




UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE
Office of Response and Restoration
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Record

FROM: Tony Penn 

SUBJECT: Categorical Exclusion for certain Natural Resource Damage Assessment field activities in response to the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill

This memorandum provides an environmental review of NOAA Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) field activities in the Gulf of Mexico in response to the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill under the requirements of the NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 216-6, Environmental Review Procedures for Implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), to determine whether the proposed action should be categorically excluded from requirements to prepare either an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or an Environmental Assessment (EA) under NEPA.

The NOS Office of Response and Restoration Damage Assessment, Remediation, and Restoration Program (DARRP) proposes to fund and undertake NRDA activities in the Gulf of Mexico to assess and quantify damages to living marine resources and habitats that resulted from the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill. Typical NRDA activities include use of gear for collecting or sampling benthos, fish, plankton and vegetation, including either manual or mechanical use of traps, seines, trawl nets, tongs, dredges and core tubes; chemistry sampling gear for water surface, column and benthic substrates; passive data collection (i.e., aerial, ground and vessel surveys using video or photographic equipment); conducting laboratory analysis of tissue samples collected; use of active acoustic echosounders; and characterization and mapping of salt marsh, coral reef, oyster reef, mangrove, and submerged aquatic vegetation habitats.

Consistent with the requirements of Section 6.03b.2 of NAO 216-6, conducting and funding these NRDA activities are:

- Intended to restore an ecosystem, habitat, biotic community or population of living resources to a determinable pre-impact condition;
- Do not require substantial dredging, excavation, or placement of fill; and
- Do not involve a significant added risk of human or environmental exposure to toxic or hazardous substances.

Conducting and funding these NRDA activities would not result in any potential significant adverse impacts to the human environment. Therefore, consistent with the requirements of NAO 216-6, conducting and funding NRDA activities in the Gulf of Mexico is categorically excluded from the need to prepare an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement.

