Puerto Rico

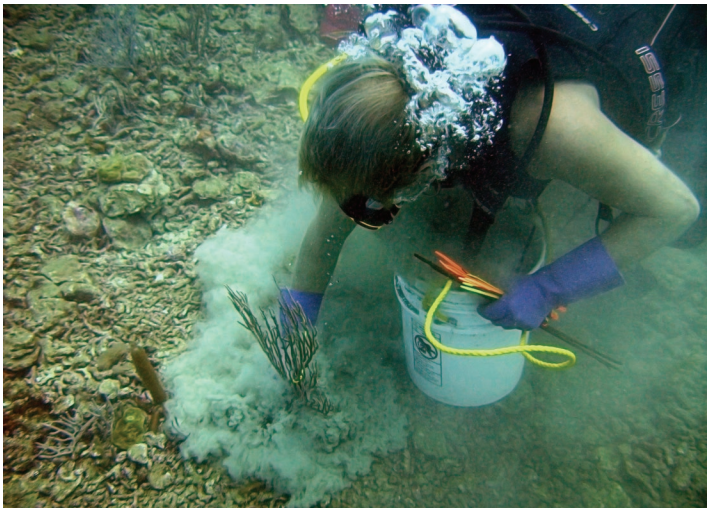
As a steward of our nation's coastal and marine environments, NOAA addresses immediate and long-term environmental threats through its Office of Response and Restoration (OR&R). Scientists are on call around-the-clock to provide the U.S. Coast Guard and other emergency responders with critical information to help minimize environmental damage caused by oil and hazardous chemical spills. Environmental experts assess ecosystems compromised by historic or ongoing contamination and work with other organizations to conduct remediation, restoration, and monitoring of critical natural resources.

Protecting and Restoring Puerto Rico's Coastal and Marine Areas

NOAA trust resources in Puerto Rico include large expanses of coral reefs, mangroves, and sea grass beds. Puerto Rico's natural resources help sustain a healthy local economy by providing food, jobs, and protection from storms. The cumulative impact of vessel groundings, anchor damage, hazardous waste sites, past military activities, and oil spills harm the businesses and communities that depend on Puerto Rico's natural resources. The state map on the reverse page shows key response and restoration activities in the past year.

Emergency Response

In the early morning of April 27, 2006, the 748-foot Cayman Island-flagged tanker *Margara* ran aground on a shallow coral reef approximately one mile south-southeast of the entrance into Bahia de Tallaboa and approximately two and half miles southeast of the entrance into Bahia de Guayanilla. NOAA provided emergency response coordinators with daily weather, tides, currents, and trajectory updates. Significant injury to corals, including the staghorn coral, a recently listed threatened species, occurred during the initial grounding. Ensuing efforts to extract the vessel caused further injury to the coral. NOAA and co-trustees performed emergency restoration that included stabilizing reef debris and reattaching more than 10,000 dislodged corals.



Restoration of coral following the M/V Margara *ship grounding*

Assessment and Restoration

The Vieques Island Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Area was used by the U.S. Navy for military operations from the 1940s until 2003. Extensive amounts of unexploded ordnance and remnants of exploded ordnance have been identified in the range areas and surrounding waters of Vieques. Hazardous substances associated with ordnance use, such as mercury, lead, and depleted uranium, have contaminated beaches, fisheries, and recreational waters that are used by local populations and support a growing tourism industry. The site was added to the National Priority List (Superfund) in 2005. Site investigations and cleanup activities are now being conducted to address extensive contamination problems. Large areas of the island, home to at least 25 endangered species, have been set aside as a wildlife refuge. NOAA provides scientific support to the U.S. Navy and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to facilitate cleanup and restoration of the contaminated sites.

Sampling fiddler crabs on Vieques Island

Research

NOAA collaborates with other federal, state, and local programs to develop innovative approaches to protecting marine and estuarine environments through research and synthesis of information. The Coastal Response Research Center (CRRC) brings together the resources of a research-oriented university and the field expertise of OR&R to conduct and oversee basic and applied research, conduct outreach, and encourage strategic partnerships in spill response, assessment, and restoration.

NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration—Protecting our Coastal Environment

For further information about NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration, please call (301) 713-2989 or visit our Web site at response.restoration.noaa.gov