

Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
FY 2021 Annual Report for the Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program (COE)
Grant Number 1 RCEGR010006-01-00

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Brief Description of the selected COE

In December 2014, the Alabama Gulf Coast Recovery Council (AGCRC) made available for public comment for 45 days draft Competitive Process documents. After consideration of meaningful input from the public, a final RFP was published in May 2015. As a result of the Final RFP, AGCRC received one proposal. After reviewing the proposal according to the qualifications and criteria described in the Final RFP, the AGCRC made a motion to accept the proposal submitted by the Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium (MESC). MESC was founded to reduce redundancy in Marine Sciences in higher education while serving as a vehicle for collaborative coastal studies. Member institutions include the following 23 public and private colleges and universities: Alabama A&M, Alabama State, Athens State, Auburn, Auburn University at Montgomery, Birmingham Southern, Huntingdon, Jacksonville State, Judson, Samford, Spring Hill, Stillman, Talladega, Troy, Tuskegee, Alabama, Alabama at Birmingham, Alabama in Huntsville, University of Mobile, Montevallo, North Alabama, South Alabama, and West Alabama.

Overview of focus of the COE

The focus of MESC, a consortium of Alabama universities, is to provide local, state, and federal officials, and interested citizens access to the findings of innovative research performed on the following priority areas:

- (1) Coastal and deltaic sustainability, restoration and protection, including solutions and technology that allow citizens to live in a safe and sustainable manner in a coastal delta in the Gulf Coast Region;
- (2) Coastal fisheries and wildlife ecosystem research and monitoring in the Gulf Coast Region;
- (3) Sustainable and resilient growth, economic and commercial development in the Gulf of Mexico; and
- (4) Comprehensive observation, monitoring, and mapping of the Gulf of Mexico. MESC will capitalize on the diverse expertise of the scientists employed by the 23-member MESC colleges and universities, and bringing the state's best science talent to bear on these four focal areas.

Summary of the annual performance of the COE

MESC released RFP #1 on January 6th, 2021. In response to RFP #1, 40 full proposals were received in March 2021. The release of the RFP in January was accompanied by the launch of the ALCoE website. In September 2021, 10 projects were selected for funding totaling \$4.3 million. Brief descriptions of these 10 projects are included in the attachment at the end of this document.

Renovations to wet lab facilities at Dauphin Island Sea Lab (DISL), administrative home of the MESC began in 2021 and after delays due to hurricanes and COVID, are expected to be completed in 2022. Similarly, repairs to Alabama's Real-Time Coastal Observing System (ARCOS) were begun in 2021 and continue. Both the wetlab and ARCOS upgrades will enable and support the research funded through Alabama's Center of Excellence.

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Programmatic Elements

Award Recipient

Treasury – ADCNR: Treasury issued the federal award to ADCNR in September 2019, with an effective date of October 1, 2019. AGCRC selected MESC to implement the Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program in Alabama. MESC is a consortium of 23 public and private colleges and universities: Alabama A&M, Alabama State, Athens State, Auburn, Auburn University at Montgomery, Birmingham Southern, Huntingdon, Jacksonville State, Judson, Samford, Spring Hill, Stillman, Talladega, Troy, Tuskegee, Alabama, Alabama at Birmingham, Alabama in Huntsville, University of Mobile, Montevallo, North Alabama, South Alabama, and West Alabama. The MESC serves as the administrator for the consortium. During the reporting period, ADCNR executed the sub-award for implementation of the Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program. ADCNR conducted routine monitoring and reporting, and participated in routine meetings with the Center of Excellence.

Award Sub-recipient/Consortium Lead

ADCNR – Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium: The sub-award agreement was executed on February 28, 2020, between ADCNR and Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium (Executive Director – Dr. John Valentine, DUNS - 07-507-0474) for \$7,868,353.00. The funds will be used to implement the Alabama Center of Excellence program. This program will conduct research on the Gulf Coast Region that focuses on science, technology, and monitoring.

MESC was selected as Alabama’s Center of Excellence under Bucket 5 of the RESTORE Act. MESC is a consortium of 23 public and private colleges and universities: Alabama A&M, Alabama State, Athens State, Auburn, Auburn University at Montgomery, Birmingham Southern, Huntingdon, Jacksonville State, Judson, Samford, Spring Hill, Stillman, Talladega, Troy, Tuskegee, Alabama, Alabama at Birmingham, Alabama in Huntsville, University of Mobile, Montevallo, North Alabama, South Alabama, and West Alabama. The MESC serves as the administrator for the consortium. The sub-award agreement was executed on February 28, 2020, between the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) and the Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium (DUNS - 07-507-0474) for \$7,868,353.00. The funds will be used to implement the Alabama Center of Excellence program. This program will conduct research on the following priority areas: (1) Coastal and deltaic sustainability, restoration and protection, including solutions and technology that allow citizens to live in a safe and sustainable manner in a coastal delta in the Gulf Coast Region; (2) Coastal fisheries and wildlife ecosystem research and monitoring in the Gulf Coast Region; (4) Sustainable and resilient growth, economic and commercial development in the Gulf of Mexico; and (5) Comprehensive observation, monitoring, and mapping of the Gulf of Mexico.

During the reporting period, ADCNR and MESC conducted routine monitoring and reporting activities, including monthly reporting submittal and monthly status calls, and participated in routine meetings.

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Subawards between MESC and the recipients of awards through RFP1 were drafted in December 2021. Finalization of those contracts is expected in early 2022.

Financial Elements

Award Recipient

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| Recipient: | Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources |
| Award Amount: | \$7,964,464.00 |
| Expenditures to Date: | \$479,935.43 |
| Funds Leveraged: | \$0.00 |

Award Sub-recipient/Consortium Lead

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Sub-recipient: | Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium |
| Sub-award Amount: | \$7,868,353.00 |
| Expenditures to Date: | \$442,964.76 |
| Funds Leveraged: | \$0.00 |

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council Elements

Relevant Synergies/Collaboration with other RESTORE funding streams

Alabama’s Center of Excellence (ALCoE) has participated in monthly calls with the Gulf Restoration and Science Programs Coordination Forum. This forum is led by the NOAA RESTORE Science Program and works to facilitate collaboration between the different RESTORE funding streams. ALCoE joined one of the working groups examining the metrics used for program success and transfer of research to various stakeholders including State resource managers. AL COE has submitted an abstract to present at the Gulf of Mexico Conference in April 2022.

Relevant Synergies/Collaboration with other DWH funding mechanisms

Currently, ALCoE does not have any synergies/collaborations with other DWH funding mechanisms to report.

Opportunities

Currently, ALCoE does not see any need for modifications to existing laws or program rules to improve the COE grant program.