

Onondaga Lake

Natural Resource Damage
Assessment and Restoration
Trustee Council



Fact Sheet: What is Natural Resource Damage Assessment

The U.S. Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service (DOI), New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), and the Onondaga Nation (the Nation), collectively “the Trustees” of Onondaga Lake, are conducting a Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA).



*The goal of **NRDA** is to restore, replace or acquire the equivalent of **natural resources and resource services injured** by hazardous materials released into the environment to **baseline** conditions.*

NRDA is the process of assessing injury and restoring natural resources, with the goal of restoring trust resources to their baseline condition. DOI has issued regulations on how to conduct an NRDA (43 C.F.R. Part 11).

Natural resources include land, air, water, plants and wildlife.

Natural resource services are the physical/biological functions of a resource and the benefits that people, wildlife and other natural resources get from those functions (e.g., fishing for people, nesting habitat for birds).

Injury occurs when hazardous substances enter the environment and cause changes to “the chemical or physical quality or the viability [of] a natural resource” (43 C.F.R. 11.14(v)).

Baseline conditions are those that would exist but for the release of the hazardous substance.

Restoration is any action that will help return an injured resource or resource service to baseline and is done in addition to remedial actions. **Restoration projects** include restoration or replacement of injured resources or acquisition of equivalent resources.

Damages are money or actions sought by the Trustees as compensation for injury to natural resources. Damages can be estimated as the cost of restoration or the loss in value of a resource or resource service.

The **Potentially Responsible Party (PRP)**, the entity identified as potentially releasing the hazardous substance, typically pays for damages (and/or completes restoration projects) and the cost of assessment.

Who has the authority to conduct an NRDA?

Federal, state and tribal governments can conduct an NRDA as **Trustees** under Federal law (the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), the Clean Water Act and the Oil Pollution Act). State law may provide additional authority. In this case, DOI, NYSDEC and the Nation are NRDA Trustees.

How is NRDA different from site clean-up?

Site clean-up focuses solely on eliminating or reducing risks to public health and the environment from the release of hazardous substances. NRDA seeks restoration of natural resources and related services injured by these hazardous substances. NRDA Trustees can also collect damages for the loss of natural resources and associated services between the release of hazardous substances and the completion of restoration.

Key Steps in an NRDA

1. Preparation of a Damage Assessment Plan

A plan for assessing injury and damages to natural resources is produced by the Trustees, with input from the public.

2. Injury Assessment and Quantification

Injury to natural resources is documented and the magnitude and extent of the injury is determined.

3. Damages Determination

The type and magnitude of restoration required to compensate the public for injuries to natural resources, the cost of that restoration, and the value of any losses between the time when injury occurred and restoration is complete are determined.

4. Restoration Plan

Specific restoration projects are evaluated and selected, with input from the public.

5. Natural Resource Restoration

Selected restoration projects are implemented.



Ninemile Creek, tributary to Onondaga Lake

Where in the process is the Onondaga Lake NRDA?

The first step in an NRDA is the development of a Damage Assessment Plan (DAP), which describes the studies and methods proposed as part of the assessment. In 1996, NYSDEC produced a DAP. After DOI and the Nation joined New York State as natural resource Trustees, the Trustees and Honeywell agreed to undertake the NRDA cooperatively. In November 2011, the Trustees released a Draft Addendum to the 1996 DAP for public review and comment. In November 2012, the Final DAP Assessment, along with a Response to Public Comments, was completed and made available on-line at www.fws.gov/northeast/nyfo. The Trustees are undertaking assessment activities described in the DAP, including a review of available information related to natural resource injury and new injury assessment studies. Several completed studies are available on-line. The Trustees are also working closely with EPA to understand the impact of the on-going remediation work at the Lake on resource recovery.

What is the role of the public in the NRDA process?

The Trustees must keep the public informed and create opportunities for people to voice concerns, preferences, and suggestions regarding assessment and restoration. The Trustees will continue to communicate with the public through fact sheets, web sites, and public meetings, and seek input on additional planning documents. To keep up-to-date on overall Lake happenings, you can add your name to NYSDEC's Onondaga Lake News listserv at www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/52545.html.



Additional Information

For more information on the Onondaga Lake NRDA, please contact:

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