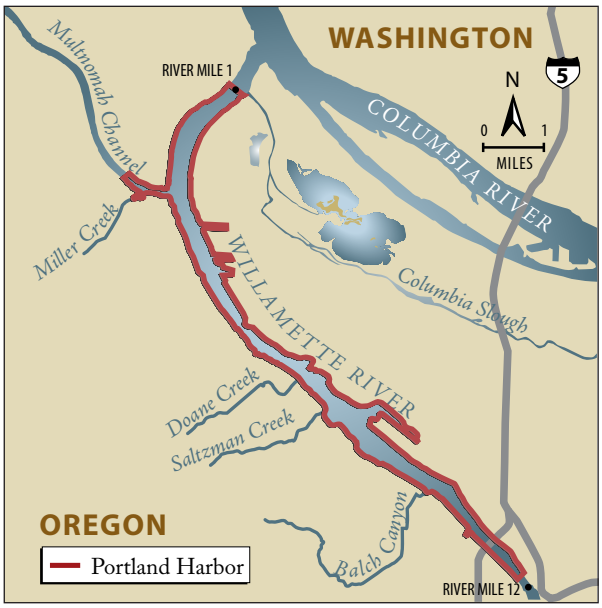
The Natural Resource Damage Assessment Purpose and Process

Clean-up actions by the EPA alone will not fully restore natural resources or address the public's lost use of the resources. A major goal of NRDA is to make the environment and public "whole" for injury to, or loss of, natural resources and the services provided by those resources. Through the NRDA process, the Trustee Council will do the following:

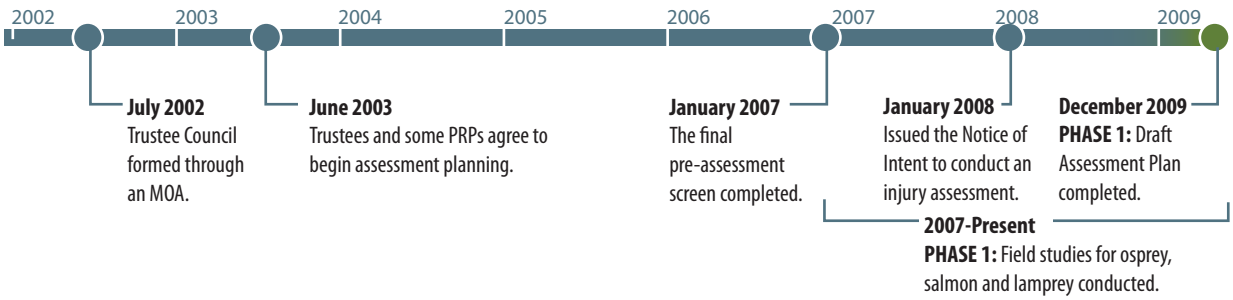
- Assess natural resource injuries caused by contaminants.
- Quantify those injuries.
- Seek compensation from the parties responsible for the contaminants.
- Use compensation funds to restore, rehabilitate, and/or replace those injured natural resources, or direct the responsible parties to do so.

The Trustee Council has developed a phased approach for the NRDA process (see the Portland Harbor Site Activities information box). The goal

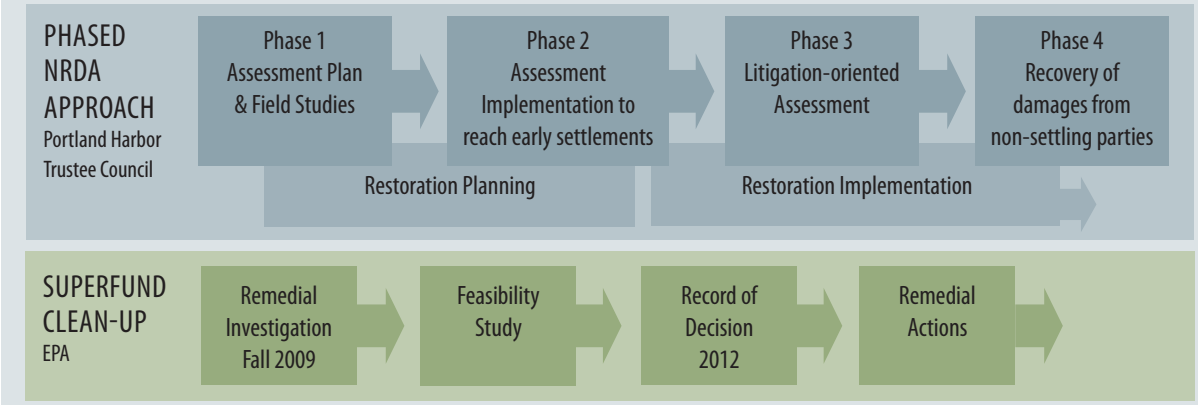
Project Location



Project Timeline



Portland Harbor Site Activities



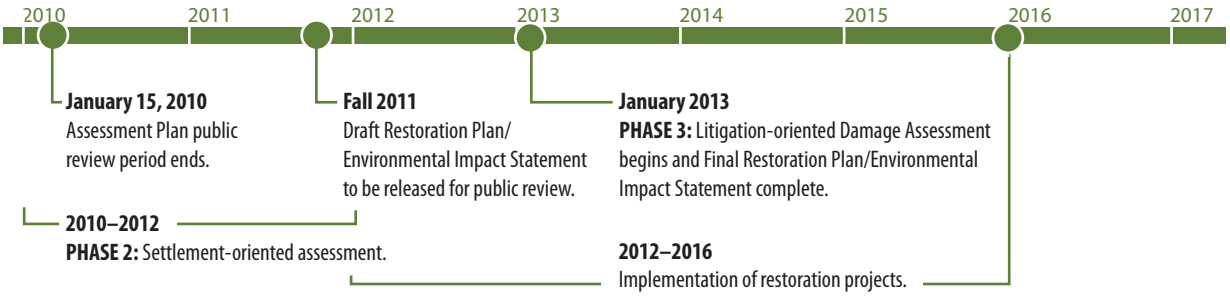
is to reach settlements with PRPs at or around the time of EPA's decision on the Superfund clean-up.

Assessment Plan

In December 2009, the Trustee Council released the draft Assessment Plan to the public. The Assessment Plan for Portland Harbor does the following:

- Provides background on the site.
- Documents the contaminants released.
- Discusses the services, uses, and values of natural resources for the public.
- Defines "injury" for the assessment process.
- Documents the Trustee Council's phased approach.

The final draft of the Assessment Plan and additional information will be available at **www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/Contaminants/PortlandHarbor**.



Learn More

Project Websites:

- **www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/Contaminants/PortlandHarbor**
  Portland Harbor Natural Resource Trustee Council
- **www.darrp.noaa.gov/northwest/portharbor**
  National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)/ Damage Assessment and Restoration Program
- **yosemite.epa.gov/r10/cleanup.nsf/sites/ptldharbor**
  EPA's Portland Harbor information

Restoration Planning and Priorities

PORTLAND HARBOR
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As the NRDA process continues, the Trustee Council is exploring restoration opportunities. The goal of restoration is to return injured natural resources and services to the condition they would have been in if no contamination had occurred.

The Trustee Council has identified a preliminary list of potential restoration opportunities in the Portland Harbor area and is drafting a Restoration Plan. The Trustee Council will seek public input on the plan in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and anticipates holding public meetings on the plan beginning in early 2010.

The plan will outline restoration options, describe a way to scale restoration to the assessed natural resource injuries, and guide how specific restoration projects are chosen. Restoration actions will improve habitat conditions along the lower Willamette River, its shorelines, floodplain, and river-associated habitats, focusing on the most important habitat needs of injured fish and wildlife.

The Trustee Council is starting restoration planning now to ensure that the best restoration opportunities can be identified and preserved as soon as possible. The Trustee Council is also coordinating its restoration efforts closely with EPA's ongoing Superfund clean-up process. Restoration will not be fully implemented until the EPA remediation is complete.

Restoration Examples

- Creating or restoring access to off-channel and shallow water habitats (streams, sloughs, marshes and wetlands) for fish and wildlife
- Removing non-native, invasive plants and replacing them with native streamside and wetland plants
- Restoring river shorelines by removing rip-rap and other artificial materials and "laying back" banks to create a more natural shoreline slope
- Planting native trees in shoreline and upland areas to provide perching and nesting sites for water-dependent birds such as osprey and bald eagle
- Preserving and connecting patches of intact, functioning habitat