



# ***The Power of Integrated Conservation Efforts through Science & Restoration – The Future of the Gulf of Mexico***

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# Overview



- NOAA's Gulf of Mexico Vision & Goal
  - Roles & Collaboration in Gulf Restoration
- Collaborative, System-Based Approach
- 3 Main Gulf Restoration Initiatives
  - NRDA, GEBF, & RESTORE
- Restoration Priorities
- Conclusion

# Future of the Gulf of Mexico – Science, Restoration, and Collaboration

- **NOAA's Vision for Gulf of Mexico (GOM) Restoration:** A robust collaborative effort with our partners to implement an aggressive, coordinated science & system-based approach to restore the impaired Gulf ecosystem and to protect it from further degradation.
- **NOAA's Goal for Gulf of Mexico Restoration:** The Gulf of Mexico is restored to a healthy, functional ecosystem that sustains resilient and thriving marine and coastal resources, communities and economies.

# A Collaborative, System-Based Approach

- NOAA's investments will focus on critical ecological processes, connectivity between habitats and species, and ecosystem services for coastal communities.
- NOAA will use the following criteria to identify priority resources and restoration initiatives within the Gulf of Mexico:
  - Achieves NOAA mandates.
  - Supports collective Gulf of Mexico restoration efforts.
  - Results benefit large-scale ecosystem restoration goals.
  - Provides a high rate of return for restoration.
  - Leverages local support and partnerships.
  - Effectively applies NOAA expertise and assets.

# A Collaborative, System-Based Approach

- Landscape scale protection and restoration
- Key stressors are addressed in a holistic and science-based manner
- Protection and restoration activities occur at geographic scales at which habitat functions and habitat forming processes can be restored, maintained, enhanced, and sustained
- Recognize the importance of interconnectivity of seascapes/habitats
- Application of regulatory and non-regulatory strategies

# Restoration Initiatives

- Three core restoration initiatives post Deepwater Horizon (DWH):
  - Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA)
    - Early Restoration projects per DWH Trustees
    - Restoration Plan
  - Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund (GEBF)
    - Administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)
  - RESTORE Act
    - Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council)

# Common Ground – NRDA, GEBF, & RESTORE

- Although each program has its own unique qualities and requirements, there is common ground in which to collaborate:
  - Focus on resource restoration
    - Identifying priorities and most at-risk resources
    - Leveraging restoration opportunities
    - Achieving holistic and balanced restoration
  - Science-based decision-making
    - Monitoring and adaptive management
    - Data sharing and analysis to determine ecosystem health trajectories

# Restoration Priorities – Science, Species, & Habitat

- **Support science to inform decision-making and investments**
  - Focus on overall long-term health, prosperity, and resilience of Gulf Coast region
  - Foundational research, modeling, monitoring, and decision-support are required to make progress in the face of scientific uncertainty
- **Improve coastal community resilience**
  - Challenges related to balancing growth, mitigating risks from existing coastal hazards, adapting to climate change, and protecting natural infrastructure
  - Building resilience is an economic imperative for the Gulf region

# Restoration Priorities – Science, Species, & Habitat

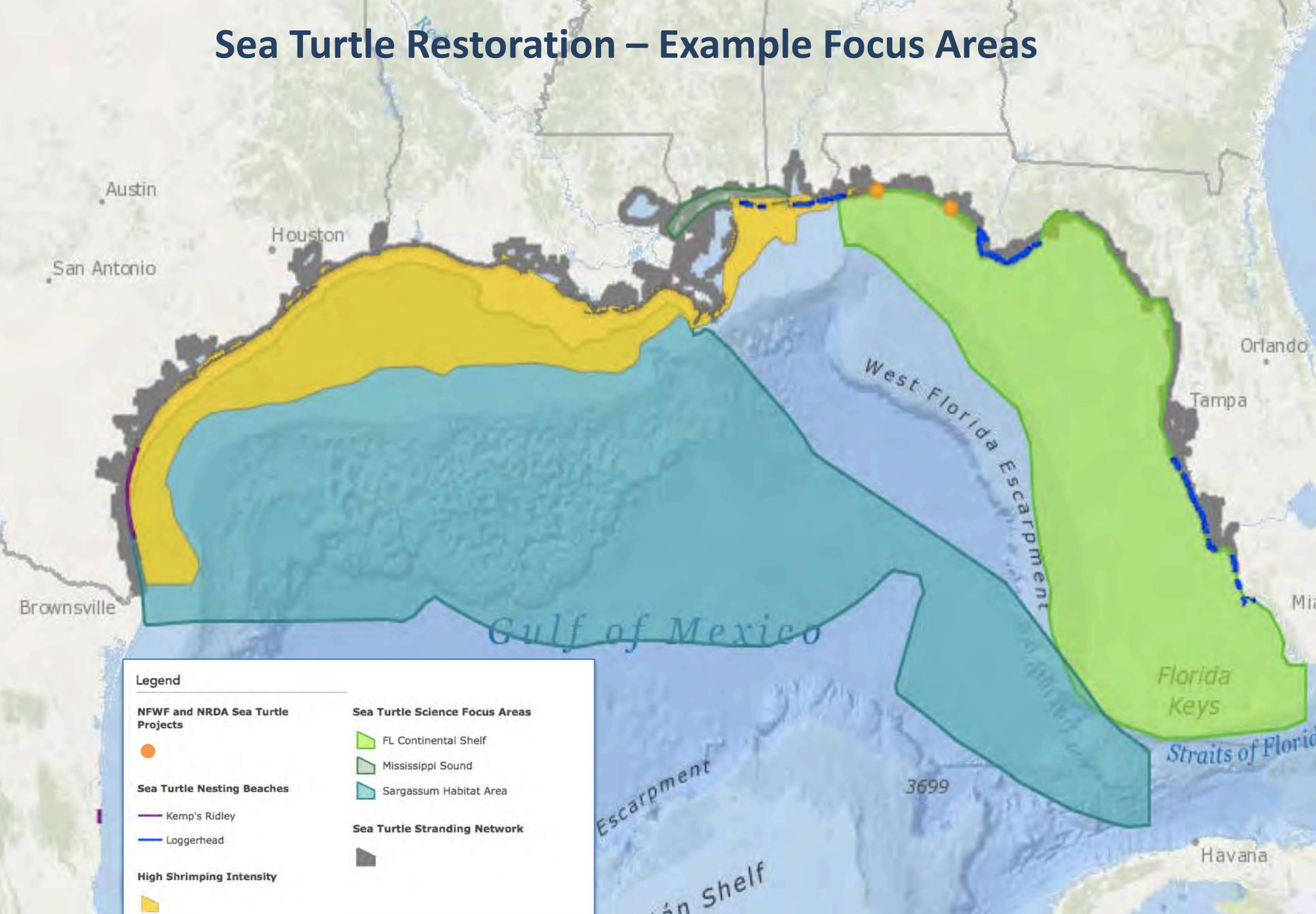
- **Restore and sustain living marine coastal and marine living resources**
  - NOAA and partners will target species known to be critical components of the food web, including apex predators and those species in lower trophic levels
  - Advancing scientific knowledge of these resources should be considered as a critical component of restoration actions and associated research
- **Restore and conserve key habitats**
  - Habitat throughout the Gulf of Mexico has been and continues to be in a state of deterioration and decline.
  - NOAA will leverage its existing habitat-directed and place-based programs to further generate partnership opportunities

# Sea Turtle Restoration Priorities – Example of NOAA's Role in Gulf

## ➤ Sea Turtles

- **Implement protected species recovery plans**
- **Stranding response** – Improving Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network (STSSN) through enhanced response times and stranding investigation
- **Bycatch reduction** – Reduction of bycatch mortality in commercial and recreational fisheries
- **Nesting habitat protection** – Including lighting management, predator control
- **Species-focused science** – Increase sea turtle conservation science and monitoring
- **Outreach/education activities** – Increased fisher outreach and education on Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs); outreach on nesting beach sites and lighting issues

# Sea Turtle Restoration – Example Focus Areas



# Conclusion

- NOAA seeks to craft a path toward ecosystem recovery and increased coastal resilience for the Gulf region.
- NOAA will do this by:
  - Pursuing activities in accordance with the approach outlined, and
  - Partner with the Gulf States & organizations and work with other Federal agencies to achieve a holistic and comprehensive approach to restore a healthy and resilient Gulf ecosystem.