

Environmental Restoration Technical Advisory Committee

A disaster can greatly impact the natural environment a community has worked to preserve. A post-disaster redevelopment plan (PDRP) can lay out a strategy for dealing with long-term negative impacts that require human intervention to repair.

Environmental restoration is interconnected with other recovery needs such as health and social services, land use, and economic redevelopment. Issues including clearing waterways of debris, cleaning up hazardous materials spills, and restoring recreation areas can affect economic activity and residents' safety and quality of life. Consideration of the long-term environmental impacts of infrastructure repairs, temporary housing, and debris sites is also important during recovery efforts. The purpose of the Environmental Restoration Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is to make sure these issues are not overlooked in the rush to rebuild and also to address their impact on local and statewide community redevelopment.

Post-Disaster Redevelopment Issues for Environmental Restoration

Below are the Environmental Restoration Technical Advisory Committee's prioritized issues with a brief description of each.

1. **Hazardous materials, debris contaminates** – A major storm can cause severe pollution by compromising hazardous materials storage facilities and through the scattering of contaminated debris by wind or floodwaters. Hillsborough County is particularly vulnerable to widespread contamination due to the presence and location of the Port of Tampa and Port Manatee.
2. **Environmental review of temporary sites** – After a disaster, sites are often needed for temporary housing, business, and debris storage as well as other recovery staging activities. These temporary uses will leave varying degrees of impacts on the sites. For instance, temporary housing sites will need water, sewer, and power facility hookups if they are not already there. Additionally, temporary housing units, such as trailers, require adequate time to off-gas formaldehyde and other chemicals. Environmental professionals will be needed to ensure that these sites are safe for residents displaced during a disaster. Debris management sites can require clearing an area for temporary storage of debris during transport or processing. Depending on the type of debris being handled at a particular site, there could be issues of soil contamination. Often, many of the sites available for temporary use after a disaster are vacant public landholdings or recreational properties. Through advanced planning, the long-term environmental impacts of these temporary sites may be managed and the negative impacts minimized.
3. **Waterway debris removal, pollution** – Following a storm, water pollution could be a large scale problem affecting human health, threatening animal and plant species, and hindering the ability of the tourism industry to rebound. Removal of waterway debris is important for navigation and will require different expertise than normal land debris removal operations.

4. **Wetland restoration** – Tidal wetlands make up a significant portion of Tampa Bay and may be heavily impacted from coastal storms. Wave action and erosion of sediment may undermine wetland vegetation and weaken its ability to recover. Wetlands provide many environmental services to bay water quality, act as a buffer for coastal flooding, and provide prime habitat for many important bird and estuarine species. Debris and contamination from coastal storms may degrade this important ecosystem. Accelerated sea level rise will further threaten wetland ecosystems through inundation, increased salinity levels, and increased exposure to storm surge.
5. **Habitat restoration on conservation lands** – The Hillsborough County Comprehensive Plan and county regulations include initiatives to conserve the delicate habitats of numerous endangered and threatened species. Many conservation lands also provide passive recreation and environmental education opportunities for county residents. A natural disaster can devastate these areas, and it may be in the best interests of the public for the agencies managing them to predetermine restoration actions that will be needed to restore or recover from these events.
6. **Restore urban forests** – Urban forests are a valuable asset to a community and after a major wind or fire event they could be severely damaged. Air quality, urban heat effects, and simply the aesthetic quality of the urban areas of Hillsborough County would be impacted by a massive loss of mature trees. Restoring the urban canopy also will be an important symbol of recovery and return to normalcy for residents and tourists.
7. **Environmental review of housing sites/neighborhoods** – Before residents return to their neighborhoods and start to rebuild, comprehensive environmental reviews need to be conducted to ensure that property is safe for occupancy.