Good News for the Gulf

Five years after the BP Deepwater Horizon oil disaster devastated the Gulf’s natural resources and communities, a historic settlement this year brought significant good news—and a reminder that much work remains to be done.

It’s a day that I won’t forget.

On April 20, 2010, the BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico, taking the lives of eleven men and sinking into the ocean in a cloud of smoke and fire.

The BP Deepwater Horizon oil disaster was the largest environmental catastrophe in U.S. history. Nearly five million barrels of crude oil were released into the Gulf, contaminating over 1,300 miles of beaches and wetlands from Florida to Texas and threatening our creatures and our coastal way of life.

With over two decades of history working in the Gulf, Ocean Conservancy responded immediately. The organization made a deeper commitment to the region and created the Gulf Restoration Program to track impacts of the disaster and help people understand what was happening in affected Gulf ecosystems—from coral reefs to salt marshes to the deep seafloor.

Along with most of the Gulf Restoration Program team, I live on the Gulf Coast and saw the BP oil disaster unfold firsthand, even getting access to the Incident Command Center where the Coast Guard coordinated the response and cleanup effort. It’s been very challenging—and at times quite painful—to see this place we love so damaged.

In the months and years that followed the BP oil disaster, our team worked diligently to hold BP and other parties accountable and make sure any penalties paid would be used for science-based restoration of Gulf waters, wildlife and communities.

We understood that once the well was capped and media attention ebbed, Gulf restoration would be a decades-long endeavor—and one of our biggest challenges to date.

We emphasized the importance of repairing the environmental damage that occurred far out in the ocean, where the oil impacted seabirds, whales, bottlenose dolphins, sea turtles and many other vulnerable species.

In 2012, we helped to get the RESTORE Act passed, which went a long way toward making sure that penalties paid for the BP oil disaster would be allocated fairly and responsibly.

Then, earlier this year, came the news that Ocean Conservancy and other advocates of the Gulf had long been waiting for. On July 2, 2015, the U.S. announced a settlement of all remaining claims against BP for a whopping $20.8 billion, with $1.24 billion dedicated to restoring the open ocean.

The settlement represented a huge victory for Ocean Conservancy. We had strongly advocated for a swift and fair resolution. Our approach has always been that comprehensive restoration—including both coastal and marine environments—is the only way that the Gulf will ever be made whole.

Now that the funding is imminent, we have to ensure that any funded projects will truly restore the Gulf and create a healthier ecosystem for generations to come.

Soon after the settlement was announced, the Deepwater Horizon Trustees, who are charged with restoring the damage to our natural resources, released a sobering 635-page summary of oil impacts in the Draft Programmatic Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan and Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement.

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BY BETHANY CARL KRAFT
You’ll read about our victories from the past year in our center section. You’ll see how we, with your help, have moved the dial forward to facilitate smart planning for our ocean and coastal development, guard against increasing acidity levels in the ocean and defend federal policies essential to a healthy ocean.

Dedicated supporters like you have played a major role in making these successes possible. Without the generous commitment of our members, our work would not be possible. Thank you, thank you.

The cover story focuses on our work to restore the Gulf of Mexico now five years after BP spilled millions of gallons of oil in the country’s worst offshore oil disaster. We are thrilled that a portion of the fines levied against BP will go to help sea turtles, dolphins and other incredible sea life that reside in the Gulf.

Ocean Conservancy’s Board of Directors got “up close and personal” with our work to help guide Gulf restoration at our fall meeting in New Orleans. We applauded the work of our Gulf Restoration Director Bethany Kraft and her capable team on the achievements they’ve made—as we lamented the fact that, unchecked, the rising waters caused by climate change could put New Orleans and its environs under water in the years to come.

And so we pause to celebrate the great accomplishments of 2015 as we also implement bold and ambitious campaigns to protect the ocean from a host of threats going forward—with climate change and what it will do to ocean life and coastal communities being front and center in the challenges.

Your continuing support is critical to our success. Thank you for your past generosity. Please join us in supporting the fights that lie ahead.

Kind regards,

David C. Aldrich
Board Chair
Ocean Conservancy values all of the dedicated members, volunteers and activists who believe in our mission and make our work possible. We thank all of our members for their generous financial support of our ocean conservation efforts. Ocean Conservancy is especially grateful for our Champions for Sea Change, an elite group of ocean stewards who support our work with annual gifts of $1,000 or more.
Engaged communities to take action on ocean acidification

Important species like oysters and crabs that fuel the nation’s seafood industry are endangered by the increasing acidity of seawater. Ocean Conservancy led the drive to introduce two new bipartisan federal bills to tackle this serious challenge, and we garnered support for additional federal funds for research and monitoring. To raise awareness of this growing threat to coastal communities, we co-authored papers in several science journals and teamed up with Mote Marine Laboratory to host a roundtable in Florida to explore solutions. Having long advocated on this important issue, we are also pleased to see coastal states taking up the mantel to promote state-driven legislation and panels that we worked hard to champion.

Commemorated the 5th anniversary of the National Ocean Policy and progress on smart ocean planning

Our Ocean Planning program protects marine ecosystems while balancing ocean uses like shipping, fishing, and recreation. Five years ago, ocean planning in the U.S. was a long-sought dream; today we are months away from ocean plans for the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic. We also celebrated construction of the country’s first offshore wind farm, made possible by Rhode Island’s smart ocean plan that we have showcased as a gold standard of ocean planning. Thanks to the plan, this wind farm is a model of sustainable development, supported by fishermen and conservationists. We along with our industry and conservation partners are working to make smart ocean planning the new status quo for how our ocean is managed and preserved.

Redoubled our efforts to restore the Gulf of Mexico in the wake of historic $20.8 billion settlement for BP Deepwater Horizon oil disaster

Since the BP disaster polluted the Gulf with nearly five million barrels of oil, damage to fishing communities and marine wildlife continues to emerge. Roughly four to eight billion oysters were lost, and bottlenose dolphins are expected to take 40–50 years to recover. The settlement will help us address spill impacts and achieve long-term restoration goals. The inclusion of over $1 billion for ocean restoration—as well as separate funds to monitor long-term spill effects—were major victories. Ocean Conservancy remains steadfast in ensuring that every dime of funding is directed as intended.

Helped keep offshore drilling out of the U.S. Arctic

This year, President Obama protected nearly 10 million acres of important habitat off Alaska’s coast, Shell retreated from offshore oil exploration in the Chukchi Sea and the Administration cancelled two Arctic sales. These decisions are huge victories for all the groups—including Ocean Conservancy—that continually pressed for protections from irresponsible development. Still, although drilling is no longer imminent, Shell has signaled continued interest in the region and the Administration is still considering new leasing. We continue our fight against future drilling and for a more resilient Arctic ecosystem.

THANK YOU for all you do to help us secure a healthy ocean for future generations. Here are some examples of what we accomplished this year—they would not have been possible without your support.
Reflecting on 2015

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Protected Arctic wildlife

In May, when the U.S. assumed the Chair of the multinational Arctic Council, Ocean Conservancy capitalized on this historic opportunity by launching a push for priority actions to protect Arctic wildlife and important ocean habitats. We also started working at the United Nations’ International Maritime Organization, where we successfully finalized new shipping measures to reduce vessel traffic and potential oil spills near the coast of Alaska’s wildlife-rich Aleutian Islands. These new measures, which take effect in 2016, protect the region’s fragile ecosystem, which also supports robust fisheries and Alaska Native communities engaged in the traditional subsistence way-of-life.

Promoted healthy fisheries and resilient fishing communities

Nationally, overfishing is at an all-time low, in great part thanks to Ocean Conservancy’s decades-long effort to secure sustainable U.S. fisheries. In April, the National Marine Fisheries Service released its 2014 Status of Stocks report showing important signs of recovery for ocean ecosystems and fishing communities. Part of our advocacy effort involved rallying support for the West Coast’s Fishery Ecosystem Plan, resulting in a new effort to move management beyond a focus on single species and to one that considers the health of the whole ecosystem. In addition, in the face of changing ocean conditions, brought on in part by climate change, we are developing a new tool with international experts that considers a broader and more complex set of variables to help fisheries better adapt. Together with partners, we are building a state-of-the-art “flight simulator” that will allow fishery managers to better factor ecological, social and economic dynamics into their decision-making and policy development. Once completed we plan to apply this tool to fisheries around the world.

Celebrated 30th anniversary of the International Coastal Cleanup® and led Trash Free Seas Alliance® in tackling ocean plastics

Thanks to millions of volunteers, over the past 30 years we have protected marine wildlife by removing more than 200 million pounds of trash from beaches and waterways. We are also leading a growing coalition of influential partners through the Trash Free Seas Alliance to keep trash and plastics from entering the ocean in the first place. With our Alliance partners we released a first-of-its-kind report, Stemming the Tide, that outlines specific solutions to address waste management and stop the outflow of plastic waste into the ocean in the five priority countries that account for over half of the plastic in the ocean (China, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand).

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Ocean Conservancy
Foundations, Corporations and Government Agencies

Ocean Conservancy is grateful to the following foundations, corporations and government agencies for their generous support of our ocean conservation work.  

JANUARY 1–DECEMBER 31, 2015

Ocean Legacy Society

We thank the following dedicated supporters who are investing in the future of our ocean and its wildlife by including Ocean Conservancy in their wills, trusts and beneficiary designations.

Bequests for the Ocean

JANUARY 1–DECEMBER 31, 2015

We honor in memoriam the following supporters of Ocean Conservancy. Their foresight and generosity provide important and ongoing program support and create an ocean legacy for future generations to behold and enjoy.

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Ocean Conservancy is grateful to the following foundations, corporations and government agencies for their generous support of our ocean conservation work.  

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Judith Blanche
Financial Summary

Ocean Conservancy continues to deliver high-impact programmatic results in an operationally efficient and cost-effective manner. This impact is made possible through the ongoing commitment, involvement and financial contributions of individuals, foundations and corporations who understand the critical importance of protecting and preserving the ocean.

Ocean Conservancy’s 2015 revenue totaled $31.6 million. Investment income and gains totaled $0.4 million and expenses totaled $21.6 million. Eighty-three percent of expenses were for ocean conservation programmatic activities and administrative services, and 17 percent of expenses were for fundraising.

Ocean Conservancy meets all 20 standards for charitable organizations established by the Better Business Bureau’s Wise Giving Alliance, and is proud of its reputation as a good steward of the resources entrusted to it by its supporters. The financial results depicted are derived from Ocean Conservancy’s June 30, 2015 audited financial statements. Copies of the complete audited financial statements are available upon request or on the Ocean Conservancy website—www.oceanconservancy.org.