



PRESS RELEASE

Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill NRDA project awarded for over a half million dollars to fund large hydrological restoration project in Charlotte and Lee Counties.

Southwest Florida: The Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP) has been awarded the first *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill NRDA (Natural Resource Damage Assessment) project award in Southwest Florida. The project was approved for funding by the Florida Trustee Implementation Group (FL TIG) in the Final Restoration Plan 1 and Environmental Assessment (RP1/EA) finalized in March 2019.

The CHNEP submitted the proposed project for the funding in collaboration with the South Florida Water Management District, who coordinates the Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Initiative (CHFI) - the larger hydrological restoration effort that this project will support. The FL TIG, then selected the Lower Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Hydrologic Restoration Planning Project as one of the 23 preferred projects in the FL TIG's RP1/EA – the first NRDA project in Southwest Florida. The CHNEP recently entered into a funding agreement to accept the funds and now is in the procurement process to initiate the project.

Development, including the construction of major roadways such as US 41 and I-75, has significantly altered the historic sheet flow from the Babcock-Webb WMA through the Yucca Pens Unit WMA down to the tidal creeks and into the Charlotte Harbor and Caloosahatchee estuaries.

The funding of over a half million dollars will assist with the development of a science-based Strategic Hydrological Planning Tool. The Tool will provide guidance to resource management agencies as related to the appropriate restoration and management of surface waters currently flowing from the Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and Yucca Pens Unit WMA through tidal creeks discharging into eastern

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Charlotte Harbor and the Caloosahatchee River. Extensive data collection, as well as mapping and modeling, will be used to determine the timing, distribution and quantity of water needed to improve the historic surface water flows west to tidal creeks and canals that flow into eastern Charlotte Harbor, as well as creeks and numerous canals that flow south into the Caloosahatchee River. Tidal creeks are primary nursery areas for fisheries, providing food and habitat to numerous species of fish and shellfish including snook, redfish, tarpon and oysters.

The larger CHFI hydrological restoration effort that this project supports will involve redirecting freshwater flows that are artificially impounded east of I-75 in the Babcock Cecil Webb Wildlife Management Area and unnaturally blocked and diverted from Charlotte Harbor, Cape Coral, and the Caloosahatchee, back to where they historically flowed and are needed. The CHFI is an on-going multi-agency effort with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Southwest and South Florida Water Management districts, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Florida Department of Transportation, Lee and Charlotte counties, City of Cape Coral, CHNEP and others. Some land needed for the restoration has already purchased by the state on the east side of I-75 to store and redirect flows through the Yucca Pens WMA and into the Gulf of Mexico. As the CHFI restoration initiative is implemented, it will improve hydrology and water quality in the region as well as conditions in the Gulf.

“This project, which was conceptually initiated nearly 20 years ago, is getting a much needed infusion of funding support to advance restoration at a time when our water resources desperately need it,” said Jennifer Hecker, Executive Director of the Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership. “Our organization and the many others partnering on this project are excited that we are now receiving funding that will advance this and overall Gulf restoration efforts.”

For more information about the Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership and its work, please go to <https://www.chnep.org>.

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