Restoring Natural Resources After the North Cape Oil Spill

Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program

The Problem
In January 1996, a 340-foot oil barge, the North Cape, ran aground off Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge, spilling 828,000 gallons of home heating oil that resulted in the deaths of millions of lobsters, surf clams, and fish, and billions of invertebrates. Over 2,000 birds were killed, including numerous loons and sea ducks. The piping plover, a federally-listed threatened species, was impacted by reductions to its food base.

Highlights
- Assisted with protection of 1.5 million acres of land that provide nesting habitat for at least 125 common loon pairs in Maine;
- Increased productivity of federally-listed threatened nesting piping plover pairs in Rhode Island;
- Protected 64 acres of coastal salt pond buffer habitat in southern Rhode Island;
- Protected more than 600 pairs of nesting common eider in Maine; and
- Restored spawning and nursery habitat for river herring in the Saugatucket River, Rhode Island.

Restoring the Resources
In August 2000, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the State of Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (Trustees) reached a settlement agreement with the insurer of the companies responsible for the North Cape oil spill. As part of the agreement, 1.24 million lobsters were restocked by the Responsible Party and $8 million was paid to the Trustees to restore loons, sea ducks, piping plovers, shellfish and anadromous fish.

North Cape settlement funds have helped leverage in excess of $100 million to protect over 200 lakes and ponds in Maine.
Restoration projects are summarized below:

Accomplishments:

Loons
- Permanently protected, through conservation easements and fee acquisitions, nearly 1.5 million acres of Maine forests and lakes that provide nesting habitat for at least 125 loon pairs.
- Total Project Cost: $117 million
- Trustee Restoration Program Share: $3.4 million

Piping Plover
- Ten-year monitoring and management effort has resulted in piping plover nesting pairs in Rhode Island increasing from 35 pairs on nine beaches in 2000 to 63 pairs on 10 beaches in 2008. Efforts to selectively remove predators have increased production of chicks at several beaches.
- Total Project Cost $500,000
- Trustee Restoration Program Share: $345,000
- Partners: USFWS, State of Rhode Island, The Nature Conservancy, Friends of the Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge, local communities, U.S. Coast Guard

Sea Ducks
- Permanently protected Flag Island, a 42-acre island in Casco Bay, Maine that is home to more than 600 pairs of nesting common eiders.
- Total Project Cost: $1 million
- Trustee Restoration Program Share: $300,000 for protection, $100,000 for monitoring and management
- Partners: USFWS, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, The Nature Conservancy, State of Maine, Casco Bay Estuary Project

Shellfish
- Permanently protected 64 acres of land adjacent to a coastal salt pond to improve water quality and prevent ecological impacts from future land development. Implemented a five-year quahog, oyster and bay scallop seeding and habitat restoration program.
- Total Project Cost: $3.7 million
- Trustee Restoration Program Share: $3.3 million
- Partners: NOAA, USFWS, State of Rhode Island, The Nature Conservancy, University of Rhode Island, over 100 local volunteers

Anadromous Fish
- Constructed a fishway at Indian Lake to restore access to spawning and nursery habitat for river herring in the Saugatuck River.
- Total Project Cost: $200,000
- Trustee Restoration Program Share: $200,000
- Partners: NOAA, State of Rhode Island, USFWS, local communities, individual homeowners

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