

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council Draft Funded Priorities List 3b

November 2020



Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council Members

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Executive Summary

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) is seeking public comment on proposed funding decisions as described in this draft document. The proposed funding is administered by the Council pursuant to the *Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies Act of the Gulf Coast States of 2012* ([RESTORE Act](#)). The funding would come from the RESTORE Act allocation known as the Council-Selected Restoration Component, or “Bucket 2”. The Council approves projects and programs for Bucket 2 funding as set forth in Funded Priorities Lists (FPLs). Prior to release of this draft document, the Council had approved three other FPLs.

The Council develops FPLs through collaboration among its members and with feedback from stakeholders across the Gulf. The Council was initially planning on developing FPL 3 as a single action, consisting of a list of restoration projects and programs addressing ecosystem needs across the Gulf coast. As a result of the collaborative process, the Council decided to develop FPL 3 in two phases. On February 12, 2020, the Council approved the first phase, referred to as FPL 3a. The Council is now proposing the second phase, FPL 3b.

In draft FPL 3b, the Council is now proposing to approve approximately \$105,135,750 for water quality improvement, habitat conservation and restoration, and other ecosystem projects and programs (collectively referred to as activities) across the Gulf coast. In addition, the Council is proposing to reserve approximately \$196,864,250 to implement priority activities in the future. Among other potential benefits, this proposed FPL 3b would:

- Establish large-scale programs to address water quality and quantity, habitat acquisition and conservation, coastal resilience, and other ecosystem restoration needs in the Gulf;
- Continue funding to enhance the environmental vitality of the area's natural resources while also providing environmental job training for young adults across the Gulf, including youth from Federally recognized tribes;
- Support ecosystem restoration in important ecoregions and watersheds, including the Texas Chenier Plain, Mississippi Sound in Mississippi, the Apalachicola watershed in Florida, and the Perdido River and Bay Watershed shared by Alabama and Florida;
- Continue funding for private land conservation and ecological restoration on agricultural lands across the Gulf; and
- Support scientific efforts to help build the knowledge needed to advance Gulf restoration.

Many of these activities would continue to strategically leverage investments with other restoration efforts, including building upon successes of past FPL activities. The sponsor proposals for these projects and programs, along with the best available science (BAS) reviews of the proposals, may be found at www.restorethegulf.gov. Draft FPL 3b adheres to the FPL development process committed to by the Council, including the application of best available science, public engagement and transparency, and the 2019 Planning Framework ([RESTORE Council 2019a](#)).

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Introduction

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (RESTORE Council or Council) is seeking public comment on proposed funding decisions described in this draft document. The proposed funding is administered by the Council pursuant to the *Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies Act of the Gulf Coast States of 2012* ([RESTORE Act](#)). The funding would come from the RESTORE Act allocation known as the Council-Selected Restoration Component, or “Bucket 2.” The Council approves projects and programs for Bucket 2 funding as set forth in Funded Priorities Lists (FPLs). Thus far, the Council has approved two FPLs. As a result of the collaborative process, the Council decided to develop FPL 3 in two phases. On February 12, 2020, the Council approved the first phase, referred to as FPL 3a. The Council is now proposing the second phase, FPL 3b. The following provides background on the RESTORE Act and Bucket 2, along with an overview of the proposed projects and instructions on how to provide comments to the Council.

The RESTORE Act and Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council

The Gulf Coast environment was significantly damaged by the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. In an effort to advance environmental and economic recovery from the spill, Congress passed the [RESTORE Act](#) in 2012. The RESTORE Act established the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council. Members of the Council include the Governors of the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas; the Secretaries of the U.S. Departments of the Interior, the Army, Commerce, Agriculture, and Homeland Security; and the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The Administrator of the EPA currently serves as the Council Chairperson.

Pursuant to the RESTORE Act, the Council is responsible for administering a portion of the funds associated with settlement of civil penalties against parties responsible for the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. Specifically, the Council is responsible for administering two funding sources: (1) the Council-Selected Restoration Component, or “Bucket 2”, and (2) the Spill Impact Component, or “Bucket 3”. Bucket 2 receives 30% of the funds allocated under the RESTORE Act. [Figure 1](#) shows the funding allocations and amounts under the RESTORE Act and associated settlements of civil penalties. In addition, the Direct Component, also known as “Bucket 1”, provides states with funds to conduct restoration and other activities, and is administered by the U.S. Department of the Treasury.



Figure 1. Allocation of the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund based on settlements with BP, Transocean and Anadarko; RESTORE Council oversight components are highlighted in green.

The Council’s Bucket 2 funding decisions are guided by criteria set forth in the RESTORE Act, the Council’s *2016 Comprehensive Plan Update: Restoring the Gulf Coast’s Ecosystem and Economy* ([2016 Comprehensive Plan Update](#)), and other policies, including the Council’s [2019 Planning Framework](#). Pursuant to the RESTORE Act, Council approval of Bucket 2 funding requires an affirmative vote from at least three state members and the Council Chair. The other federal members do not have a vote. The following is a brief overview of the Bucket 2 criteria and policies, with links to additional information.

RESTORE Act Priority Criteria

In selecting projects and programs under Bucket 2, the RESTORE Act requires that the Council give the highest priority to projects and programs (collectively referred to as activities) that address one or more of the following criteria:

1. **Projects that are projected to make the greatest contribution to restoring and protecting** the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast region, without regard to geographic location within the Gulf Coast region.
2. **Large-scale projects and programs** that are projected to substantially contribute to restoring and protecting the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast ecosystem.

3. **Projects contained in existing Gulf Coast State comprehensive plans** for the restoration and protection of natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast region.
4. **Projects that restore long-term resiliency** of the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands most impacted by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

As required by the RESTORE Act, the RESTORE Council released the *2013 Initial Comprehensive Plan: Restoring the Gulf Coast's Ecosystem & Economy* ([2013 Initial Comprehensive Plan](#)). The Council's strategy for achieving a healthy Gulf is founded on the five Comprehensive Plan goals that address habitat, water quality and quantity, coastal and marine resources, community resilience, and the Gulf economy. Additionally, the Council committed to an overarching framework for an integrated and coordinated approach to region-wide Gulf Coast restoration and to help guide the collective actions at the local, state, tribal, and federal levels. The Council's goals are:

1. *Restore and Conserve Habitat*
2. *Restore Water Quality and Quantity*
3. *Replenish and Protect Living Coastal and Marine Resources*
4. *Enhance Community Resilience*
5. *Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy*

The fifth goal focuses on reviving and supporting a sustainable Gulf economy. While a healthy ecosystem does benefit the economy, this goal does not apply directly to Bucket 2. This goal directly pertains to expenditures by the Gulf Coast States authorized in the RESTORE Act under the Direct Component (Bucket 1, administered by the Department of the Treasury) and the Spill Impact Component (Bucket 3, administered by the RESTORE Council), and ensures that these investments can be considered in the context of comprehensive restoration.

Consistent with these goals, the Council's objectives are:

1. *Restore, Enhance, and Protect Habitats*
2. *Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources*
3. *Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources*
4. *Restore and Enhance Natural Processes and Shorelines*
5. *Promote Community Resilience*
6. *Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education*
7. *Improve Science-Based Decision-Making Processes*

The Council approves Bucket 2 funding for projects and programs through the development of Funded Priorities Lists (FPLs). Projects and programs funded through this component must be in furtherance of the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan and meet at least one of the above-mentioned criteria identified in the RESTORE Act.

The Council approved the Initial FPL in December 2015 ([2015 Initial FPL](#)) which provided funding for restoration and conservation activities that focus on habitat and water quality based

on a watershed or estuary approach, as well as several Gulfwide projects. These activities are intended to provide near-term “on-the-ground” ecological results while also building a planning and science foundation for future success of projects.

A review of the process used to develop the 2015 Initial FPL was conducted that included input from both Council members and the public. Following completion of this review, the Council developed the *2016 Comprehensive Plan Update: Restoring the Gulf Coast’s Ecosystem & Economy* ([2016 Comprehensive Plan Update](#)). The 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update further emphasized the Council’s commitments to collaborate among members, potential funding partners, and the public; increase public engagement and transparency; and refine its best available science (BAS) practices.

To advance these commitments, the Council approved a second FPL in January 2018, referred to as the *2017 Commitment and Planning Support FPL* ([2017 CPS FPL](#)). Rather than funding specific restoration projects or programs, the 2017 CPS FPL dedicates funds over a five-year period to help Council members meet 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update commitments and identify potential areas for future FPL proposal development.

Council members have used 2017 CPS FPL funds to pay for travel to meetings and to develop and implement processes for working with potential funding partners (including other Deepwater Horizon funding sources), stakeholders, and the public to generate project ideas. Council members held meetings throughout the Gulf to discuss ecosystem restoration concepts and potential techniques to address environmental challenges and stressors throughout the Gulf.

In this collaboration process, the Council determined that additional strategic guidance could help ensure that Bucket 2 funds are used as effectively as possible. The Council developed its [2019 Planning Framework](#) to provide this guidance. The 2019 Planning Framework lists priority restoration approaches and techniques ([Figure 2](#)), their relationship to the Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives, and associated geographic areas. The purpose of this document is to provide the public and potential funding partners with an indication of the kinds of projects and programs that are anticipated to be developed for FPL 3 funding consideration. As part of the process of developing future FPLs, the 2019 Planning Framework will be reviewed and revised as needed to incorporate outcomes and lessons learned from previously implemented projects, scientific and technical developments, changing policy, public input, and other planning considerations.

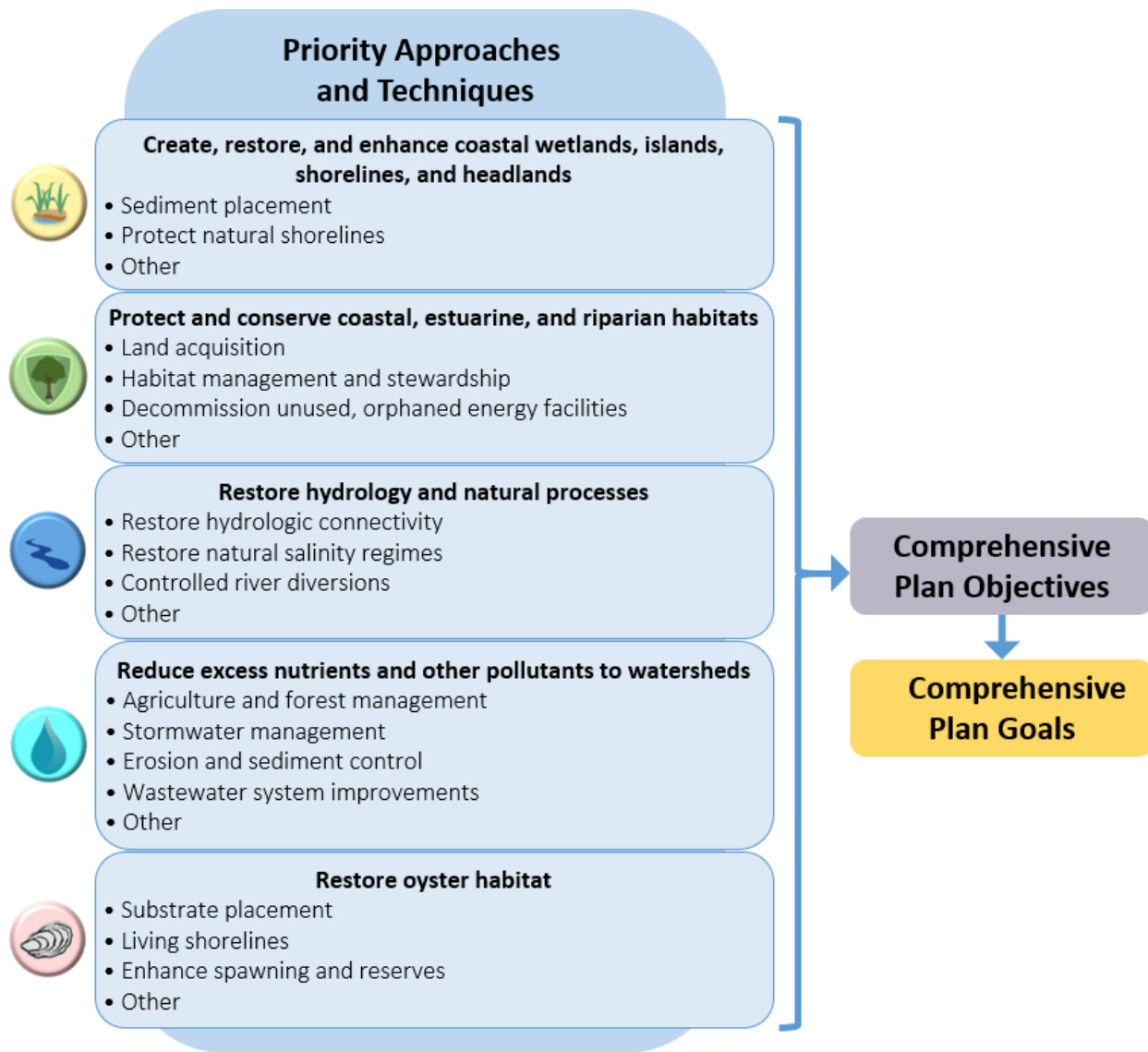


Figure 2. The 2019 Planning Framework priority approaches and techniques can be applied to support the Comprehensive Plan objectives and goals.

It was also through this collaborative process that the Council recognized that developing FPL 3 in two phases would enable the Council to fund projects requiring near-term attention and take advantage of important partnership opportunities to advance large-scale ecosystem restoration. The first phase, [FPL 3a](#), was approved by the Council in February 2020 and included two projects, one in Alabama and the other in Louisiana. In the second phase, draft FPL 3b, the Council is considering restoration projects and programs that address additional ecosystem needs across the Gulf.

FPL Proposal Submission Guidelines and Review Process

In 2019, the Council developed updated guidance for its members on the content and review process for Bucket 2 funding proposals. This updated guidance is called the *FPL 3 Proposal Submission Guidelines and Review Process* ([2019 Submission Guidelines](#)). The primary purpose of the 2019 Submission Guidelines is to help Council members develop effective proposals for potential funding in FPL 3. Council members are the only entities eligible to submit proposals for potential funding under Bucket 2. Federally recognized tribes may submit proposals via a federal Council member sponsor. This guidance document is divided into three sections:

- **Section 1 - Proposal Evaluation Criteria and Related Information:** This section discusses the statutory criteria that FPL 3 proposals must address to be considered for funding under Bucket 2, along with other legal requirements pertaining to BAS and environmental compliance. This section also discusses the FPL categories and 2019 Planning Framework that will help guide the selection of projects and programs for inclusion in FPL 3.
- **Section 2 - Guidance for FPL Proposal Content:** This section describes the information to be included in FPL 3 proposals.
- **Section 3 - FPL Proposal Review Process and Public Engagement:** This section outlines how the Council will review and consider FPL 3 proposals to ensure compliance with the RESTORE Act, use of the best available science (BAS),¹ and consistency with the goals, objectives, and commitments set forth in the Comprehensive Plan. It also describes the opportunities for the public to engage in the FPL 3 development process.

FPL Categories

FPLs include activities in two categories. Category 1 activities are approved for Bucket 2 funding. Such approval requires a Council vote as set forth in the RESTORE Act. To be approved in Category 1, a project or program must have documentation demonstrating that all applicable environmental laws have been addressed. For example, a construction project would need documentation demonstrating compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and other applicable laws.

Category 2 activities are Council priorities for potential future funding, but are not approved for funding. These are projects and/or programs that are not yet in a position to be approved by the Council, but which the Council considers to warrant potential future funding.

¹ The RESTORE Act defines best available science as science that “(A) maximizes the quality, objectivity, and integrity of information, including statistical information; (B) uses peer-reviewed and publicly available data; and (C) clearly documents and communicates risks and uncertainties in the scientific basis for such projects” (RESTORE ACT 2012).

The Council remains committed to efficient and transparent environmental compliance to help deliver timely restoration results. After publication of draft FPL 3b, Council members will continue to collaborate in an effort to complete the environmental compliance documentation required to move some of the implementation components listed in draft FPL 3b as Category 2 into Category 1 status prior to a Council vote on the final FPL 3b. The final FPL 3b will include a link to the environmental compliance documentation on the Council's website for all approved projects and programs.

If FPL 3b is approved by the Council, funding would be budgeted for potential use on the proposed Category 2 activities, but the Council would not be committed to such activities. As appropriate, the Council will review the activities in Category 2 to determine whether to: (1) move an activity to Category 1 and approve it for funding, (2) remove it from Category 2 and any further consideration, or (3) continue to include it in Category 2. In these reviews, the Council can consider feasibility and environmental compliance, as well as scientific, technical, policy and/or other related issues. A Council vote and FPL amendment are required to move an activity from Category 2 to Category 1, or to remove an activity from Category 2 and any further consideration.

The combined total for funding approved in Category 1 and budgeted for potential use on Category 2 activities will not exceed the total amount of Bucket 2 funding in the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund at the time of a Council vote to approve FPL 3b. After initial approval of FPL 3b, the Council will provide a minimum of 15 days additional public notice before voting on whether to approve funding for an activity in Category 2, thereby moving it to Category 1. These notifications will be provided to Council "eBlast" (automatic email update) subscribers, referred to in the "[Request for Public Comments and Next Steps](#)" section of this document. These notifications also will be posted to the Council's website. While Category 2 activities will be subject to this additional public notice as applicable, the Council encourages the public to provide comments now on activities proposed for both FPL 3b Category 1 and Category 2.

Draft FPL 3b contains a number of large-scale programs² across the Gulf. Some of these programs have planning funding proposed for approval in Category 1, with associated implementation components proposed for Category 2. The planning funds would be used to identify specific projects that advance the program goals and objectives. The planning funds would also be used to develop the projects through the engineering, design, and permitting phase. Implementation funds for such projects would only be available after the Council has reviewed the project (including the associated environmental compliance documentation), solicited additional public input, and voted to move the project from Category 2 to Category 1.

² The [2016 Comprehensive Plan Update](#) provided definitions of the terms "project" and "program":

Project: A single ecosystem restoration and/or conservation activity that cannot be separated into stand-alone sub-activities.

Program: A suite of intrinsically-linked restoration and/or conservation activities that must be implemented together in order to achieve the desired outcome. A program should generally be covered by one unified Council environmental compliance review and should have a common set of performance measures to effectively assess and measure outcomes.

Those who are interested in these large-scale programs are encouraged to comment on the overall program as proposed in draft FPL 3b and to stay involved during the subsequent stages, when specific implementation projects will be reviewed by the Council.

FPL 3b Development Process: Continued Collaboration

Upon approving FPL 3a in February 2020, the Council continued its focus on identifying projects and programs to address other Gulf Coast ecosystem needs through FPL 3b funding. Using 2017 CPS FPL resources, Council members (members) continued to collaborate among themselves and with stakeholders to identify and shape project and program concepts for potential inclusion in FPL 3b. In the early stages of collaboration, members identified and discussed potential priorities, which ranged from broad programmatic goals to specific project concepts. Throughout this process, project and program concepts were reviewed and discussed by all members, further refined, and in some cases, dropped from further consideration based on feedback and other factors (e.g., availability of alternative funding sources). These discussions helped members further shape their respective project and program concepts as they developed FPL 3b proposals.

To manage resources and time, the Council chose to limit each member to a submission limit of no more than five proposals for FPL 3b funding (as was done in the 2015 Initial FPL). Proposals submitted by a federal member on behalf of a Federally recognized tribe did not count toward this limit. Members could submit fewer than five proposals or none at all during the submission window from March 9 to April 24, 2020. The Council then reviewed all proposals for compliance with the RESTORE Act, consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and 2019 Planning Framework, and compliance with all applicable environmental laws.

Additionally, the Council refined the process that was used in the 2015 Initial FPL to review all proposals for the use of the best available science (BAS). The RESTORE Act requires the Council to “undertake projects and programs, using the best available science that would restore and protect the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, coastal wetlands, and economy of the Gulf Coast.” To meet the intent of the RESTORE Act, and to support the Council’s 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update commitment to science-based decision-making, all FPL 3b proposals underwent a BAS review process that included three anonymous external science reviews (including reviews by experts from within and outside the Gulf Coast region) and an Internal BAS Review Panel. The purpose of this internal panel was to use Council member-agency technical expertise to consider external reviews, identify ways to further strengthen the scientific basis of each proposal and, as applicable, identify potential synergies between proposals not identified prior to their submission.

After all proposal reviews were completed, members responded to review comments pertaining to their respective proposals. This included revising their proposals, as warranted. These responses and revised proposals were resubmitted to the Council by July 17, 2020. The revised proposals, as well as the proposal “packages” containing the reviews, responses, Internal BAS

Review Panel discussions, and original proposals, were then made available to the public on the [Council's website](#).

At the time the revised proposals were re-submitted, the combined cost of the proposals exceeded the funding available for FPL 3b. As the collaborative process among the members continued, some proposals were modified (e.g., scaled down), while others were eliminated from further consideration. The remaining proposals were then compiled into draft FPL 3b. Draft FPL 3b is designed to address ecosystem needs across the Gulf while also maintaining consistency with the 2019 Planning Framework and considering the FPL 3a investments. To approve an FPL, the RESTORE Act requires the affirmative vote of three of the five state members and the Council Chair. Consistent with its commitment to collaboration, the Council is proposing an FPL 3b funding allocation that is supported by all members.






















Overview of Proposed FPL 3b Activities

Advancing the Council's Comprehensive Plan and 2019 Planning Framework

Draft FPL 3b describes projects and programs (collectively referred to as activities) to address ecosystem needs across the Gulf. The Council proposes to approve approximately \$105,135,750 for Category 1 activities across the Gulf coast. In addition, the Council is proposing to reserve approximately \$196,864,250 for Category 2 activities. The proposed activities are consistent with the RESTORE ACT Priority Criteria, the Council's 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update goals and objectives, and also utilize priority approaches and techniques described in the 2019 Planning Framework. Collectively, these activities continue to advance the Council's vision of "*A healthy and productive Gulf ecosystem achieved through collaboration on strategic restoration projects and programs*" ([2016 Comprehensive Plan Update](#), p. 18).

The 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update describes four goals and seven objectives that pertain to Bucket 2, as shown in [Table 1](#). Each proposed activity in draft FPL 3b is designed to provide primary benefits to a particular Comprehensive Plan goal and objective — designated as its primary goal and primary objective, respectively. Proposals may also identify secondary Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives. To achieve its stated goals and objectives, each of the proposed FPL 3b activities utilizes priority approaches and techniques. These priority approaches and techniques are broad categories of restoration identified and described in the 2019 Planning Framework. Further, the 2019 Planning Framework provides an overview of the likely primary and secondary goal(s) and objective(s) that each technique may be employed to support.

Table 1. Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives are supported using Planning Framework priority approaches employed by FPL 3b activities across geographic areas. For each activity, the priority approaches that will be employed are shown as icons, and are placed to indicate corresponding objectives (top) and goals (bottom). Primary objectives are distinguished by dark-shaded boxes.

Comprehensive Plan Objectives		Restore, enhance, and protect habitats	Restore and enhance natural processes and shorelines	Restore, improve, and protect water resources	Promote community resilience	Natural resource stewardship and env. education	Improve science-based decision-making processes
Project/Program							
Coastal TX	Shoreline Protection through Living Shorelines						
	Texas Coastal Water Quality Program			 			
	Texas Land Acquisition Program for Coastal Conservation						
	Wind-Tidal Flat Restoration Pilot Project						
	Chenier Plain Ecosystem Restoration Program	 					
MS Sound	Coastal Nearshore Habitat Restoration and Development Program						
	Water Quality Improvement Program for Coastal Mississippi Waters						
Mobile and Perdido Bays	Enhancing Hydrologic Connectivity in Justin's Bay (Mobile Bay)						
	Coastal Alabama Regional Water Quality Program						
	Develop Ecological Flow Decision-Support for Mobile River and Perdido River Basins						
	Perdido Water Quality Improvements and Restoration Assessment Program						
Comprehensive Plan Goals		Restore and conserve habitat		Restore water quality and quantity	Enhance community resilience	Varies	
 Create, restore, and enhance coastal wetlands, islands, shorelines, and headlands		 Protect and conserve coastal, estuarine, and riparian habitats		 Restore hydrology and natural processes	 Reduce excess nutrients/pollutants to watersheds	 Restore oyster habitat	

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Comprehensive Plan Objectives		Restore, enhance, and protect habitats	Restore and enhance natural processes and shorelines	Restore, improve, and protect water resources	Promote community resilience	Natural resource stewardship and env. education	Improve science-based decision-making processes
Project/Program							
Coastal FL	The Apalachicola Regional Restoration Initiative: Strategies 2 & 3						
	Florida Gulf Coast Resiliency Program						
	Florida Gulf Coast Tributaries Hydrologic Restoration Program						
	Florida Water Quality Improvement Program						
	Florida Strategic Gulf Coast Land Acquisition Program						
Gulfwide	Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program						
	Enhancing Gulf Waters through Forested Watershed Restoration						
	Gulf of Mexico Coast Conservation Corps (GulfCorps) Program						
	Tribal Youth Coastal Restoration Program						
Comprehensive Plan Goals		Restore and conserve habitat		Restore water quality and quantity	Enhance community resilience	Varies	
		Create, restore, and enhance coastal wetlands, islands, shorelines, and headlands	Protect and conserve coastal, estuarine, and riparian habitats	Restore hydrology and natural processes	Reduce excess nutrients/pollutants to watersheds	Restore oyster habitat	

In the “[Proposed FPL 3b Projects and Programs](#)” section of this document, supporting figures are included in each FPL 3b summary activity description to show how the 2019 Planning Framework priority approaches and techniques will be employed to support Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives for each FPL 3b activity ([Figure 3](#)).

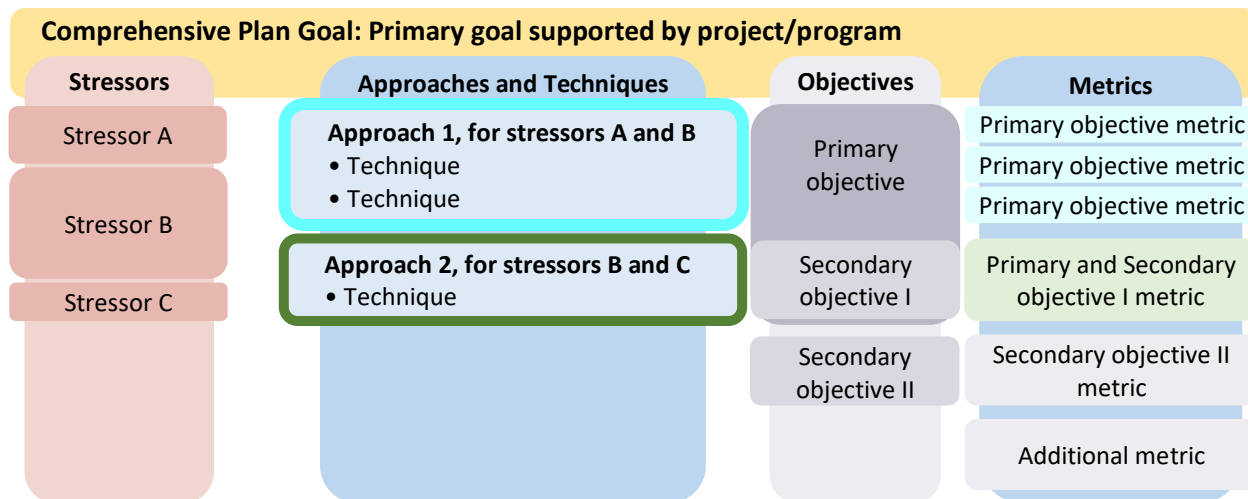


Figure 3. This figure provides a generalized example of an FPL 3b activity supporting figure. The figure shows how the Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives of an activity will be supported and tracked. The primary goal supported by the activity is shown at the top; any secondary goals are not depicted. All other information is organized into rows to provide a simplified depiction of how each column relates to the 2019 Planning Framework approaches. Each approach box (second column) lists the corresponding techniques that will be implemented, and aligns with the stressors it will be used to address (first column), the objective(s) it will support (third column), and metrics that may be used to track its benefits to the supported objective(s) (fourth column). For activities with one or more secondary objectives, an approach may support both the primary objective (uppermost row) and a secondary objective, as shown for ‘Approach 2’. Objectives that are placed below the row(s) aligned to approaches, as shown for ‘Secondary objective II’, are supported by all of the approaches to be implemented by the activity. Additional metrics may be proposed which do not align with selected approaches and/or objectives (bottom row). Note that techniques are not meant to align on particular rows, and that stressors only align with approaches.

The activities proposed in draft FPL 3b also build upon investments made in FPL 3a as well as the 2015 Initial FPL. In the 2015 Initial FPL, the Council focused on activities that primarily addressed the Comprehensive Plan goals *Restore and Conserve Habitat* and *Restore Water Quality*. In FPL 3a, the Council included two restoration projects that primarily address the goal *Restore and Conserve Habitat*. In draft FPL 3b, the Council proposes to continue to invest in these goals, as well as the *Enhance Community Resilience* goal. Combined, FPL 3a and FPL 3b activities would address three of the five Comprehensive Plan goals, and six of the seven Comprehensive Plan objectives throughout the Gulf ([Figure 4](#)).

FPL 3a and 3b Comprehensive Plan Objectives by Percentage of Total Funding

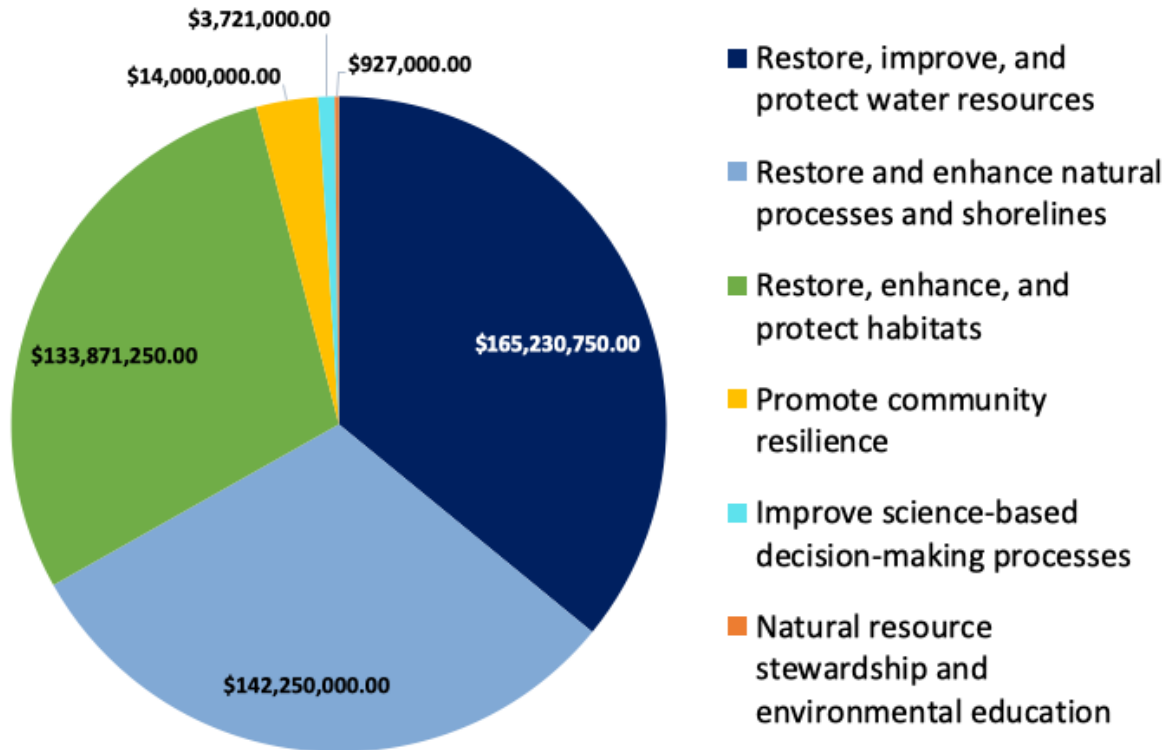


Figure 4. Percentage of total FPL 3a and proposed FPL 3b funding by project/program primary Comprehensive Plan objective. Note: While only the primary objectives for FPL 3a and FPL 3b activities are summarized here, projects/programs may address multiple Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives

The fourth Comprehensive Plan goal and the last Comprehensive Plan objective, *Replenish and Protect Living Coastal and Marine Resources* and *Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources*, respectively, would also be supported by the proposed FPL 3b activities, although they are not proposed to be addressed directly. For example, by addressing the degradation of shorelines and other tidally influenced habitats through the conservation of important habitats and coastal processes, the Council may also provide indirect benefits to living coastal and marine resources that rely on these habitats for food, shelter, and breeding areas ([Chesney et al. 2000](#); [Minello et al. 2003](#); [O’Connell et al. 2005](#)).

Regional Ecosystem-based Approach to Restoration

Draft FPL 3b reflects lessons learned from the 2015 Initial FPL process and commitments made in the 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update, most notably, enhanced collaboration and strategic planning to achieve large-scale ecosystem benefits. The 2015 Initial FPL contains activities described as “foundational” in that they will contribute to comprehensive Gulf restoration by complementing other projects in order to produce environmental benefits greater than the sum of the individual activities. This approach to identifying priority restoration activities acknowledges the interconnected nature of coastal and marine ecosystems. It also recognizes the importance of addressing system-wide stressors that reduce ecosystem health. Draft FPL 3b advances this concept by proposing to invest in programmatic approaches to address the ecosystem needs in certain geographic areas.

Ecosystems are subjected to both natural and human alterations that act together as “stressors” and affect natural ecosystem structure and function. The more ecosystems are stressed, the less resilient they may be to even larger, global challenges such as climate change ([Timpane-Padgham et al. 2017](#)). The programs proposed for FPL 3b are intended to address large-scale ecosystem stressors that result in water quality impairment, coastal habitat loss and degradation, and coastal resilience challenges.

In the 2015 Initial FPL, the Council focused in part on key watersheds and estuaries to concentrate its resources for the greatest ecosystem benefit. The Council further committed to using a watershed/estuary-based approach to restoration in the 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update. Geographic areas described in the 2019 Planning Framework are a step toward identifying priority watersheds or estuaries for investment in order to meet Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives.

These geographic areas vary in size from specific watersheds to coverage of an entire coastal area of one or more states. To some degree, this range reflects the extent to which individual projects have or have not been identified within the broader proposed programs. In some geographic areas, the planning process may be advanced sufficiently to have identified specific restoration activities within a watershed. In other geographic areas, restoration programs may still require additional planning and review of restoration options before identifying specific actions. In addition, these geographic areas reflect the anticipated collaboration — between members, among funding partners, and across states — needed to address broader ecosystem stressors. Members will continue to identify priority watersheds or estuaries as they identify specific projects for implementation within the proposed programs.

The Council recognizes that ensuring the use of the best available science (BAS) is critical to working at geographic scales of watersheds or larger geographic areas. The Council’s 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update committed to measuring and delivering results, acknowledging that identifying science-based targets for restoration and monitoring improves restoration outcomes and assists in addressing critical uncertainties. Draft FPL 3b supports this commitment by proposing to fund activities that have identified metrics of success and also by

allocating a percentage of funding to monitoring and data management (for implementation projects).

While Council members were not required to submit detailed monitoring plans with each proposal, they will be required to do so in order to receive funding. Monitoring plans will describe the metrics and ecological parameters that will be monitored to track the performance of FPL3b activities. Working in coordination with its Gulf restoration funding partners, including the Natural Resources Damage Assessment (NRDA) trustees and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), the Council has identified a suite of RESTORE Council Project Metrics ([RESTORE Council 2020b](#)). These metrics are used as a foundation to monitor and evaluate the efficacy of funded activities in meeting the Council's goals and objectives and to track annual performance. Using these consistent metrics, the benefits of FPL projects may be synthesized and described within their respective watersheds.

Similarly, using consistent metrics across activities implementing the same restoration techniques in different geographic areas may allow the Council to evaluate the impact of its investments across the Gulf. For example, the FPL 3b Internal BAS Review Panel discussions highlighted similarities in the water quality improvement programs proposed by Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas. Panelists agreed that synergies could be fostered across these states by adopting shared metrics, measures, and monitoring methodologies ([RESTORE Council 2020c](#)).

Coordinating, Collaborating, and Connecting Gulf Restoration Activities

Consistent with its Comprehensive Plan commitment, the Council recognizes that coordination and collaboration among members and our restoration partners is critical to the success of Gulf restoration. To maximize ecosystem benefits, the Council continues to pursue opportunities to align and leverage activities funded from Bucket 2 with investments made by other coastal restoration programs, as well as its own work in Buckets 2 and 3. As implementation of activities continues, the Council will continue to consider the synergistic benefits of its investments with those of other programs, including NRDA and NFWF.

Building on Partnerships and Leveraging

The Council remains committed to leveraging resources with funding partners to maximize the impact of Bucket 2 investments. Through its collaborative process for developing FPL 3b, the Council identified several opportunities to leverage other funding streams. For example:

- The proposed *Enhancing Gulf Waters through Forested Watershed Restoration* program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), would be implemented in a way that attracts additional partners and investors, including conservation organizations, universities, local governments, and others. Such an approach may create leveraging opportunities beyond that which is currently identified, increase potential for innovative solutions, and increase positive outcomes of forest restoration for the Gulf Coast region.

- The proposed *Chenier Plain Ecosystem Restoration Program*, sponsored by Texas, intends to restore and conserve high-quality coastal habitats within the Chenier Plain complex of Texas. The effort to restore the Texas Chenier Plain has been ongoing since at least 1990. In 2013, the Salt Bayou Marsh Workgroup (Workgroup) published a restoration plan describing the status of the Texas Chenier Plain, a review of past and ongoing projects, and recommendations for future work. Workgroup members include federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and local and regional governments. The proposed FPL 3b program would further leverage the decades of experience and technical recommendations of the Workgroup and other stakeholders to implement priority activities in this region.
- The proposed *Florida Water Quality Improvement Program*, sponsored by Florida, would improve water quality and quantity by building upon and implementing restoration plans and strategies developed by Florida through previous efforts. Florida has designed the proposed program in a way that would leverage Deepwater Horizon NRDA funds, as well as other federal and state funds. Project selection under this proposed FPL 3b program would consider each project's ability to leverage other funds to expand the impact of awards.

Coordination with Ongoing Council-led Restoration

In addition to generally aligning proposed FPL 3b investments with the 2015 Initial FPL and FPL 3a, the Council proposes to extend or directly build upon some of the activities it previously approved for funding. For example:

- The proposed *Texas Land Acquisition Program for Coastal Conservation*, sponsored by Texas, would greatly expand strategic watershed-based land protection investments that the Council made in its 2015 Initial FPL through the Bahia Grande Coastal Corridor and Bayou Greenways acquisition projects. This newly-proposed, coastwide acquisition program would utilize lessons learned to increase the resiliency and environmental quality of the Texas coast by accommodating natural buffers to erosion, storm surge, flooding, and sea level rise while preserving fish and wildlife habitat for the future.
- The proposed *Apalachicola Regional Restoration Initiative (ARRI): Strategies 2 & 3* program, sponsored by USDA, would build on the *Tate's Hell Strategy 1* project funded in the 2015 Initial FPL. The proposed FPL 3b program would focus on restoring longleaf pine, coastal ecosystems, and hydrology within the Apalachicola watershed, in Florida.
- The proposed Coastal Nearshore Habitat Restoration and Development Program in Mississippi, sponsored by Mississippi, would build upon two planning efforts undertaken through NFWF's Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund (NFWF-GEBF) and the Enhancing Opportunities for Beneficial Use of Dredge Sediments project funded in the Initial FPL. These planning efforts are currently funding engineering, design, and permitting on specific projects that could potentially be implemented through this proposed FPL3b program.
- The proposed *Gulf of Mexico Coast Conservation Corps Program*, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Commerce/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the proposed *Tribal Youth Coastal Restoration Program*, sponsored by the

U.S. Department of Interior/Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), would continue the work of the *Gulf of Mexico Habitat Restoration via Conservation Corps Partnerships* program funded in the 2015 Initial FPL. Further, these two programs leverage one another. Both seek to enhance the environmental vitality of the area's natural resources while also building the local coastal restoration workforce and giving young adults the skills and experience needed to find jobs in this field. Initial connections were also made between GulfCorps' partner organizations and the Tribal Youth Conservation Corps to inform past and future Tribal Corps graduates of GulfCorps recruiting opportunities as tribal students advance their career development. Such coordination and awareness would continue under these proposed FPL 3b programs to provide restoration benefits throughout the Gulf.

- The proposed *Coastal Alabama Regional Water Quality Program*, sponsored by Alabama, would continue planning and invest in implementation of watershed plans that the Council previously funded for this geographic area. Leveraging local and regional expertise, these plans were developed for Alabama through an agreement with the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program.
- The Council would also build upon investments made in FPL 3a in the Perdido watershed. In FPL 3a, the Council approved planning and implementation funds for the *Perdido River Land Conservation and Habitat Enhancements* project in Alabama. In draft FPL 3b, the Council proposes to provide planning funds to Alabama for the proposed *Perdido Watershed Water Quality Improvements and Restoration Assessment Program*. This proposed FPL 3b program would coordinate the location and sequencing of additional restoration projects that could improve water quality and habitat and to develop monitoring protocols to assess the potential collective impacts of restoration projects within the watershed. Further, the water quality and acquisition programs proposed by Florida may offer opportunities for Florida and Alabama to collaborate on conservation work in this shared watershed.

Many of the proposed activities in draft FPL 3b also increase investments that are being made in Gulf coast states with Buckets 1 and 3 funds. For example, the proposed *Water Quality Improvement Program for Coastal Mississippi Waters*, sponsored by Mississippi, would be coordinated with water quality investments the State is making using funding from Buckets 1 and 3. Collectively, these funds, as overseen by Mississippi, would allow for the advancement of priority projects to improve the condition of the Mississippi Sound watershed.

In addition to leveraging on-the-ground restoration activities, draft FPL 3b activities continue to build upon the science-based decision-support tools funded by the Council in the 2015 Initial FPL. For example, the FPL 3b Internal BAS Review Panel discussions highlighted how hydrologic restoration programs, such as the proposed *Enhancing Gulf Waters Through Forested Watershed Restoration* program, sponsored by USDA, would be able to use the streamflow data modeled by the 2015 Initial FPL *Baseline Flow, Gage Analysis & On-Line Tool to Support Restoration* project to calibrate soil and water assessment tools ([RESTORE Council 2020c; Rodgers et al. 2018](#)). Similarly, the Internal BAS Review Panel also discussed other Council-funded science tools, such as the Council's *Gulf Coast Monitoring and Assessment*

Portal ([NOAA and USGS 2020](#)) and the *Strategic Conservation Assessment for Gulf Landscapes* tools ([Samiappan et al., in prep](#)). These tools can provide support for FPL 3b activities by identifying reference monitoring activities and opportunities for land acquisition.

Addressing Risk, Sustainability, and Resilience

The Council's Comprehensive Plan recognizes that healthy ecosystems are essential for thriving and resilient coastal communities. Across the Gulf coast, cultures, economies, and communities are built upon and sustained by natural ecosystems that provide clean water, abundant fisheries, storm protection, and other critical benefits. By restoring and protecting the Gulf environment through investments made in FPL 3b and other funding decisions, the Council can help communities enhance their ability to recover from natural and man-made disasters and thrive in the face of changing environmental conditions. For example:

- The proposed *Florida Gulf Coast Resiliency Program*, sponsored by Florida, supports the primary RESTORE Comprehensive Plan goal to enhance community resilience through activities to identify vulnerabilities and implement sustainable solutions to improve coastal resiliency. Developing strategies to address resiliency is critical to Florida's ability to adapt to a changing coastline. This proposed program would result in environmental benefits such as resiliency improvements, protections against wave energy and storm surge, habitat protection sustaining healthy wildlife populations, and recreation and tourism opportunities.
- The proposed *Shoreline Protection Through Living Shorelines* program, sponsored by Texas, supports the construction of large-scale living shorelines that would enhance the resiliency of coastal Texas by stabilizing estuarine shorelines and protecting large tracts of land and coastal resources along the Texas coast. Living shorelines can reduce damage to shorelines by damping wave action and trapping sediments, thereby elevating shore profiles to a level that will support marsh vegetation. This proposed program would also enhance ecosystem function by creating hard structure habitats for fish and oysters, removing excess nutrients and sediments, providing seagrass protection, and improving water quality.

Proposed FPL 3b Projects and Programs

The activities proposed for inclusion in FPL 3b are listed below, along with their location and the types of work that is proposed to be funded. All associated environmental compliance documentation may be found on the [Council's website](#).

Draft Funded Priorities List 3b				
Activity	Geographic Area	Type	Amount Category 1	Amount Category 2*
Shoreline Protection Through Living Shorelines	Texas	Planning	\$1,286,250	-----
		Implementation	-----	\$10,963,750
Texas Coastal Water Quality Program	Texas	Planning	\$3,262,500	-----
		Implementation	-----	\$19,237,500
Texas Land Acquisition Program for Coastal Conservation	Texas	Planning	\$1,579,500	-----
		Implementation	-----	\$22,720,500
Wind-Tidal Flat Restoration Pilot	Texas	Planning & Implementation	\$321,000	----
Chenier Plain Ecosystem Restoration Program	Texas	Planning	\$1,700,000	-----
		Implementation	-----	\$18,300,000
Coastal Nearshore Habitat Restoration and Development Program in Mississippi	Mississippi Sound	Planning	\$6,920,000	-----
		Implementation	-----	\$27,680,000
Water Quality Improvement Program for Coastal Mississippi Waters	Mississippi Sound	Planning	\$6,850,000	-----
		Implementation	-----	\$27,400,000
Enhancing Hydrologic Connectivity in Justin's Bay (Mobile Bay)	Mobile Bay and Mobile-Tensaw Delta, AL	Planning	\$1,000,000	-----

* Council members will continue to collaborate on environmental compliance in an effort to move implementation components listed in draft FPL 3b as FPL Category 2 into FPL Category 1 status prior to a Council vote on the final FPL.

Draft Funded Priorities List 3b				
Activity	Geographic Area	Type	Amount Category 1	Amount Category 2*
Coastal Alabama Regional Water Quality Program	Mobile Bay and Mobile-Tensaw Delta, AL; Perdido Bay and River, AL-FL	Planning	\$16,130,750	-----
		Implementation	-----	\$19,000,000
Develop Ecological Flow Decision-Support for Mobile River and Perdido River Basins	Mobile Bay and Mobile-Tensaw Delta, AL; Perdido Bay and River, AL-FL	Planning & Implementation	\$3,400,000	-----
Perdido Watershed Water Quality Improvements and Restoration Assessment Program	Perdido Bay and River, AL-FL	Planning	\$1,500,000	-----
Apalachicola Regional Restoration Initiative: Strategies 2 & 3	Florida	Planning & Implementation	\$5,000,000	-----
Florida Gulf Coast Resiliency Program	Florida	Planning	\$5,600,000	-----
		Implementation	-----	\$8,400,000
Florida Gulf Coast Tributaries Hydrologic Restoration Program	Florida	Planning	\$3,437,500	-----
		Implementation	-----	\$10,312,500
Florida Water Quality Improvement Program	Florida	Planning	\$6,750,000	-----
		Implementation	-----	\$20,250,000
Florida Strategic Gulf Coast Land Acquisition Program	Florida	Planning	\$1,400,000	-----
		Implementation	-----	\$12,600,000
Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program	Gulfwide (Florida, Alabama, Mississippi)	Planning & Implementation	\$3,100,000	-----

* Council members will continue to collaborate on environmental compliance in an effort to move implementation components listed in draft FPL 3b as FPL Category 2 into FPL Category 1 status prior to a Council vote on the final FPL.

Draft Funded Priorities List 3b				
Activity	Geographic Area	Type	Amount Category 1	Amount Category 2*
Enhancing Gulf Waters through Forested Watershed Restoration	Gulfwide (Florida, Alabama, Mississippi)	Planning & Implementation	\$23,000,000	-----
Gulf of Mexico Conservation Corps Program	Gulfwide (All five states)	Implementation	\$11,971,250	-----
Tribal Youth Coastal Restoration Program	Gulfwide (Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana)	Planning & Implementation	\$927,000	-----

* Council members will continue to collaborate on environmental compliance in an effort to move implementation components listed in draft FPL 3b as FPL Category 2 into FPL Category 1 status prior to a Council vote on the final FPL.

Summary Activity Descriptions by Geographic Area

Summary descriptions of each activity are presented according to the geographic area in which they would occur. Links to more detailed draft activity descriptions are provided in each summary description. Per the Council's process for developing FPL 3b, these draft activity descriptions were revised from the submitted proposals based upon internal and external reviews, as well as continued collaboration among Council members to determine the activities and funding levels to include in draft FPL 3b. The proposal "package" containing the reviews, responses, Internal BAS Review Panel discussions, and original proposals, are also available to the public on the [Council's website](#).

Coastal Texas, including Chenier Plain

Coastal Texas includes approximately 365 miles of Gulf of Mexico shoreline, an area that supports a suite of important habitats, including estuarine waters, fresh, brackish and saline wetlands, saline flats, forests, prairies, rivers and streams (TSDC 2014). These habitats are under increasing pressure from coastal population growth, in addition to the threats of sea level rise, coastal storms, and erosion. Priority issues of concern in the geographic areas of Texas and Chenier Plain, as identified by the Council's 2019 Planning Framework, include habitat fragmentation and conversion, loss of hydrologic connectivity, increased flood and storm damage, and water quality and quantity issues. To help address these challenges, the Council is proposing to invest in four large-scale programs in Texas that would work to restore hydrologic connectivity and natural salinity regimes, protect natural shorelines through land acquisition and sediment placement, and reduce the delivery of excess nutrients and other pollutants to watersheds. In addition, the Council is proposing to fund a pilot project in Laguna Madre to investigate the best methods to restore tidal flats, which are critical habitats for shorebird and waterbird species. This work could help to determine how best to approach future large-scale tidal flat restoration efforts in Texas and across the Gulf coast (Figure 5).

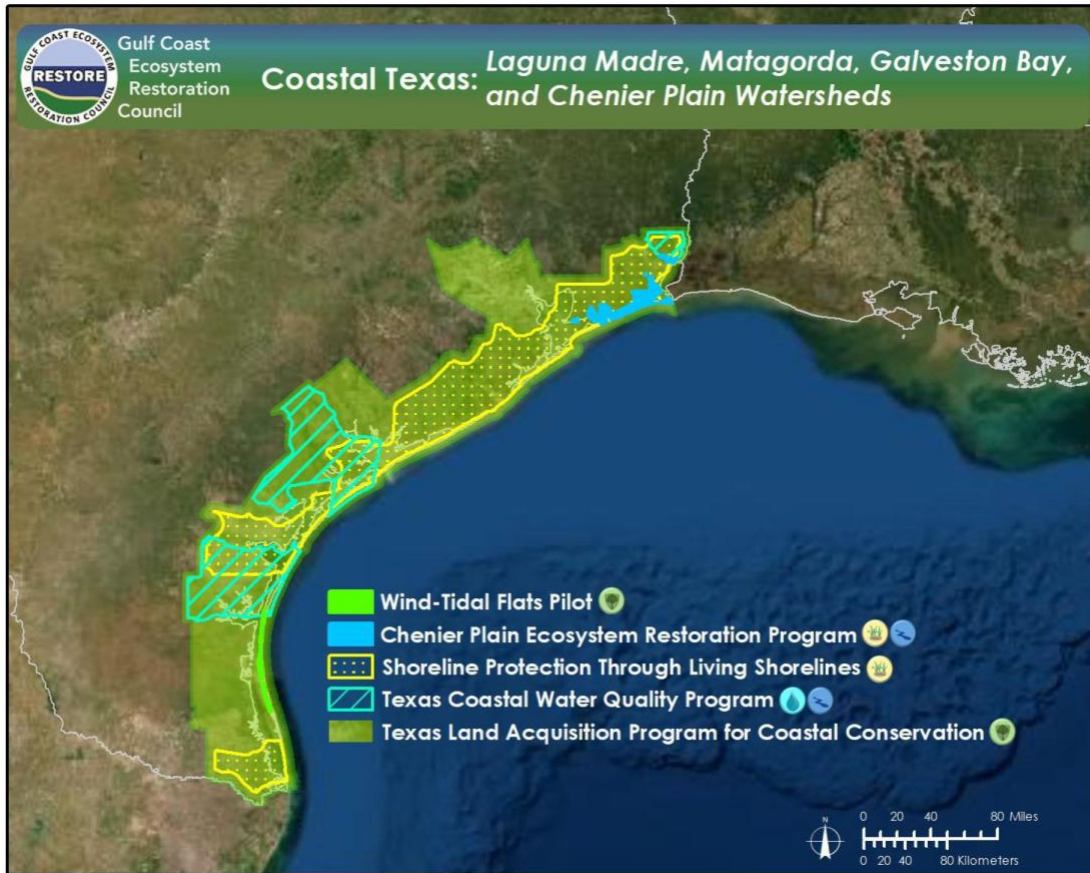


Figure 5. Map highlighting the projects and programs proposed for funding under FPL 3b in the Coastal Texas geographic area, including the Chenier Plain. Icons next to project/program names indicate the 2019 Planning Framework approaches to be implemented by each activity.

Shoreline Protection through Living Shorelines

The [Shoreline Protection Through Living Shorelines program description](#), developed and sponsored by Texas, provides additional detail on the program, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$1,286,250 in planning funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Shoreline Protection Through Living Shorelines program*. In addition, the Council is considering the implementation component for potential future funding as an FPL Category 2 activity, and proposes to reserve \$10,963,750 for this component, pending further review and a Council vote. The program is proposed to be implemented over the course of 4 years along the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, vulnerable bay shorelines and other waterfront locations along the Texas coast that have been identified as suitable areas for beneficial placement of dredge materials ([Figure 5](#)). Texas, through the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), is the sponsor of this proposed program.

This program would construct large-scale living shorelines to stabilize estuarine shorelines and protect large tracts of land and coastal resources along the Texas coast. Living shorelines consist of marsh vegetation planting typically combined with rock breakwaters or oyster reefs to protect bay shorelines and marshes from loss due to erosion. The program would target highly eroding shorelines along the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, bay shorelines, and other locations that have been identified as suitable areas for a living shoreline installation. This program would also address degrading coastal structures that need repair, such as critical seawalls, and add living shoreline elements to enhance their protective capabilities.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to restore and conserve habitat ([Figure 6](#)). A number of factors have contributed to bay and channel shoreline loss, including boat traffic, altered sediment regimes, and increasing rates of relative sea level rise ([Prosser et al. 2018](#); [Sweet et al. 2017](#)). As a result, growing numbers of private and public waterfront landowners are looking to harden or armor shorelines to stop or reduce rates of shoreline loss, which has produced a patchwork of bulkheads and riprap along the shore and has greatly reduced and degraded natural shoreline habitats for fish and wildlife species. Living shorelines can reduce damage to shorelines by damping wave action and trapping sediments, thereby elevating sub-aqueous shore profiles to a level that would support marsh vegetation and provide beneficial habitat to estuarine dependent species through nature-based solutions.

Implementation of this program has the potential to protect wetlands, reduce erosion, improve water quality, create habitat, provide land reclamation, and increase coastal resiliency by buffering storm surges ([Arkema et al. 2013](#); [Barbier et al. 2013](#); [Manis et al. 2015](#)). Living shorelines are resilient as they mimic natural shoreline processes, having the ability to adapt to changing conditions to endure over time ([Mitchell et al. 2019](#)). In addition, strategic placement of shore protection projects would facilitate the use of dredge material for marsh restoration activities.

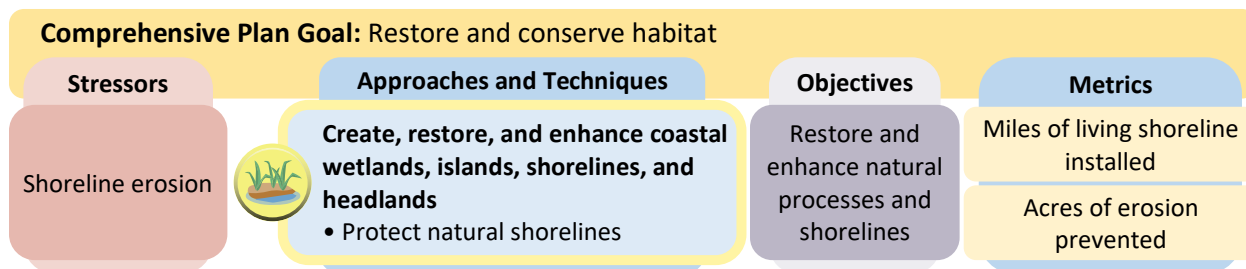


Figure 6. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track program or implemented project success (fourth column). Should the proposed program be approved for funding, metrics may be added, removed, or replaced, as appropriate, as specific projects under the program are identified. See [Figure 3](#) for more information on interpreting the above figure.

Much of the work has already been done to identify projects that could be funded within this program. Projects selected for implementation would build on Texas’ stakeholder-driven process for developing the 2019 Planning Framework and for selecting preliminary projects for FPL3 consideration. During this earlier work, county judges and two workgroups (state and federal agency and non-governmental organization representatives) submitted projects for FPL3 consideration. Coastal experts, Harte Research Institute staff, and TCEQ staff reviewed the projects and selected 23 for public comment. These 23 projects included multiple living shoreline projects that may be considered under this program.

The decision criteria to select the specific projects under this program would include, but are not limited to, the following: (1) addresses issues presented in the program proposal; (2) amounts of funds available for the program; (3) readiness; (4) leveraging opportunities; (5) scalability; (6) risk-benefit ratio; and (7) distribution of funds across the Texas coastline. The process to select projects would include the requirement that projects will have to have been already vetted through Texas’ prior efforts to develop the 2019 Planning Framework or through other public processes such as the [TGLO’s Coastal Resiliency Master Plan](#) or NRDA- and NFWF-related activities. Notification of the projects selected to funds would be posted on the Texas RESTORE website.

The planning component of this program would be covered by the Council’s National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion for planning and related activities. The implementation component is currently proposed for FPL Category 2. Texas is collaborating with federal member agencies to address the environmental laws applicable to the approval of implementation funding for this program. This may be accomplished before a Council vote on FPL 3b, in which case the final document will incorporate any changes in implementation funding from Category 2 to Category 1 and will provide a link to the associated environmental compliance documentation. If implementation activities remain in Category 2 in the final, approved FPL 3b, those activities would be moved into Category 1 through the formal Council review and amendment process as described in the [“FPL Categories”](#) section of this document.

Texas Coastal Water Quality Program

The [Texas Coastal Water Quality Program description](#), developed and sponsored by Texas, provides additional detail on the program, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$3,262,500 in planning funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Texas Coastal Water Quality Program*. In addition, the Council is considering the implementation component for potential future funding as an FPL Category 2 activity, and proposes to reserve \$19,237,500 for this component, pending further review and a Council vote. The program is proposed to be implemented over the course of 4 years within the Texas watersheds that drain to the Gulf of Mexico ([Figure 5](#)). Texas, through the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), is the sponsor of this proposed program.

This program would restore water quality and freshwater inflows on the Texas coast using a variety of proven methods. These methods include the implementation of best management practices (BMPs) in Texas coastal watersheds to reduce nonpoint source pollution, the repair and enhancement of drainage channels and outfalls to improve stormwater flow and increase freshwater inflow to adjacent marshes, and the construction of living shoreline features to reduce erosion and improve water quality.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to restore water quality and quantity ([Figure 7](#)). This program would address environmental stressors focused on: (1) stormwater runoff; (2) freshwater inflows; (3) floodplain management; (4) sediment control; and (5) water quality for activities related to coastal communities, wetlands, and agriculture. Coastwide, the implementation of BMPs to reduce nonpoint source pollution would improve the water quality of Texas bay systems by reducing nutrient loading, thereby reducing the instances of eutrophication (i.e. excessive nutrient enrichment), hypoxia or harmful algal blooms that impact economically valuable fisheries and sensitive habitats ([Park et al. 1994](#)). This program would also improve freshwater inflows and restore a more natural hydrology by improving sections of existing drainage channels and tributaries and extending outfalls to introduce more sediment and freshwater, helping to restore marshes suffering from impacts of development, saltwater intrusion, and inundation. Additionally, this program would consider improving water quality through the implementation of projects that utilize living shorelines, which consist of marsh plantings, and, in higher energy environments, the construction of breakwaters to reduce erosion issues.

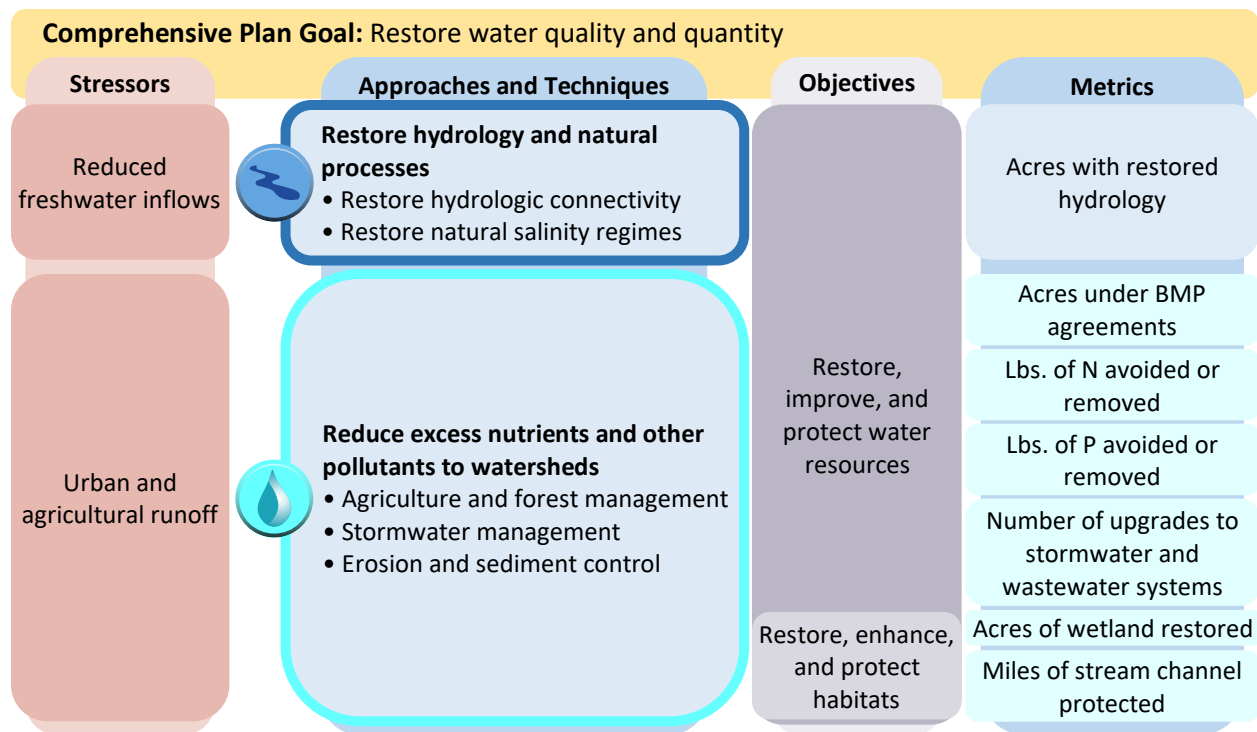


Figure 7. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track program or implemented project success (fourth column). Should the proposed program be approved for funding, metrics may be added, removed, or replaced, as appropriate, as specific projects under the program are identified. See [Figure 3](#) for more information on interpreting the above figure.

Much of the work has already been done to identify projects that could be funded within this program. Projects would be selected for implementation building on Texas’ stakeholder-driven process for developing the 2019 Planning Framework. During this earlier work, county judges and two workgroups (state and federal agency and non-governmental organization representatives) submitted projects for FPL3 consideration. Coastal experts, Harte Research Institute staff, and TCEQ staff reviewed the projects and selected 23 for public comment. These 23 projects included multiple water quality improvement projects that may be considered under this program.

The decision criteria to select the specific projects under the Texas Coastal Water Quality program would include, but are not limited to, the following: (1) addresses issues presented in the program proposal; (2) amounts of funds available for the program; (3) readiness; (4) leveraging opportunities; (5) scalability; (6) risk-benefit ratio; and (7) distribution of funds across the Texas coastline. The process to select projects would include the requirement that projects will have to have been already vetted through Texas’ prior efforts to develop the 2019 Planning Framework or through other public processes such as the [TGLO’s Coastal Resiliency Master Plan](#), or NRDA- and NFWF-related activities. Notification of the projects selected to funds would be posted on the Texas RESTORE website.

The planning component of this program would be covered by the Council's National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion for planning and related activities. The implementation component is currently proposed for FPL Category 2. Texas is collaborating with federal member agencies to address the environmental laws applicable to the approval of implementation funding for this program. This may be accomplished before a Council vote on FPL 3b, in which case the final document will incorporate any changes in implementation funding from Category 2 to Category 1 and will provide a link to the associated environmental compliance documentation. In the event that implementation activities remain in Category 2 in the final, approved FPL 3b, those activities would be moved into Category 1 through the formal Council review and amendment process as described in the "[FPL Categories](#)" section of this document.

Texas Land Acquisition Program for Coastal Conservation

The [Texas Land Acquisition Program for Coastal Conservation description](#), developed and sponsored by Texas, provides additional detail on the program, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$1,579,500 in planning funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Texas Land Acquisition Program for Coastal Conservation* program. In addition, the Council is considering the implementation component for potential future funding as an FPL Category 2 activity, and proposes to reserve \$22,720,500 for this component, pending further review and a Council vote. The program is proposed to be implemented over the course of 4 years within the Texas Coastal Zone ([Figure 5](#)). Texas, through the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), is the sponsor of this proposed program.

This program would acquire large, high-quality coastal zone properties in Texas with locations selected on the basis of greatest value to the coastal environment now and in the future, considering the pressures of environmental change and development. Targeted habitats would include urban green corridors, riparian, prairie and other upland, wooded wetlands, or bay and chenier wetlands. This program aims to preserve the existing environment now rather than attempt to replace the resources once they are lost.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to restore and conserve habitat ([Figure 8](#)). The 2019 Texas Coastal Resiliency Master Plan (TCRMP) scored land acquisition projects highly for addressing a variety of environmental issues of concern, including: (1) altered, degraded, or lost habitat, (2) existing and future coastal storm damage, (3) coastal flood damage, (4) impact on water quality and quantity, and (5) impact on coastal resources ([TGLO 2019](#)). Programmatic land acquisition may also allow the environment to adjust to long-term changes while providing continued environmental benefits that span from protection of habitats and conservation of biodiversity to improvement of water quality and storm buffering.

Through fee title acquisition or purchase of conservation easements to promote long-term habitat management consistent with the Protect and Conserve Coastal, Estuarine, and Riparian Habitats priority approach, this proposed program would prevent habitat loss and degradation from coastal development by protecting large coastal properties that support a diverse and abundant array of plants and animals. The purpose is to acquire and conserve lands that drain to the Gulf of Mexico, including coastal, estuarine, and riparian habitats. Secondary benefits may be realized in better water quality and protection of adjacent areas with some land acquisitions also serving to provide areas where the transition of coastal environments can occur as sea level rises, thus offsetting the loss of intertidal environments ([TGLO 2019](#)).

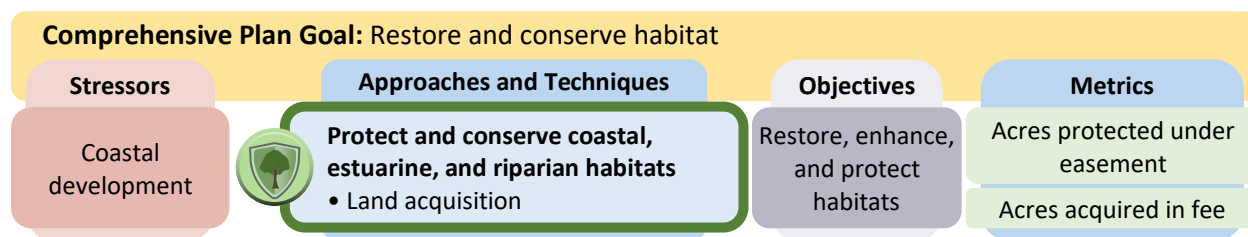


Figure 8. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track program or implemented project success (fourth column). Should the proposed program be approved for funding, metrics may be added, removed, or replaced, as appropriate, as specific projects under the program are identified. See [Figure 3](#) for more information on interpreting the above figure.

Much of the work has already been done to identify projects that could be funded within this program submission. This program would develop a process for selecting properties for acquisition that builds on Texas’ stakeholder-driven process for developing the 2019 Planning Framework and selecting preliminary projects for FPL3 consideration. During this earlier work, county governments, non-governmental organizations (NGO), and a workgroup made up of Texas NRDA staff and TCRMP representatives submitted 38 projects for FPL3 consideration. Coastal experts, Harte Research Institute staff, and TCEQ staff reviewed the projects and selected 23 for public comment. Among these 23 projects, there are 10 projects that include land acquisition, which this program would consider for implementation.

The selection process would consider what provides the greatest value to the coastal environment, both now and in the future as the human and natural landscapes continue to evolve. The program would explore the use of the previously-funded 2015 Initial FPL Strategic Conservation Assessment for Gulf Lands (SCA) tools ([SCA 2020](#)) as a valuable resource to augment the process of land selection. Additional natural and relevant socioeconomic and human health environmental data and analyses would be required. To ensure success of this program, the TCEQ would reach out to the state, federal, and NGO groups who have collaborated on developing Texas’ FPL3b program to this point. The combined expertise and experience of this group in coastal land conservation (including experience gained from FPL 1 land acquisitions) would be a significant resource to the program.

Once an area has been targeted for acquisition the following general steps would be required: (1) complete due diligence; (2) secure the land or easement with a purchase contract; and (3) convey the property for long-term management. Ownership of the acquired land may be held by the federal, state, or local government or an NGO depending on the greatest advantage for acquisition, leveraging, and conservation. It is Texas' intent to consider leveraging as a criteria in selecting projects, including the recognition of previous projects and the potential for a new project to add to the cumulative impact to the area.

The planning component of this program would be covered by the Council's National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion for planning and related activities. The implementation component is currently proposed for FPL Category 2. Texas is collaborating with federal member agencies to address the environmental laws applicable to the approval of implementation funding for this program. This may be accomplished before a Council vote on FPL 3b, in which case the final document will incorporate any changes in implementation funding from Category 2 to Category 1 and will provide a link to the associated environmental compliance documentation. In the event that implementation activities remain in Category 2 in the final, approved FPL 3b, those activities would be moved into Category 1 through the formal Council review and amendment process as described in the "[FPL Categories](#)" section of this document.

Wind-Tidal Flat Restoration Pilot

The [Wind-Tidal Flat Restoration Pilot project description](#)³, developed and sponsored by the U.S. Department of the Interior, through the U.S. National Park Service (NPS), provides additional detail on the project, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$321K in planning and implementation funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Wind-Tidal Flat Restoration Pilot project*. The project is proposed to be implemented over the course of 2 years on Padre Island National Seashore, Texas ([Figure 5](#)). The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), through the U.S. National Park Service (NPS), is the sponsor of this proposed project.

This pilot project would lead to the restoration of and improved resiliency for 5 acres of wind-tidal flat habitat on Padre Island National Seashore, Texas. Restored natural processes would enhance the overall health, availability, and diversity of habitat that supports a variety of shorebirds and wading bird species ([Withers 1994](#)). The proposed project would enhance bird

³ *This draft project description, originally submitted as part of the proposal titled "Decommissioning Onshore Orphaned Energy Facilities on NPS and FWS lands (DOI/NPS & FWS)" has been revised in response to internal and external reviews as well as continued collaboration among Council members to determine the activities and funding levels to include in draft FPL 3b.*

populations that contribute to restored areas designated as a Site of International Importance by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network ([WHSRN 2019](#)).

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this project is to restore and conserve habitat ([Figure 9](#)). A variety of public lands managed by the NPS have impaired coastal habitat. Specific to this project, previous energy exploration efforts caused significant vehicular impacts to wind-tidal flats. This resulted in altered wind-driven inundation by Laguna Madre waters, thus affecting algal growth and degrading foraging habitat for migratory birds ([Smith et al. 2013](#)).

This proposed project would directly address energy exploration stressors by experimentally testing wind-tidal flat restoration techniques on impacted tidal wetlands at Padre Island National Seashore. These wind-tidal flat areas protect portions of the largest freshwater wetland in Texas, conserve protected species, and provide wintering habitat for millions of migratory birds. This program ultimately would provide for public safety and restore important habitat on public lands along coastal Texas while building upon the decommissioning oil investments made in the 2015 Initial FPL.

Consistent with the 2019 Planning Framework priority approach to develop tools for planning and evaluation and the Comprehensive Plan objective to improve science-based decision-making processes, techniques developed as part of this project may be used by state and federal land management agencies to provide accurate cost estimates for tidal flat restoration and reduced uncertainty about restoration success.

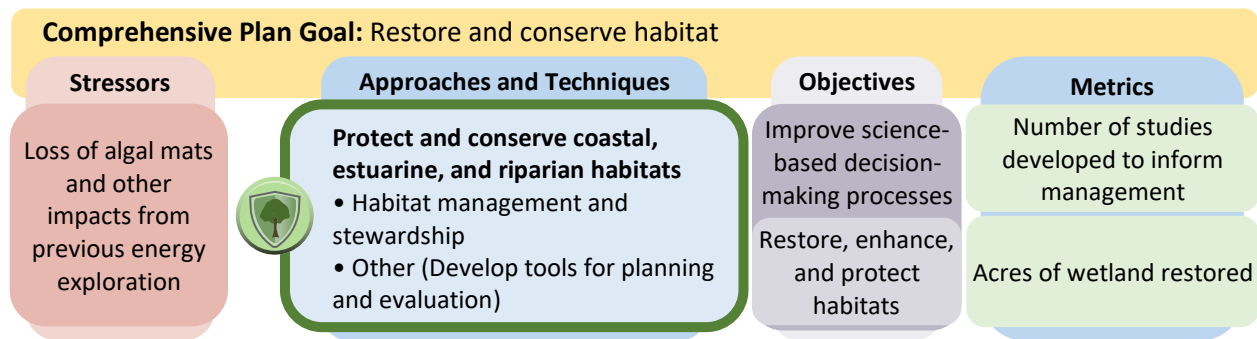


Figure 9. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track project success (fourth column). See [Figure 3](#) for more information on interpreting the above figure.

The planning component of this project would be covered by the Council's National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion for planning and related activities. DOI has advised the Council that the implementation component of this proposed project is covered by a NPS Categorical Exclusion (CE). The Council proposes to adopt this CE and the associated environmental compliance documentation to support the proposed funding approval of this project, consistent with Section 4(d)(4) of the Council's National Environmental Policy Act

(NEPA) Procedures, which enables the council to use member CEs, where appropriate. In making this decision, the Council would consider potential extraordinary circumstances, including potential negative effects to threatened and endangered species, essential fish habitat, tribal interests and historic properties, where applicable.

Chenier Plain Ecosystem Restoration Program

The [Chenier Plain Ecosystem Restoration Program description](#), developed and sponsored by Texas, provides additional detail on the program, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$1.7M in planning funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Chenier Plain Ecosystem Restoration Program*. In addition, the Council is considering the implementation component for potential future funding as an FPL Category 2 activity, and proposes to reserve \$18.3M for this component, pending further review and a Council vote. The program is proposed to be implemented over the course of 4 years in the Chenier Plain of southeast Texas, including locations in four upper coastal counties: Galveston, Orange, Jefferson, and Chambers ([Figure 5](#)). Texas, through the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), is the sponsor of this proposed program.

This program would restore and conserve high-quality coastal habitats within Texas. Targeted habitats would include freshwater to estuarine marsh, coastal prairie grasslands, tidal flats, creeks, and basins, all of which creates an extremely productive complex for diverse fish and wildlife resources and protects inland areas from storm surge. Potential partners may include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Ducks Unlimited, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and local and regional governments.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to restore and conserve habitat ([Figure 10](#)). Stressors that would be addressed include channelization, subsidence, erosion, and saltwater intrusion. Implementation of this program has the potential to restore degraded wetlands, reduce erosion and habitat loss, improve water quality, provide land reclamation, and increase coastal resiliency. Multiple restoration methods could be considered, including (1) beneficial use of dredge material to restore wetlands and elevate marshes; (2) installation of fresh water siphons to route freshwater underneath the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway to the lower Chenier Plain; (3) installation of breakwaters to reduce shoreline erosion; and (4) modification of levees. This work would yield habitat benefits for fish and wildlife species and restore ecosystem services such as storm surge buffering, water quality maintenance, sediment retention, nutrient regulation, and recreation.

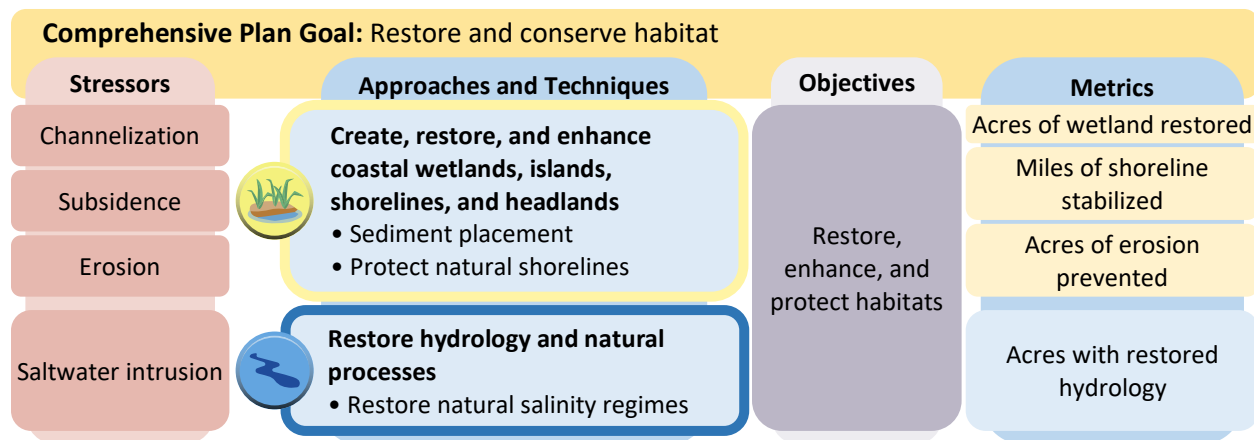


Figure 10. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track program or implemented project success (fourth column). Should the proposed program be approved for funding, metrics may be added, removed, or replaced, as appropriate, as specific projects under the program are identified. See [Figure 3](#) for more information on interpreting the above figure.

This program would select projects for implementation by building on Texas’ stakeholder-driven process for developing the 2019 Planning Framework and for selecting preliminary projects for FPL3 consideration. During this earlier work, county judges and two workgroups (state and federal agency and non-governmental organization representatives) submitted projects for FPL3 consideration. Coastal experts, Harte Research Institute staff, and TCEQ staff reviewed the projects and selected 23 for public comment. These 23 projects included 5 multicomponent projects that address the Chenier Plain that may be considered under this program.

The decision criteria to select the specific projects under the program would include, but are not limited to, the following: (1) addresses issues presented in the program proposal; (2) amounts of funds available for the program; (3) readiness; (4) leveraging opportunities; (5) scalability; (6) risk-benefit ratio; and (7) distribution of funds across the Texas Chenier Plain. The process to select projects would include the requirement that projects have been vetted through Texas’ prior efforts to develop the 2019 Planning Framework or through other public processes such as the TGLO’s [Coastal Resiliency Master Plan](#), or NRDA and NFWF related activities. Notification of the projects selected to fund would be posted on the Texas RESTORE website.

The planning component of this program would be covered by the Council’s National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion for planning and related activities. The implementation component is currently proposed for FPL Category 2. Texas is collaborating with federal member agencies to address the environmental laws applicable to the approval of implementation funding for this program. This may be accomplished before a Council vote on FPL 3b, in which case the final document will incorporate any changes in implementation funding from Category 2 to Category 1 and will provide a link to the associated environmental compliance documentation. If implementation activities remain in Category 2 in the final,

approved FPL 3b, those activities would be moved into Category 1 through the formal Council review and amendment process as described in the "[FPL Categories](#)" section of this document.

Mississippi Sound, Mississippi

The Mississippi Sound geographic area encompasses approximately 1,545 square miles and consists of a variety of ecologically and economically important habitats, including barrier islands, marsh, maritime forest, pine savannah, cypress swamp, and oyster reefs (MDEQ 2019). Mississippi's coastal watersheds are threatened by several stressors, including sea-level rise, pollution from stormwater and wastewater system failures, altered hydrologic regimes, and urban and industrial development (MDEQ 2018). Priority issues of concern in the Mississippi Sound geographic area, as identified by the Council's 2019 Planning Framework, include coastal habitat loss, increased flood and storm damage, and water quality issues. To help address these challenges, the Council is proposing to invest in two large-scale programs in Mississippi that would build off of previously-funded Council planning and implementation activities to create and restore wetland habitats through sediment placement and shoreline protection, and reduce the delivery of excess nutrients and other pollutants to the Mississippi watersheds (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Map highlighting the programs proposed for funding under FPL 3b in the Mississippi Sound geographic area. Icons next to program names indicate the 2019 Planning Framework approaches to be implemented by each activity.

Coastal Nearshore Habitat Restoration and Development Program in Mississippi

The [Coastal Nearshore Habitat Restoration and Development Program in Mississippi description](#), developed and sponsored by Mississippi, provides additional detail on the program, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$6.92M in planning funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Coastal Nearshore Habitat Restoration and Development Program in Mississippi*. In addition, the Council is considering a separate implementation component as an FPL Category 2 priority for potential funding and proposes to budget \$27.68M for this implementation component, pending a future Council vote. The program is proposed to be implemented over the course of 10 years in the coastal waters of Mississippi, including the Mississippi Sound and Barrier Islands ([Figure 11](#)). Mississippi, through the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), is the sponsor of this proposed program.

This program in Mississippi would support the restoration and protection of natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast Region by creating, restoring, and enhancing coastal habitat through the dedicated sourcing of materials. To accomplish this, program activities include planning, engineering and design, and construction of habitat in the three coastal counties of Mississippi. To accelerate habitat creation and restoration, MDEQ may utilize multiple methods for sourcing habitat construction material, such as dedicated material sourcing from borrow sites, upland sites, and beneficial use of dredge materials.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to restore and conserve habitat ([Figure 12](#)). In Mississippi, increased development over time (as well as storms, sea level rise and other impacts) has accelerated the rate of wetland loss. Mississippi is estimated to have lost 60 percent of its wetlands statewide over the last 200 years ([Chapman and Reed 2006](#); [Dahl 1990](#)). Primary causes for wetland loss include erosion, increases in impervious surfaces in watersheds (e.g., roads, parking lots), agricultural practices, flood control structures (e.g., canals, ditches, levees), and industry. Although regulations and incentives have reduced wetland habitat loss since the 1970s, continued urban growth and other landscape alterations can leave wetlands open to hydrological and biological fluxes ([Mitsch and Gosselink 2000](#)) that negatively impact ecosystem functioning, including: (1) increased stormwater inflow; (2) increased sedimentation and nutrient loading; and (3) decreased species richness and abundance, including coastal bird species ([DeLuca et al. 2008](#)).

Coastal nearshore habitats provide many ecosystem services, including: (1) acting as natural buffers to protect shorelines from eroding, (2) storm surge protection; (3) fisheries production; (4) water quality enhancement through sediment and nutrient reduction, faunal support; (6) carbon reduction; and (7) habitat within the ecosystem. Wetland loss results in a reduction in the protection of inland areas against soil erosion and flooding as well as the refuge that many threatened and commercially important species use ([Chapman and Reed 2006](#)). The creation of new coastal nearshore habitats and the restoration of these habitats would continue to support

and increase these ecosystem services to coastal systems in Mississippi. The program builds from work funded by the 2015 Initial FPL, as well as NFWF GEBF projects.

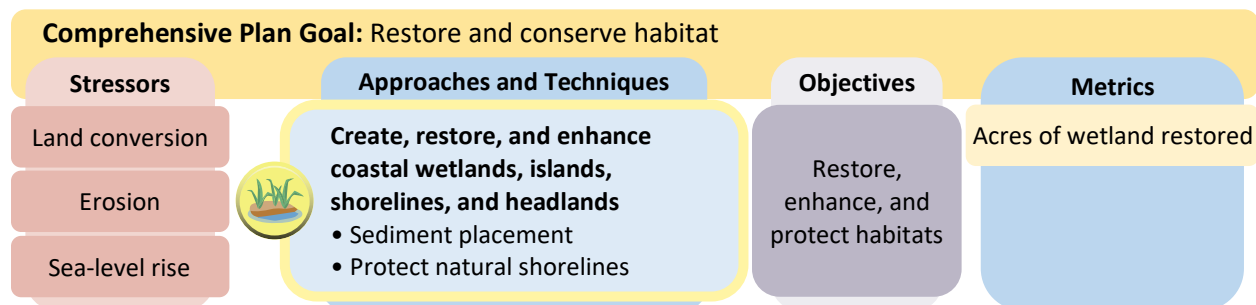


Figure 12. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track program or implemented project success (fourth column). Should the proposed program be approved for funding, metrics may be added, removed, or replaced, as appropriate, as specific projects under the program are identified. See [Figure 3](#) for more information on interpreting the above figure.

Site selection for coastal habitat restoration and creation would consider ecological principles as well as economic and implementation feasibility. MDEQ would support beneficial use site locations and designs which maximize direct and indirect ecological benefits to the extent practicable based on individual project dynamics. MDEQ would assess factors such as availability of material, proximity to material supply/dredging sites, material transport logistics, overall cost feasibility (e.g., cost estimates for containment, sourcing and transport of materials, and construction), and permitting.

Mississippi has been investing in multiple coastal habitat restoration projects. Unlike other coastal restoration programs, the landscape for coastal nearshore habitat restoration at large scales is limited by geographic variables, regulatory compliance measures, as well as opportunities to build back coastal habitat in strategic locations. Mississippi has undertaken two planning exercises that have identified several coastal habitat restoration locations through NFWF-GEBF and the 2015 Initial FPL Enhancing Opportunities for Beneficial Use of Dredge Sediments project ([MDEQ 2017](#)). From a large scale perspective, several coastal habitat restoration sites have already been identified and prioritized within the Mississippi coastal landscape, including the following: (1) Deer Island (several ongoing coastal habitat restoration projects, including Deer Island Marsh Restoration [DIMR] IV, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Lagoon, and the Mississippi Coastal Improvements Program [MsCIP] proposed expansion); (2) Round Island; (3) Greenwood Island; (4) Cat Island; (5) Pelican Key; (6) Wolf River; (7) Beardslee Lake; and (8) Graveline Bayou. Planning has occurred for each of these sites and they are in various phases of development (e.g., engineering and design, permitting, construction, land acquisition, etc.). Mississippi would continue to develop all of these sites, as practicable, but may also work with state and federal agencies to identify additional sites that would also allow strategic coastal habitat restoration that could take place under this program.

The planning component of this program would be covered by the Council's National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion for planning and related activities. The implementation component is currently proposed for FPL Category 2. Mississippi is collaborating with federal member agencies to address the environmental laws applicable to the approval of implementation funding for this program. This may be accomplished before a Council vote on FPL 3b, in which case the final document will incorporate any changes in implementation funding from Category 2 to Category 1 and will provide a link to the associated environmental compliance documentation. In the event that implementation activities remain in Category 2 in the final, approved FPL 3b, those activities would be moved into Category 1 through the formal Council review and amendment process as described in the "[FPL Categories](#)" section of this document.

Water Quality Improvement Program for Coastal Mississippi Waters

The [Water Quality Improvement Program for Coastal Mississippi Waters description](#), developed and sponsored by Mississippi, provides additional detail on the project, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$6.85M in planning funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Water Quality Improvement Program for Coastal Mississippi Waters (WQIP)*. In addition, the Council is considering an implementation component for potential future funding as an FPL Category 2 activity, and proposes to reserve \$27.4M for this component, pending further review and a Council vote. The program is proposed to be implemented over the course of 10 years in Mississippi watersheds that drain into the Gulf of Mexico ([Figure 11](#)). Mississippi, through the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), is the sponsor of this proposed program.

This program would include a suite of linked activities that would restore water quality and quantity in the Mississippi Gulf Coast Region through the identification and implementation of water quality improvement projects. Program activities would include planning, engineering and design, septic-to-sewer conversion, implementation of new stormwater and wastewater systems, and repairing or upgrading existing stormwater and wastewater systems.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to restore water quality and quantity ([Figure 13](#)). Water quality impairment in coastal systems is a global phenomenon ([Bennett et al. 2001](#); [Vörösmarty et al. 2010](#)) that is not only limited to nutrient pollution and associated hypoxia, but also tied with bacteriological impairment ([Mallin et al. 2000](#)). Mississippi has identified stressors in coastal waters, including nutrient and bacterial loading from pollutant sources, freshwater inputs and urban runoff.

This proposed program would prioritize the improvement of water quality for promoting ecosystem health and restoring and revitalizing Mississippi's economy through the conversion

of septic-to-sewer (Kelly 2019) and the implementation of stormwater and wastewater system improvement practices (Reisinger et al. 2018). These actions are anticipated to reduce nonpoint source pollutant loads to downstream coastal receiving water bodies. This would result in improvement in water quality of coastal waters and would provide in-situ benefits to living coastal marine resources, as well as the economy of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The primary objective would be to restore, improve, and protect water resources and would target projects that reduce and treat nutrient and pollutant loading. This proposed program is consistent with the priority approach to reduce excess nutrients and other pollutants to watersheds and downstream receiving waters.

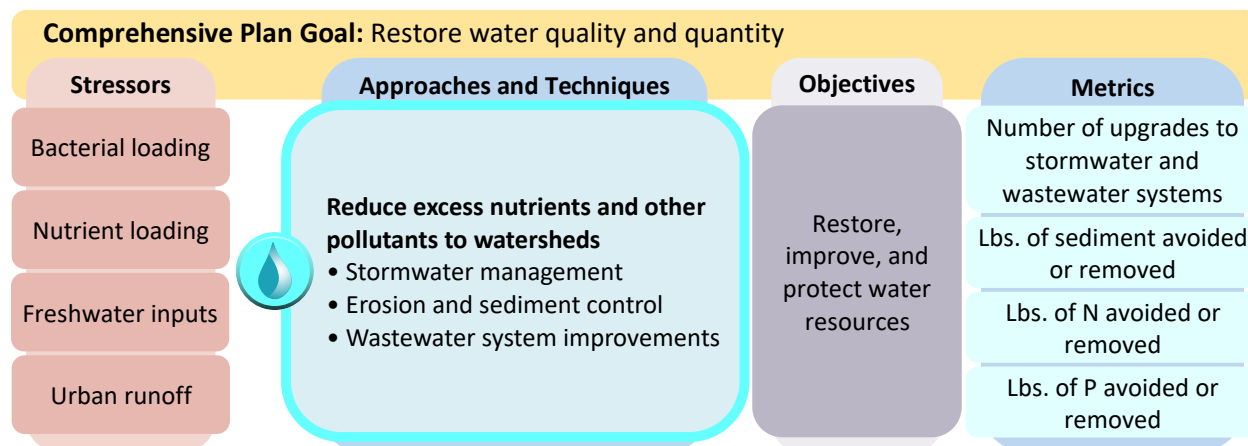


Figure 13. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track program or implemented project success (fourth column). Should the proposed program be approved for funding, metrics may be added, removed, or replaced, as appropriate, as specified projects under the program are identified. See Figure 3 for more information on interpreting the above figure.

Projects may be identified through existing data and analysis that demonstrate connectivity to water quality impairments as well as through the source tracking process where data gaps exist. MDEQ may coordinate with local city and county entities to support identification of known wastewater and stormwater system failures contributing to water quality degradation. When needed, systematic source tracking may be utilized to identify sources and stressors of water quality degradation.

Source tracking uses the identified water quality impairments (e.g., beach advisory information, etc.) to establish hotspot-specific water quality sampling regimes in order to systematically work upstream to identify the source of the degradation. Source tracking activities may include water quality sampling, tracking of pollutants, flow monitoring, stormwater and wastewater system testing, and microbial source tracking, and could also include the sampling of marine nearshore sediments to provide an initial assessment of pollutant loading in the system. The source tracking process would provide analytical guidance and outline the next steps for project

identification, when needed. The source tracking process would determine hotspots for bacterial concentrations moving along an upstream gradient.

Tributary contributions may be evaluated by examining the respective contributions, including potential concentrations and loads. Water sample analysis may be utilized to refine a specific project and/or the source of contamination project areas. Once an area or a specific project has been identified, additional due diligence (i.e., smoke testing, dye testing, and/or camera inspection), project scoping, and coordination may be undertaken. Due diligence for individual projects would be unique, requiring varying degrees of additional work that may include cost benefit analyses, economic feasibility, preliminary engineering, environmental compliance and additional pre-construction activities.

The planning component of this program would be covered by the Council's National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion for planning and related activities. The implementation component is currently proposed for FPL Category 2. Mississippi is collaborating with federal member agencies to address the environmental laws applicable to the approval of implementation funding for this program. This may be accomplished before a Council vote on FPL 3b, in which case the final document will incorporate any changes in implementation funding from Category 2 to Category 1 and will provide a link to the associated environmental compliance documentation. In the event that implementation activities remain in Category 2 in the final approved FPL 3b, those activities would be moved into Category 1 through the formal Council review and amendment process as described in the "[FPL Categories](#)" section of this document.

Mobile Bay and Mobile-Tensaw Delta, Alabama, Perdido Bay and River, Alabama-Florida

The Mobile Bay and Mobile-Tensaw Delta and Perdido Bay and River geographic areas include barrier islands, fresh and saltwater wetlands, coastal maritime forests, longleaf pine habitats, seagrass, oyster reefs, streams and rivers and associated riparian areas (MBNEP 2013). These ecologically and economically important habitats have been degraded by a number of stressors, including nutrient-loading and erosion from agriculture and silviculture run-off, pollution from stormwater and wastewater system failures, altered hydrologic regimes, land use change and urbanization, and sea-level rise (MBNEP 2019). These stressors were also identified as priority issues of concern in the Council's 2019 Planning Framework. To help address these challenges, the Council is proposing to invest in a large-scale program in Alabama that would work to reduce the delivery of excess nutrients and other pollutants to the Alabama watersheds. In addition, the Council is proposing to fund three planning activities that would assist in identifying, prioritizing, and monitoring the success of future restoration activities in Alabama watersheds (Figure 14).

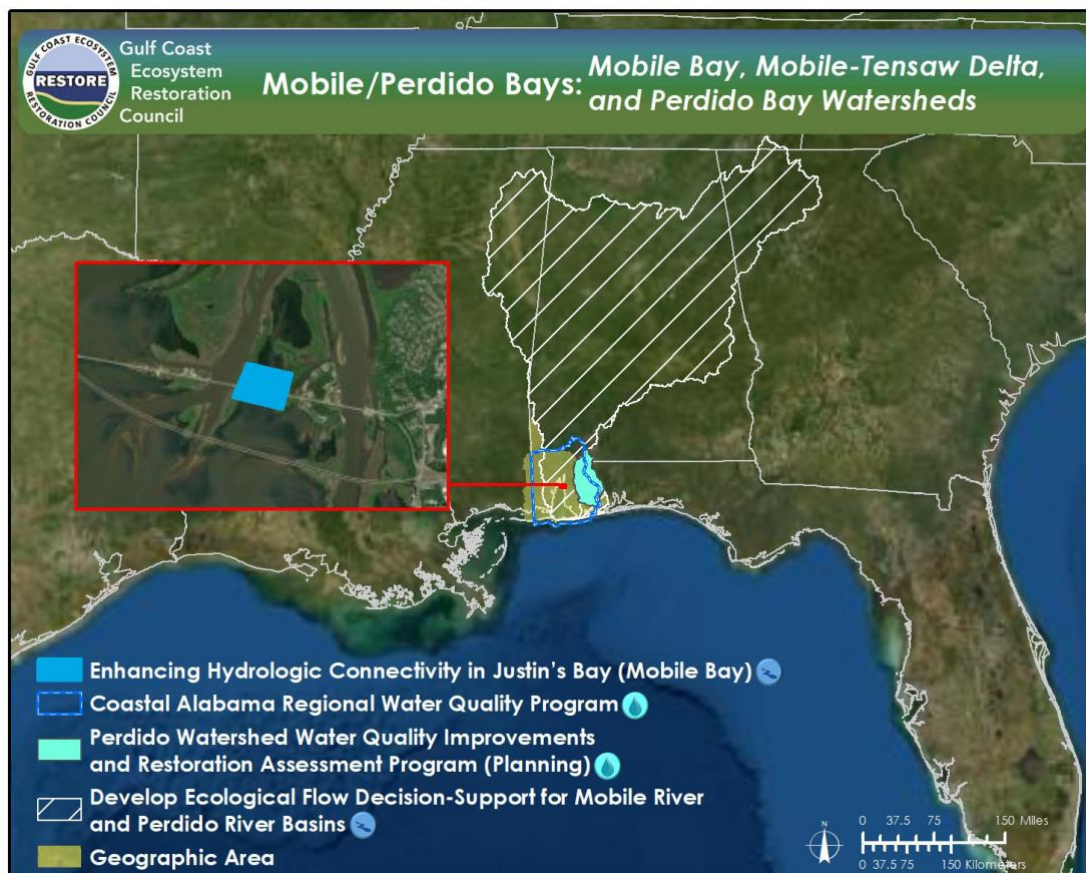


Figure 14. Map highlighting the projects and programs proposed for funding under FPL 3b in the Mobile Bay, Mobile-Tensaw Delta, and Perdido Bay geographic areas. Icons next to project/program names indicate the 2019 Planning Framework approaches to be implemented by each activity.

Enhancing Hydrologic Connectivity in Justin's Bay (Mobile Bay)

The [Enhancing Hydrologic Connectivity in Justin's Bay \(Mobile Bay\) project description](#), developed and sponsored by Alabama, provides additional detail on the project, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$1M in planning funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Enhancing Hydrologic Connectivity in Justin's Bay (Mobile Bay)* project. The project is proposed to be implemented over the course of 3 years with a focus on Justin's Bay (Mobile Bay), Alabama ([Figure 14](#)). Alabama, through the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR), is the sponsor of this proposed project.

This planning project would build on a previous study of how the hydrology of upper Mobile Bay is affected by the Mobile Bay Causeway. The construction of the Mobile Bay Causeway in 1927 resulted in a significant amount of dredge material placement over large portions of the Upper Mobile Bay marsh complex. At the time, filling of marsh was a preferred alternative to elevating the causeway and as a result, restrictions of hydrological interaction and connections between Mobile Bay and its Delta, including faunal migrations and natural food web interactions have occurred. Project activities aim to enhance hydrologic connectivity in Justin's Bay by conducting a planning effort that would: (1) address any data gaps remaining from the 2015 study; (2) evaluate the suggested restoration alternatives with a cost-logistics and feasibility frame of reference; and (3) move identified and prioritized restoration alternatives forward to a preliminary engineering design.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this project is to restore and conserve habitat ([Figure 15](#)). In the lower section of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta, a large causeway built in the mid-to late-1920s has blocked a number of once-open bays from contact with Mobile Bay and the Gulf. By altering the seasonal variation and volume of flows, these hydrological modifications have altered the ecological function and biodiversity of one of North America's largest, most productive and diverse estuaries, on a local and system-wide basis ([Valentine and Sklenar 2006](#)). In the Mobile Bay area, hydrological modification has affected fish densities and diversity of species ([Rozas et al. 2013](#)), reduced salt- and fresh- water exchange, and altered water circulation patterns ([Martin and Valentine 2012](#)). This resulted in changes in nutrient cycling ([Goecker et al. 2009](#)), frequency of occurrence and persistence of low oxygen events, and increased incidences of exotic and invasive plant species ([Kauffman et al. 2018](#)). The degree of hydrological connectivity can be a significant driver in the movement and transfer of energy, organisms, and nutrients through a marsh system ([Goecker et al. 2009](#); [Roberts 1997](#); [Smith 1988](#)). Restoration of hydrological connectivity is critical to ensuring the long-term resilience of the coastal marsh system, especially as freshwater flow changes and weather-related storm events increase in frequency and intensity.

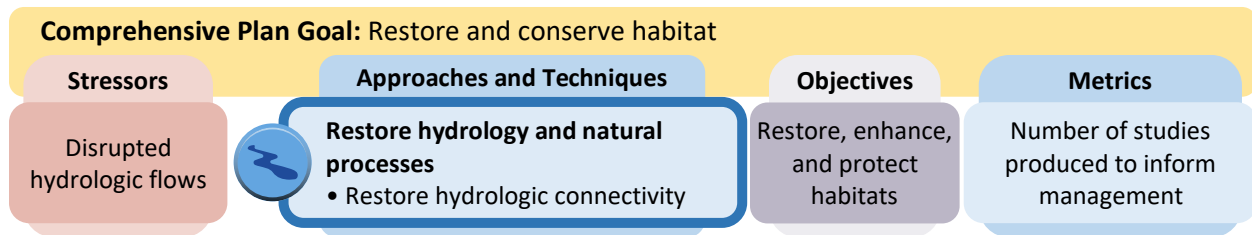


Figure 15. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track project success (fourth column). See [Figure 3](#) for more information on interpreting the above figure.

This project would fund necessary planning, data collection and analysis, and preliminary engineering and design. Robust planning is essential to the success of a large-scale project that would ultimately have a positive impact on water quality. Investing in planning now is cost-effective and increases the likelihood of success for future efforts to restore hydrologic connectivity. The proposed project builds off of previous investments from the U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through the Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP).

This proposed project would be covered by the Council's National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion for planning and related activities.

Coastal Alabama Regional Water Quality Program

The [Coastal Alabama Regional Water Quality Program description](#), developed and sponsored by Alabama, provides additional detail on the project, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$16,130,750 in planning funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Coastal Alabama Regional Water Quality Program*. In addition, the Council is considering an implementation component for potential future funding as an FPL Category 2 activity, and proposes to reserve \$19M for this component, pending further review and a Council vote. The program is proposed to be implemented over the course of 10 years in Mobile and Baldwin counties, Alabama ([Figure 14](#)). Alabama, through the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR), is the sponsor of this proposed program.

This program may include, but is not limited to: (1) planning related work (e.g., project prioritization and selection, engineering and design, and permitting and compliance activities); (2) construction of stormwater and wastewater management systems (including upgrades and repairs to existing systems); (3) low impact development/green infrastructure activities; and (4) septic to sewer conversions.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to restore water quality and quantity (Figure 16). Water quality assessments conducted in Alabama underscore the importance of addressing water quality impairments stemming from wastewater discharge and stormwater runoff holistically (MBNEP 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2019). Water quality degradation of coastal water bodies in Alabama is both an economic (recreational and commercial) and environmental stressor. Bacterial and nutrient loading from pollutant sources results in harmful algal blooms, oyster reef closures, hypoxia development, and thus indirect consequences on coastal workforce and economies.

Water quality impacts of nutrient and bacterial pollution in coastal systems is a global phenomenon (Bennett et al. 2001; Diaz and Rosenberg 2008; Lymer et al. 2018; Mallin et al. 2000; O’Mullan et al. 2019; Vörösmarty et al. 2010). A change in water quality is often associated with changes in water column conditions (i.e., hypoxia, eutrophication, and bacterial loads). The most visible water quality degradation is often associated with urban runoff, as well as discharge and sanitary sewer overflow issues, all of which are associated with wastewater management. Replacement of aging or failing stormwater and wastewater infrastructure could also help communities plan for and address anticipated impacts of climate change associated with sea level rise, changes in precipitation, etc. (Kessler 2011). This program would partner with coastal cities, counties, and/or local utilities to implement water quality improvement projects that align with the 2019 Planning Framework approach to reduce excess nutrients and other pollutants to watersheds and downstream receiving waters. Further, this program would utilize 2019 Planning Framework techniques, including stormwater management, erosion and sediment control, and wastewater system improvements.

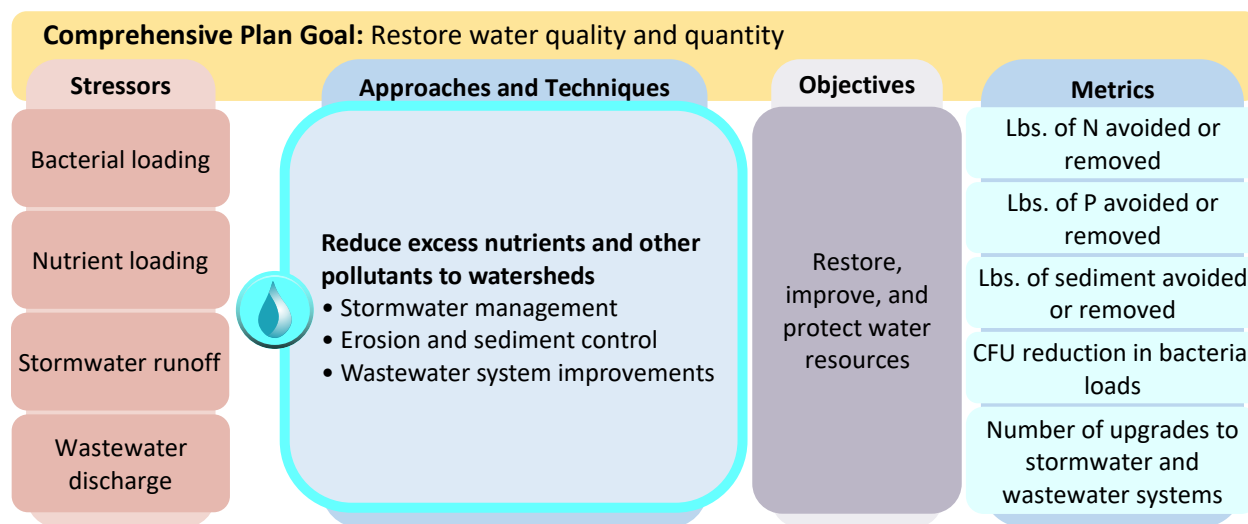


Figure 16. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track program or implemented project success (fourth column). Should the proposed program be approved for funding, metrics may be added, removed, or replaced, as appropriate, as specific projects under the program are identified. See Figure 3 for more information on interpreting the above figure.

Projects implemented through this program could include a broad range of activities designed to improve downstream water quality, including, but not limited to: (1) connection of existing septic systems to main line sewer infrastructure; (2) crushing and filling of discontinued septic systems; (3) upgrades, repairs, and replacements of sewer lines, including cure in place pipe (CIPP) technologies; (4) installation of low impact development infrastructure and/or features; (5) improvements and/or retrofits to wastewater treatment facilities, stormwater connections, manholes, and pump stations; and (6) installation of water control structures and integration of existing drainage areas with green infrastructure.

A proposed selection process would include a project application period to inform the selection of projects. The proposals would be evaluated along with associated logistical considerations and additional evaluation criteria by a small technical review team. The review team would categorize the proposals based on potential benefit, implementation readiness and the degree of background information provided to support the described benefit and implementation potential. The resulting categorized project list would be presented to the public for comment in order to further evaluate and refine the list. ADCNR, with the support of the technical team, would further evaluate funding availability and leveraging opportunities. ADCNR, with input from the technical team, would then select a slate of projects for inclusion in the program. The slate of projects could include several alternatives given possible logistical considerations and budget changes.

The planning component of this program would be covered by the Council's National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion for planning and related activities. The implementation component is currently proposed for FPL Category 2. Alabama is collaborating with federal member agencies to address the environmental laws applicable to the approval of implementation funding for this program. This may be accomplished before a Council vote on FPL 3b, in which case the final document will incorporate any changes in implementation funding from Category 2 to Category 1 and will provide a link to the associated environmental compliance documentation. In the event that implementation activities remain in Category 2 in the final, approved FPL 3b, those activities would be moved into Category 1 through the formal Council review and amendment process as described in the "[FPL Categories](#)" section of this document.

Develop Ecological Flow Decision-Support for Mobile River and Perdido River Basins

The [Develop Ecological Flow Decision-Support for Mobile River and Perdido River Basins project description](#), developed and sponsored by the U.S. Department of the Interior, provides additional detail on the project, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$3.4M in planning and implementation funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Develop Ecological Flow Decision-Support for Mobile River and Perdido*

River Basins project. The project is proposed to be implemented over the course of 4 years, focusing on the Mobile and Perdido River basins ([Figure 14](#)). The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), through the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), is the sponsor of this proposed project.

This project would create a decision-support model to provide information on freshwater inflows to streams, bays, and wetlands of the Mobile and Perdido River Basins. The Operational Analysis and Simulation of Integrated Systems (OASIS) model would be used to simulate the routing of water through watersheds in the river basins. This would allow resource managers to evaluate questions of concern, such as the influence of water resource alteration on restoring and conserving habitat, water quality, and living coastal resources. New gaging stations would be installed to fill critical freshwater inflow data gaps and support data needs for future monitoring assessments.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this project is to restore water quality and quantity ([Figure 17](#)). Maintaining the natural timing and delivery of freshwater flows from rivers to estuaries is critical for establishing appropriate estuarine circulation patterns, salinity gradients, sediment transport, and nutrient supplies that support the production of valuable coastal fisheries. ([Powell et al. 2002](#)). In the Mobile and Perdido River basins and across the Gulf region, a wide variety of land use factors have been identified that could contribute to the declining water quality of the Alabama and western Florida coast ([Kennicutt 2017](#)). The Alabama Water Agencies Working Group and other water resource managers have identified a critical need for data on inflows and models to understand how the timing and delivery of flow affects downstream ecological resources.

Consistent with the 2019 Planning Framework priority approach to develop tools for planning and evaluation and the objective to improve science-based decision-making processes, this project would provide tools (e.g., model and streamgages), data, and information that could be used by state and local decision-makers to restore more naturalized timing and delivery of freshwater in coastal river systems of Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi. Increasingly, state and local decision-makers and federal agencies are turning their attention to the restoration of flows as part of a holistic approach to restore water quality and habitat. This practice protects and replenishes living coastal and marine resources, as well as the livelihoods that depend on them. Once the model is developed and delivered to the decision-makers, it can be used well beyond the duration of the project. The proposed project would build upon the 2015 Initial FPL *Baseline Flow, Gage Analysis & On-Line Tool to Support Restoration* project ([RESTORE Council 2020c; Rodgers et al. 2018](#)), which would provide foundational datasets and statistical analyses for the OASIS model development.

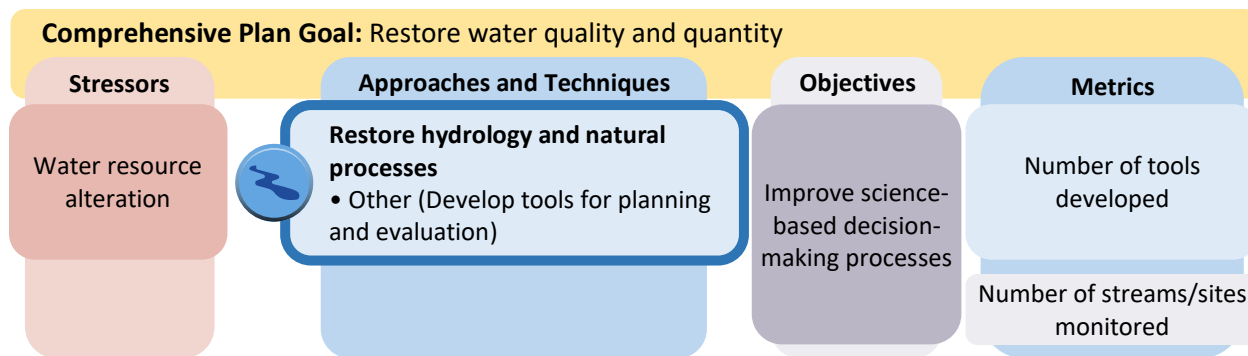


Figure 17. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track project success (fourth column). See [Figure 3](#) for more information on interpreting the above figure.

The planning component of this program involving modeling would be covered by the Council’s National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion for planning and related activities. The Council is considering using USGS Categorical Exclusion USGS 516 DM 9.5E, E. Operation, construction, installation, and removal of scientific equipment to support approval of implementation funds for this project.

Perdido Watershed Water Quality Improvements and Restoration Assessment Program

The [Perdido Watershed Water Quality Improvements and Restoration Assessment Program description](#), developed and sponsored by Alabama, provides additional detail on the project, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$1.5M in planning funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Perdido Watershed Water Quality Improvements and Restoration Assessment Program*. The program is proposed to be implemented over the course of 3 years within the Perdido Watershed near the Perdido River in Baldwin County, Alabama, and potentially Escambia County, Florida ([Figure 14](#)). Alabama, through the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR), is the sponsor of this proposed program.

This program proposes to coordinate and subsequently assess the potential cumulative benefits of restoration activities in the watershed in order to maximize water quality benefits that are potentially measurable outside of an individual project footprint. The program would support the coordination of the location and sequencing of selected restoration projects in the Perdido Watershed that could be expected to improve water quality and habitats. A concurrent component of the program would operate as a restoration assessment to monitor the potential collective impacts to water quality of the selected, co-located projects and other restoration projects within the watershed.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to restore water quality and quantity (Figure 18). Stressors in the watershed include water quality issues emanating from nonpoint source pollution, including the use of onsite septic systems and runoff associated with agriculture and silviculture activities (NWFWMMD 2017). Land use conversion and urbanization have contributed to the loss of habitats, including 80% of historic seagrass habitats (Kirschenfeld et al. 2007), and have impaired water quality of several water bodies. Low dissolved oxygen, turbidity and bacteria are a few of the impairments in the watershed.

A multi-member group is envisioned to coordinate identification of the location and sequencing of all or a subset of potential individual projects (and other restoration projects) in the Perdido Watershed that could be expected to improve water quality and habitats. In addition to coordination of restoration actions in the watershed, watershed-scale indicators to track restoration progress would be developed. The indicators would support the proposed restoration assessment program to monitor the potential collective impacts to water quality and habitats of the co-located projects, and/or other funded restoration projects in the watershed. Development of a restoration assessment/restoration progress tracker through this project would enable a better understanding of the potentially collective impacts of restoration projects in the watershed or subwatershed. Outputs would potentially include the development of one or more conceptual models, short-term and long-term indicators, and a restoration progress tracker and monitoring framework. This program would support the identification of benefits at a scale larger than the individual project level.

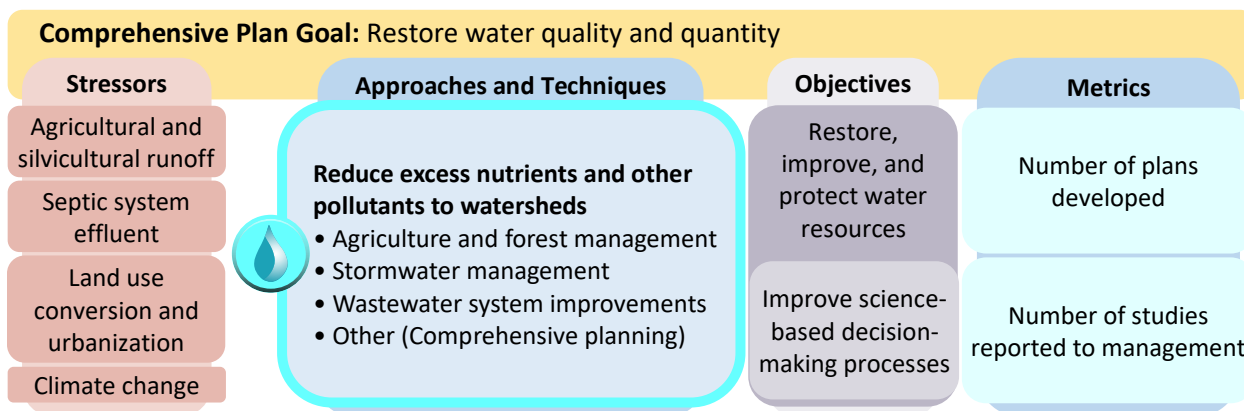


Figure 18. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track program or implemented project success (fourth column). See Figure 3 for more information on interpreting the above figure.

This proposed project would be covered by the Council’s National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion for planning and related activities.

Coastal Florida

The coastal habitats in the Florida geographic area, including beaches, salt marshes, mangrove forests, seagrass meadows, coral reefs, and estuaries, are important to numerous commercially and ecologically important species. Florida's natural resources are the foundation of the state's communities, economy, and way of life. These habitats have been degraded by a number of stressors, including nutrient pollution from a variety of sources, hydrologic alterations, and habitat fragmentation ([FL FWC and FL DEP 2018](#)). Furthermore, these adverse impacts to natural resources put coastal communities at risk for damages caused by extreme weather, coastal inundation, and climate change ([FDEP 2018a](#)). These stressors were also identified as priority issues of concern in the Council's 2019 Planning Framework. To help address these challenges, the Council is proposing to invest in several large-scale programs in Florida that would work independently and synergistically to improve water quality and quantity, restore and conserve habitat, and increase community resilience ([Figure 19](#)).

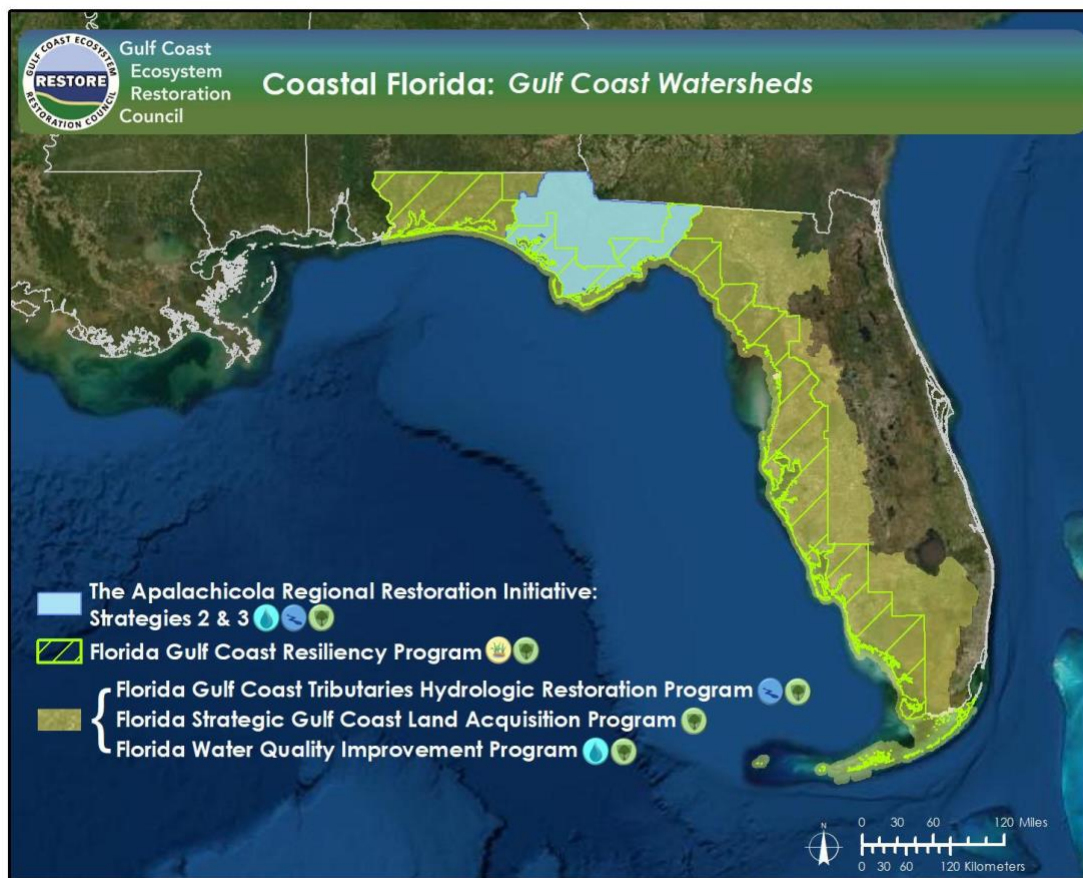


Figure 19. Map highlighting the programs proposed for funding under FPL 3b in the Coastal Florida geographic area. Icons next to program names indicate the 2019 Planning Framework approaches to be implemented by each activity.

Apalachicola Regional Restoration Initiative: Strategies 2 & 3

The [Apalachicola Regional Restoration Initiative: Strategies 2 & 3 program description](#), developed and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, provides additional detail on the program, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$5M in implementation funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Apalachicola Regional Restoration Initiative (ARRI): Strategies 2 & 3*. The program is proposed to be implemented over the course of 5 years in Florida counties within the Apalachicola River watershed, including the Apalachicola National Forest ([Figure 19](#)). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), through the U.S. Forest Service, is the sponsor of this proposed project.

This program is an extension of the Tate's Hell Strategy 1 project funded in the Council's 2015 Initial FPL. ARRI Strategies 2 & 3 include collaborative, landscape-level projects focused on restoring longleaf pine, coastal ecosystems, and hydrology within the Apalachicola Region of Florida. Activities include improvement to water quality and quantity, outreach to public landowners, monitoring, and targeted education to minority students. The combined ARRI Strategy 2 & 3 restoration efforts would help restore and conserve critical habitat, restore water quantity and quality, and benefit the economy throughout the Apalachicola Region.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to restore water quality and quantity ([Figure 20](#)). Freshwater inflow into the Apalachicola River and bay have been significantly reduced in recent decades, coinciding with upstream use and storage. This has impacted biological, geological, chemical, and hydrological conditions in coastal and near-shore ecosystems. Consequently, productivity of the Apalachicola Region's commercially and culturally significant seafood industry has also been impacted ([Florida Sea Grant 2013](#)). Moreover, variations in climate are projected to cause seasonal shifts for runoff and sediment, further affecting habitat conditions which in turn negatively affect movement and breeding behaviors of wildlife ([Hovenga et al. 2016](#)). ARRI is designed to address the stressors of poor water quality, low water quantity, degraded longleaf pine and wetland habitat, failing infrastructure, insufficient wildlife and rare plant habitat, non-native invasive species, post-hurricane risks (e.g., wildland fire, forest diseases and pests), lack of sufficient monitoring, limited public outreach to private forest landowners, and minimal natural resource management education for underrepresented minorities.

ARRI Strategies 2 & 3 would maximize environmental benefits by utilizing spatial decision-support tools and products developed through Tate's Hell Strategy 1 to prioritize much needed restoration efforts. Silvicultural treatments are prioritized to maximize water yield and to improve habitat conditions for imperiled species ([Crandall et al. in preparation](#)). Hydrologic restoration is targeted to high priority watersheds identified in Tate's Hell Strategy 1 hydrologic assessment and would restore natural sheet flow and improve water quality by increasing sediment retention and nutrient assimilation. ARRI Strategies 2 & 3 leverage significant knowledge, resources, and partnerships to substantially increase the pace and scale of restoration across the Apalachicola Region. The USDA Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Apalachicola Regional

Stewardship Alliance (ARSA), Florida Forest Service (FFS), Florida A&M University (FAMU), University of Florida (UF), and the Center for Spatial Ecology & Restoration (CSER) at FAMU would partner to implement a range of region-wide ecological restoration activities.

Under ARRI Strategy 2, project partners would implement ecological restoration activities, including: (1) region-wide restoration for approximately 127,400 acres of longleaf habitat; (2) targeted silvicultural treatments for about 7,200 acres of dense pine forests; (3) hydrologic restoration for around 1,500 acres to reconnect freshwater habitat in high priority watersheds; (4) increased regional prescribed fire; and (5) invasive species treatments. Under ARRI Strategy 3, the Florida Forest Service would lead a partnership to advise private forest landowners in active management and restoration and educate landowners on stewardship and sustainable forest management.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal is to restore water quality and quantity and; the primary objective is to restore, improve, and protect water resources. This proposed program is consistent with the following priority approaches: (1) Protect and Conserve Coastal, Estuarine, and Riparian Habitats; (2) Restore hydrology and natural processes; and (3) Reduce excess nutrients and other pollutants to watersheds.



Figure 20. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track program or implemented project success (fourth column). See [Figure 3](#) for more information on interpreting the above figure.

USDA has advised the Council that this proposed program is covered by the USDA Categorical Exclusions (CEs). The Council is proposing to adopt these CEs and the associated environmental compliance documentation to support the proposed funding approval of this

program, consistent with Section 4(d)(4) of the Council's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Procedures, which enables the Council to use member CEs, where appropriate. In making this decision, the Council would consider potential extraordinary circumstances, including potential negative effects to threatened and endangered species, essential fish habitat, tribal interests and historic properties, where applicable.

Florida Gulf Coast Resiliency Program

The [Florida Gulf Coast Resiliency Program description](#), developed and sponsored by Florida, provides additional detail on the program, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$5.6M in planning funds, as FPL Category 1 for the Florida Gulf Coast Resiliency Program. In addition, the Council is considering the implementation component for potential future funding as an FPL Category 2 activity, and proposes to reserve \$8.4M for this component, pending further review and a Council vote. The proposed program would be implemented over 10 years in Florida coastlines and estuaries along the Gulf of Mexico ([Figure 19](#)). Florida, through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), is the sponsor of this proposed program.

This program would include three types of project activities: (1) vulnerability assessments to identify strategies to improve resiliency; (2) living shorelines to protect against erosion and reduce wave energy; and (3) coastal and submerged lands management and acquisition activities to protect habitats that enhance resiliency. The FDEP would partner with the Florida Forever (FF) Program to identify acquisitions, and with the Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection on vulnerability assessments and submerged lands management activities.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to enhance community resilience ([Figure 21](#)). Comprehensive resource management and planning efforts, such as FF, Florida Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund Restoration Strategy, Basin Management Action Plans, Aquatic Preserve Management Plans, and others, have identified stressors and threats to Florida's natural resources, including habitat loss and fragmentation, and the effects of climate change such as extreme weather and sea level rise.

This proposed program would directly address habitat loss and fragmentation through acquisitions and land management protections, address the effects of climate change by constructing living shorelines to reduce wave energy, and protect coastal lands to enhance resiliency and sustainability. Identifying strategies to improve coastal resiliency would help ensure Florida's coastal communities are able to adapt to the effects of climate change by conserving Florida's natural resources, reducing wave energy, protecting against storm surge, and providing opportunities for species and habitat migration.

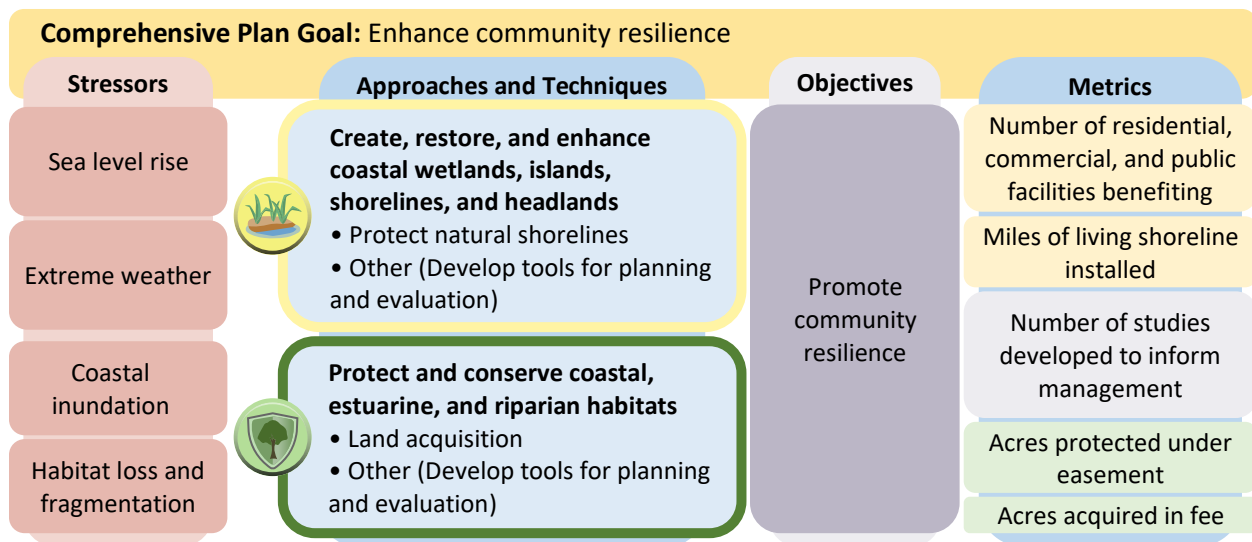


Figure 21. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track program or implemented project success (fourth column). Should the proposed program be approved for funding, metrics may be added, removed, or replaced, as appropriate, as specific projects under the program are identified. See [Figure 3](#) for more information on interpreting the above figure.

Program activities would be selected from proposals submitted by the public. Florida anticipates one request for proposals for all three project types. FDEP would utilize an approach similar to the Deepwater Horizon natural resource damage assessment project portals and issue a public notice to solicit proposals. The notice would clearly describe the goal and objectives of the program and the types of activities that would be considered.

In selecting program activities from submitted project proposals, FDEP would screen and evaluate each proposal to ensure it meets the goal and objective of the program. If a proposal meets the screening criteria (described in the program proposal), FDEP would evaluate the proposal further according to the evaluation criteria. FDEP would then select program activities based on the extent to which the proposals meet the evaluation criteria and those that are likely to benefit coastal community resilience most cost-effectively. Proposals that meet all of the initial screening and evaluation criteria would be further evaluated within the framework outlined in the project description for each of the three project types included in this program. Ultimately, the number and type of projects selected for implementation would depend on project proposals, and would be scaled to the program budget.

The planning component of this program would be covered by the Council's National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion for planning and related activities. The implementation component is currently proposed for FPL Category 2. Implementation activities in Category 2 in the final, approved FPL 3b, would be moved into Category 1 through the formal

Council review and amendment process as described in the “[FPL Categories](#)” section of this document.

Florida Gulf Coast Tributaries Hydrologic Restoration Program

The [Florida Gulf Coast Tributaries Hydrologic Restoration Program \(THRP\) description](#), developed and sponsored by Florida, provides additional detail on the program, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$3,437,500 in planning funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Florida Gulf Coast Tributaries Hydrologic Restoration Program (THRP)*. In addition, the Council is considering the implementation component for potential future funding as an FPL Category 2 activity, and proposes to reserve \$10,312,500 for this component, pending further review and a Council vote. The program is proposed to be implemented over 10 years in Florida watersheds that drain to the Gulf of Mexico ([Figure 19](#)). Florida, through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), is the sponsor of this proposed program.

This program would restore water quality and quantity throughout the Florida Gulf Coast by underwriting a comprehensive suite of linked, high-priority hydrologic improvement projects. The THRP would focus on addressing the stressors described and identified in Minimum Flow Levels (MFLs), Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs), Surface Water Improvement and Management plans (SWIM), and other approved restoration plans to achieve the Council’s goal of restoring water quality and quantity and Florida’s desired outcome of restoring hydrologic and salinity conditions of Gulf Coast wetlands and estuaries.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to restore water quality and quantity ([Figure 22](#)). The THRP would emphasize the use of priority techniques to reestablish flows through hydrologic impediments and focus on allowing natural sheet flows across wetland areas ([NRCS 2008](#)). Efforts to restore hydrology and natural salinity regimes may include: (1) plugging canals; (2) restoring the natural dimensions of tidal passes and inlets; (3) installing or enlarging culverts, gates, low water crossings and other structures to reestablish natural flows; and (4) strategic use of impoundments to capture and store flood waters to be released during droughts, etc.

Coastal habitats would benefit from THRP projects due to the restoration of natural hydrologic and salinity regimes. The THRP is also expected to: (1) improve water quality; (2) increase benthic communities, oysters, seagrass, and fish populations; and (3) reduce populations of invasive species. THRP funding would be intentionally directed to projects that provide cumulative benefits to the Florida Gulf Coast and link environmental benefits between selected and other restoration projects in a watershed or region. Linking restoration projects would contribute to large-scale hydrologic improvements.

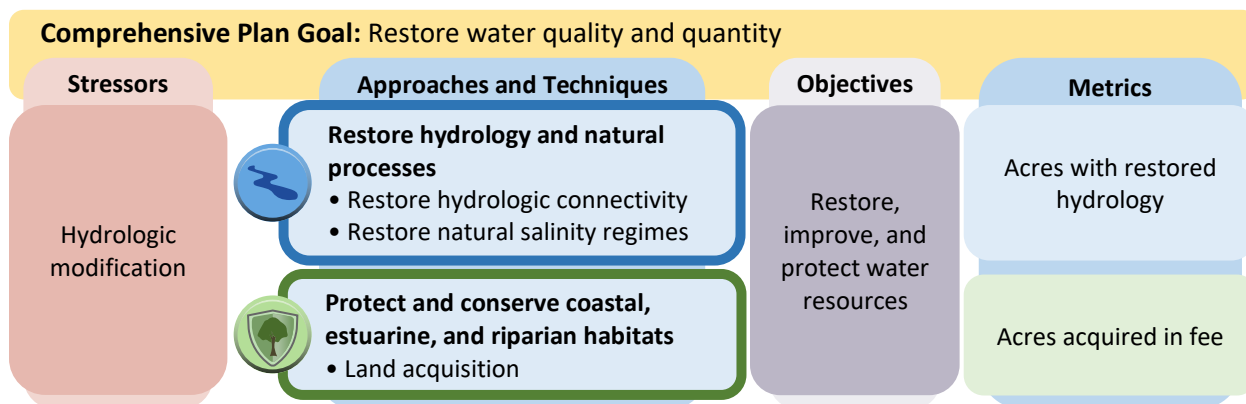


Figure 22. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track program or implemented project success (fourth column). Should the proposed program be approved for funding, metrics may be added, removed, or replaced, as appropriate, as specific projects under the program are identified. See [Figure 3](#) for more information on interpreting the above figure.

The FDEP would use a screening process based on approved selection criteria to fund projects under the THRP. Priority would be given to large-scale hydrologic restoration projects that have been previously identified in adopted MFL recovery or prevention strategies, SWIM plans, and the Florida State Expenditure Plan.

THRP selection criteria would focus on restoring the critical drivers and functions of the hydrologic regime. Following these steps would promote recovery of healthy ecosystems through flow regime dynamics, balancing sediment and organic matter inputs, nutrient cycling, and hyporheic exchanges, as well as promoting low impact development practices, conservation, and public-private partnerships that combine habitat creation and removal of human constraints to achieve ecological aims ([Beechie et al. 2010](#)). The use of effective selection criteria is intended to lead to high-quality projects, enabling the THRP to significantly improve hydrologic connectivity of Gulf Coast watersheds and restore natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, and coastal wetlands. Success of this program would translate into restored and enhanced ecosystem resilience, sustainability, and natural defenses.

The planning component of this program would be covered by the Council's National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion for planning and related activities. The implementation component is currently proposed for FPL Category 2. Implementation activities in Category 2 in the final, approved FPL 3b, would be moved into Category 1 through the formal Council review and amendment process as described in the "[FPL Categories](#)" section of this document.

Florida Water Quality Improvement Program

The [Florida Water Quality Improvement Program \(WQIP\) description](#), developed and sponsored by Florida, provides additional detail on the program, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$6.75M in planning funds as FPL Category 1 for the Florida Water Quality Improvement Program (WQIP.) In addition, the Council is considering the implementation component for potential future funding as an FPL Category 2 activity, and proposes to reserve \$20.25M for this component, pending further review and a Council vote. The program is proposed to be implemented over 10 years in Florida watersheds that drain to the Gulf of Mexico ([Figure 19](#)). Florida, through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), is the sponsor of this proposed program.

This program would restore water quality and quantity throughout the Florida Gulf Coast by underwriting a suite of linked, high-priority water quality improvement projects, which may include stormwater treatment, wastewater reuse, septic tank abatement, sediment reduction, and land acquisition. In Florida, the protection and restoration of water resources and other natural resources is guided by comprehensive planning efforts, including: (1) Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) plans; (2) a Nonpoint Source management program; (3) the Florida Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund Restoration Strategy, which is an overarching framework for restoring and conserving the natural resources of Florida's Gulf Coast ([FFWCC and FDEP 2018](#)); and (4) the Basin Management Action Plan process. The WQIP activities would result in environmental benefits such as: (1) fewer algal blooms, fish kills, beach closures, and fish and shellfish consumption restrictions; (2) healthier seagrass as well as other submerged aquatic vegetation and wildlife habitat and (3) improved recreational opportunities and experiences.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to restore water quality and quantity ([Figure 23](#)). This program would address stressors and threats such as nutrient pollution from a variety of sources, such as: (1) the millions of often densely-clustered septic systems; (2) urban and agricultural fertilizers; (3) stormwater runoff; and (4) aging and inadequate wastewater and stormwater infrastructure ([Badruzzman et al. 2012](#); [Carey et al. 2012](#); [Nagy et al. 2012](#)). WQIP funding would target projects that provide cumulative benefits to the Florida Gulf Coast, linking with other restoration projects in a watershed or region to promote large-scale water quality improvements.

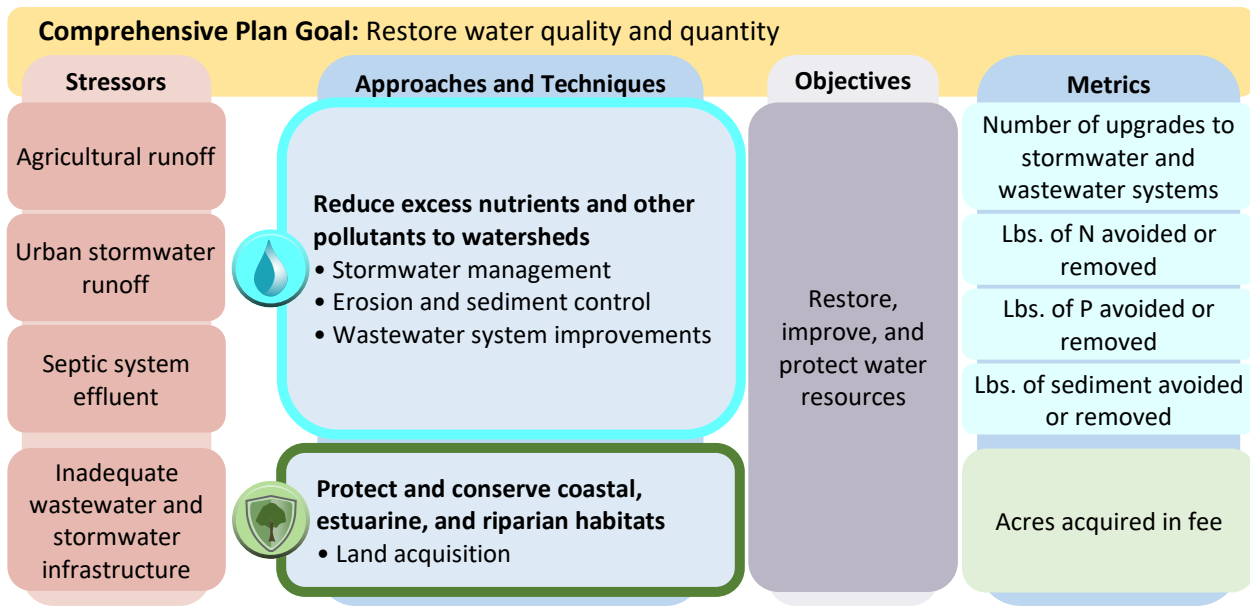


Figure 23. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track program or implemented project success (fourth column). Should the proposed program be approved for funding, metrics may be added, removed, or replaced, as appropriate, as specific projects under the program are identified. See [Figure 3](#) for more information on interpreting the above figure.

FDEP would use a screening process based on approved selection criteria to fund projects under the proposed WQIP. The WQIP would focus on stormwater treatment, wastewater reuse, septic tank abatement, sediment reduction, and land acquisition practices targeted at impaired water bodies (e.g., CWA 303(d) list or approved Total Maximum Daily Loads [TMDLs]). Infrastructure projects to be funded under the WQIP are intended to address legacy pollution from existing causes, which are typically the result of inadequate wastewater treatment (overreliance on septic systems), ineffective or lack of stormwater treatment, and other nonpoint source runoff. WQIP is not intended to support new growth or development.

The use of effective selection criteria is intended to lead to high-quality projects, which would enable the WQIP to significantly reduce pollutants to priority waters. Project locations with pollutant reduction efforts can be evaluated using the same water quality modeling used in TMDL development, ensuring improved water quality at these locations would also impact the overall system ([FDEP 2018b](#)). Water quality modeling would provide the data necessary to address project resilience to increased rainfall and sea level rise. Water quality improvement estimates for stormwater and wastewater project techniques (e.g., wastewater system improvements) would be derived from site-specific information and performance standards, where available, and peer-reviewed sources summarized in the Statewide Best Management Practice (BMP) Efficiencies for Nonpoint Source Management of Surface Waters ([FDEP 2018c](#)). By establishing estimates of water quality improvements through quantitative means (e.g., nutrient reduction in lbs.), individual projects can be evaluated together for combined effects and

comprehensive restoration.

The planning component of this program would be covered by the Council's National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion for planning and related activities. The implementation component is currently proposed for FPL Category 2. Implementation activities in Category 2 in the final, approved FPL 3b, would be moved into Category 1 through the formal Council review and amendment process as described in the "[FPL Categories](#)" section of this document.

Florida Strategic Gulf Coast Land Acquisition Program

The [Florida Strategic Gulf Coast Land Acquisition Program description](#), developed and sponsored by Florida, provides additional detail on the program, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$1.4M in planning funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Florida Strategic Gulf Coast Land Acquisition Program*. In addition, the Council is considering the implementation component for potential future funding as an FPL Category 2 activity, and proposes to reserve \$12.6M for this component, pending further review and a Council vote. The program is proposed to be implemented over the course of 10 years in Florida watersheds that drain to the Gulf of Mexico ([Figure 19](#)). Florida, through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), is the sponsor of this proposed program.

This program would include a suite of linked conservation activities that would increase conserved and protected state owned or managed lands by 10,000 to 20,000 acres. Program activities include implementation of land acquisitions, partnering with the existing Florida Forever Program (FF), Florida's premier conservation and recreation lands acquisition program.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to restore and conserve habitat ([Figure 24](#)). Comprehensive resource management and planning efforts, such as FF, Florida Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund Restoration Strategy, Basin Management Action Plans, and other efforts have identified stressors and threats to Florida's natural resources, including habitat loss, fragmentation, hydrologic alterations, climate change, and sea level rise. This proposed program would directly address habitat fragmentation and climate change stressors by acquiring and protecting critical natural areas, large functional landscapes, large hydrologic systems, imperiled natural communities, wildlife corridors, and lands. Collectively, these activities would strengthen Florida's land, water, and coastal resource resiliency, promote carbon sequestration, and mitigate sea level rise effects. This proposed program is consistent with the Protect and Conserve Coastal, Estuarine, and Riparian Habitats priority approach.

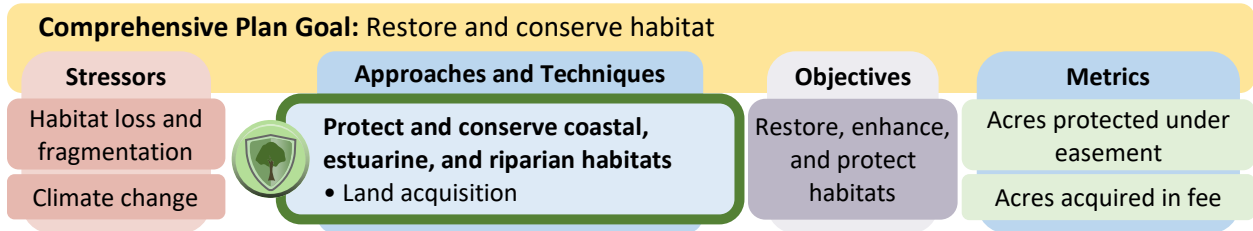


Figure 24. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track program or implemented project success (fourth column). Should the proposed program be approved for funding, metrics may be added, removed, or replaced, as appropriate, as specific projects under the program are identified. Should See [Figure 3](#) for more information on interpreting the above figure.

To select acquisitions under this proposed program, Florida would utilize the land acquisition priority list produced through FF. The list is updated and adopted annually by the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC), a 10-member group including scientific representatives from four State agencies, four appointees of the Governor, one appointee by the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and one appointee by the Commissioner of the Agriculture and Consumer Services. Members of the ARC have backgrounds in scientific disciplines of land, water, environmental sciences, wildlife management, forestry, and outdoor recreation ([FF 2019a](#)). The ARC utilizes a science-based evaluation process for decision-making when developing the priority list for acquisition.

Florida would identify the priority parcels in the Critical Natural Lands and Climate Change Lands categories, or other parcels with similar attributes, that have not already been acquired and determine which are in watersheds that drain into the Gulf of Mexico. Priority would be given to those parcels that leverage other funding sources or those that can be acquired for less than the appraised value. Once selected, FDEP would follow the land acquisition procedures outlined in the Florida Statutes, Chapter 259, Land Acquisitions for Conservation or Recreation. FDEP's Division of State Lands and its acquisition partners would contract an appraisal of land from an independent private sector appraiser to estimate market value, negotiate with owners to buy the land, conduct any required due diligence, such as site environmental assessments, and complete the acquisition on behalf of the State. Lands acquired would be titled to the State and protected in perpetuity.

The planning component of this program would be covered by the Council's National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion for planning and related activities. The implementation component is currently proposed for FPL Category 2. Florida is collaborating with federal member agencies to address the environmental laws applicable to the approval of implementation funding for this program. This may be accomplished before a Council vote on FPL 3b, in which case the final document will incorporate any changes in implementation funding from Category 2 to Category 1 and will provide a link to the associated environmental compliance documentation. If implementation activities remain in Category 2 in the final,

approved FPL 3b, those activities would be moved into Category 1 through the formal Council review and amendment process as described in the "[FPL Categories](#)" section of this document.

Gulfwide

In addition to focusing on particular geographic areas, the Council's 2019 Planning Framework acknowledged that Gulfwide investments are important to support holistic ecosystem restoration and lay the foundation for future success. In developing project ideas, the Council considered how mutual priorities across multiple geographic areas may be combined to create "Gulfwide" programs. To that end, the Council is proposing to fund four programs that span across multiple states to improve water quality and quantity in coastal, estuarine, and riparian habitats, to restore and conserve habitat, and to enhance community resilience by promoting natural resource stewardship and environmental education ([Figure 25](#)).



Figure 25. Map highlighting the programs proposed for funding under FPL 3b in the Gulfwide geographic area. Icons next to program names indicate the 2019 Planning Framework approaches to be implemented by each activity.

Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program

The [Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program description](#), developed and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, provides additional detail on the program, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$3.1M in planning and implementation funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program (GCCRP)*. The program is proposed to be implemented over the course of 4 years in coastal Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi ([Figure 25](#)). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), is the sponsor of this proposed program.

This program was established through the Initial FPL in December 2015. USDA is currently implementing the program throughout the Gulf for the purpose of protecting and restoring critical wildlife habitat and improving water quality through the development of wildlife habitat, conservation, and forest management plans. If approved, FPL 3b would provide additional funds for work in Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi. Conservation practices and restoration activities would be implemented to address the resource concerns identified in the planning phase. GCCRP activities would allow for conservation planning on private lands including, but not limited to, ecosystem restoration by conducting soil and water conservation for the benefit of water quality to priority bays and estuaries.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to restore water quality and quantity ([Figure 26](#)). Nutrient pollution adversely impacts water quality and poses a significant threat to localized watersheds across the entire Gulf Coast. Fertilizers and manures are used to supplement the natural supplies for optimum crop growth. When nutrients are used correctly they are very beneficial, but when they are used in the wrong place at the wrong time, they become pollutants. Both groundwater and surface water are very vulnerable to pollution. Excessive nutrient enrichment, or eutrophication, of Gulf Coast estuaries and their watersheds is a chronic threat that can lead to hypoxia, harmful algal blooms, habitat losses, and fish kills.

This program would serve to assist willing private landowners with implementing conservation measures to improve water and wildlife habitat conditions. The selected measures would be conducted with the landowner's conservation goals in mind, enabling greater ownership in conservation and management activities that affect water quality and wildlife habitat conditions within the Gulf coast region. Outcomes would include direct improvements in water quality, wetland and upland wildlife habitat, and forest health.

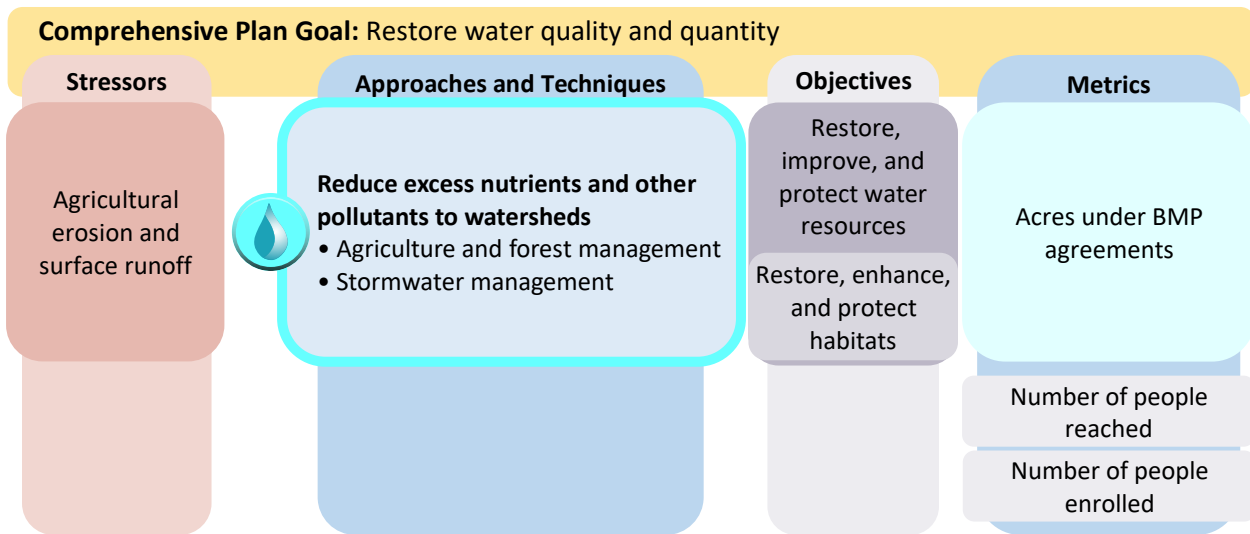


Figure 26. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track program or implemented project success (fourth column). Should the proposed program be approved for funding, metrics may be added, removed, or replaced, as appropriate, as specific projects under the program are identified. See [Figure 3](#) for more information on interpreting the above figure.

The planning component of this program would continue work that was already initiated through this program from 2015 Initial FPL investments. Water quality and natural resource concerns on private property would be identified and prioritized on individual land units. Once done, conservation plans would be developed to address those concerns on approximately 5,000 acres. The land would be subject to the NRCS conservation practice standards outlined in the conservation, forest management, and wildlife habitat plans developed in the planning phase of this program. Conservation planning and environmental due diligence efforts would be completed during the initial phase of the program. After the planning, engineering and compliance, USDA would enter into contracts with landowners to implement conservation practices on their property. Contracts would serve as an agreement to implement the conservation practices outlined in the conservation plan according to conservation practice standards and specifications (including any required property access agreement and activities related to project monitoring).

USDA has advised the Council that this proposed program is covered by the USDA Categorical Exclusions (CEs). The Council is proposing to adopt these CEs and the associated environmental compliance documentation to support the proposed funding approval of this program, consistent with Section 4(d)(4) of the Council’s National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Procedures, which enables the Council to use member CEs, where appropriate. In making this decision, the Council would consider potential extraordinary circumstances, including potential negative effects to threatened and endangered species, essential fish habitat, tribal interests and historic properties, where applicable.

Enhancing Gulf Waters through Forested Watershed Restoration

The [Enhancing Gulf Waters through Forested Watershed Restoration description](#), developed and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, provides additional detail on the program, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$23M in planning and implementation funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Enhancing Gulf Waters through Forested Watershed Restoration* program. The program is proposed to be implemented over the course of 7 years in priority watersheds in Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida as designated by State agencies ([Figure 25](#)). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is the sponsor of this proposed program.

This program would include activities to restore private and public forests by providing technical and financial assistance to private landowners and communities in watersheds where forest resources are instrumental to the health of the Gulf of Mexico. A coordinated, cross-boundary effort would be led by State Forestry Agencies in Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi; leveraging the funding and activities of other organizations that are well established. Activities include social marketing techniques to effectively reach landowners, implementation of best management practices (e.g., establishing forests, prescribed fire, and controlling invasive exotic species), and use of science-based decision-support tools to inform forest restoration investments and quantify outcomes.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to restore water quality and quantity ([Figure 27](#)). The stressors addressed by this program include water quality and quantity issues related to the conversion of the Gulf Region's forests to agricultural and urban land uses and the need for more active forest management. Indeed, among the major challenges in the 21st century will be to manage forests and water resources under development pressures and other environmental factors ([NRC 2008](#); [Sun and Vose 2016](#); [Vose 2019](#); [Vose et al. 2011](#); [Vose, Martin and Barten 2016](#)). Changes to more intensive land use increase point and nonpoint pollution, reduce aquifer recharge, accelerate stormwater release, and increase the amount of runoff. In addition, forest fragmentation negatively impacts wildlife habitat, limits forest management options, and reduces economic viability of forest ownership and reduces community resilience.

Establishing this large-scale program would substantially enhance and maintain water quality and quantity by managing and restoring forested ecosystems in a three-state region. A healthy Gulf stems from healthy estuaries, healthy estuaries depend on healthy watersheds, healthy watersheds flow from healthy forests, and healthy forests require active landowners and managers. The program would directly impact approximately 15,000 forested acres that are vital to the health of the Gulf Region. The work is anticipated to increase landowner understanding of the benefits of forest management and its importance to Gulf waters. In addition, it would improve forest health and productivity, strengthen the viability of forest-dependent community resilience, and hence, the likelihood of keeping forested lands on the landscape. Providing landowners with financial and technical assistance helps them effectively and efficiently manage

their forest resource, making it less attractive to sell or convert the land to other uses. They have more options, and those options help avoid conversion by making ownership more economically and environmentally sustainable.

A forested watershed program that approaches the work at a landscape scale must consider restoration of public land in the Gulf Region to achieve multiple Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives. Restoration of public forests, such as those that are managed by State Forest Agencies (e.g., State Forests and Section 16 school trust forests), would focus on treatments that offer long-term improvements to water quality and quantity, and wildlife habitat.

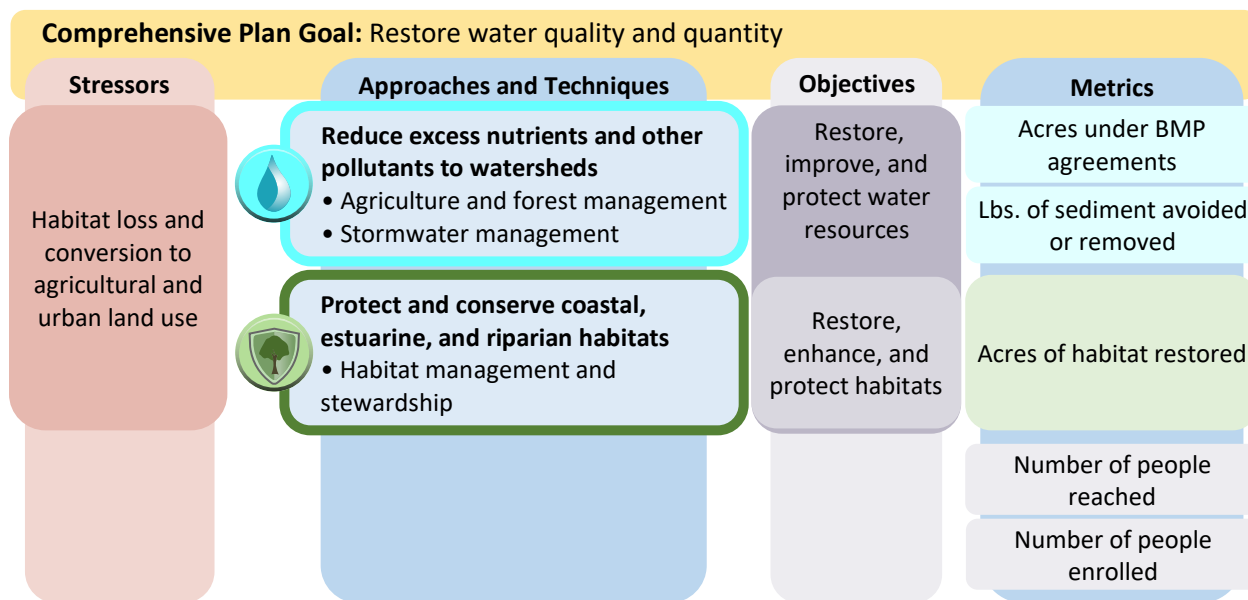


Figure 27. This figure shows the Comprehensive Plan goal of this activity (top row), how the 2019 Planning Framework approaches and techniques employed by this activity (second column) would address stressors (first column) to support Comprehensive Plan objectives (third column), and the corresponding metrics that may be used to track program or implemented project success (fourth column). Should the proposed program be approved for funding, metrics may be added, removed, or replaced, as appropriate, as specific projects under the program are identified. See [Figure 3](#) for more information on interpreting the above figure.

USDA would apply the following decision factors for project selection: (1) contribution to the RESTORE Council’s Comprehensive Plan and 2019 Planning Framework; (2) consistency with the goals and objectives of each state’s Forest Action Plan, state and local watershed management plans, state Wildlife Action Plans, and other plans as appropriate; and (3) geography – sites located within the designated priority watersheds.

Technical and financial assistance would be provided to landowners and communities, factoring in readiness and anticipated outcomes. Applications for financial assistance would be ranked using criteria that aligns with the Council’s 2019 Planning Framework, such as: (1) proximity to a

stream, lake, or wetland; (2) connectivity to protected land; (3) impacts to water quality; (4) impacts to water quantity; and (5) wildlife habitat variables.

Complementary to the work of state forestry agencies, a NFWF-led competitive grant fund is envisioned that offers an additional path for attracting partners and investors, including conservation organizations, universities, local governments and others beyond the core partners whose expertise and resources are needed to expand the impact. Such a fund may create leverage beyond that which is currently identified, increase potential for innovative solutions, and multiply positive outcomes of forest restoration for the Gulf Region.

USDA has advised the Council that this proposed program is covered by the USDA Categorical Exclusions (CEs). The Council is proposing to adopt these CEs and the associated environmental compliance documentation to support the proposed funding approval of this program, consistent with Section 4(d)(4) of the Council's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Procedures, which enables the Council to use member CEs, where appropriate. In making this decision, the Council would consider potential extraordinary circumstances, including potential negative effects to threatened and endangered species, essential fish habitat, tribal interests and historic properties, where applicable.

Gulf of Mexico Conservation Corps Program

The [Gulf of Mexico Conservation Corps \(GulfCorps\) Program description](#), developed and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Commerce - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, provides additional detail on the program, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$11,971,250 in implementation funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Gulf of Mexico Conservation Corps (GulfCorps) Program*. The program is proposed to be implemented over the course of 4 years within the major coastal estuaries and habitats in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas ([Figure 25](#)). The U.S. Department of Commerce, through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), is the sponsor of this proposed program.

Building off work funded under the Council's 2015 Initial FPL, GulfCorps organizations in each Gulf state would recruit, train, employ, and help to inspire hundreds of young adults to produce tangible habitat restoration benefits and to become the Gulf of Mexico's future restoration workforce. GulfCorps would continue to collaborate with state, federal, and local agencies, and non-profit organizations to manage natural resources and implement restoration, conservation and resilience projects. Based on project input from RESTORE Council members and local experts, the GulfCorps would implement habitat restoration, conservation and monitoring activities in a wide range of Gulf of Mexico habitats including marshes, prairies, forests, oyster reefs and shorelines. The GulfCorps crews would also facilitate public access to Gulf habitats by building and maintaining boardwalks and trails.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to restore and conserve habitat ([Figure 28](#)). The Gulf is subject to a wide variety of natural stressors such as drought, fluctuating temperatures, hurricanes, land subsidence, sea-level rise, and saltwater intrusion, as well as human stressors such as: (1) river channelization causing alteration of important wetland flooding and sedimentation regimes; (2) residential development; (3) industrial activities including oil and gas extraction contributing to land loss; (4) agricultural and wastewater discharges; (5) trawling impacts to the sea floor; and (6) invasive species.

The GulfCorps Program facilitates the restoration, conservation and stewardship of several of the highest priority habitats and watersheds across all 5 Gulf states. The program works with resource experts in each state to identify and prioritize the most critical and high-value restoration sites, and the conservation and restoration practices that need to be applied to each site over time. By taking a multi-habitat approach, the GulfCorps Program can address the primary goal to restore and conserve habitat across the Gulf of Mexico. GulfCorps provides a labor pool to help implement project partners' most important conservation, restoration and resilience efforts. The initial program's goal aligned with the Comprehensive Plan to restore and conserve habitat, and its objectives were met through the restoration, conservation and protection of habitat in all 5 Gulf states. The proposed continuation of GulfCorps shares the same priority goal and objective while adding the secondary goal of enhancing community resilience by promoting natural resource stewardship, environmental education, and development of job skills.

Program activities would contribute to the restoration of approximately 6,400 acres of coastal habitat and provide employment opportunities for an estimated 240 young people across the Gulf of Mexico region. The program would provide approximately 500,000 hours of labor for priority conservation projects. The program anticipates (1) treating over 800 acres impacted by invasive species; (2) enhancing 3,200 acres of wetlands, shorelines, and/or marsh; (3) enhancing over 2,400 acres of coastal uplands and forest; and (4) monitoring up to 800 acres of restored habitat within priority Gulf coast watersheds. To ensure the effectiveness of these restoration activities the GulfCorps program is using the best available science, an effective adaptive management framework, and a robust monitoring framework. GulfCorps has demonstrated that all of this is possible through employing local young people from the communities where the work is located.

GulfCorps projects have been guided by state-appointed RESTORE Act Representatives in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. Coordination between GulfCorps staff and these representatives occurs at least semi-annually to discuss progress of the GulfCorps crews and to coordinate on project ideas and project partners for the crews in their state. GulfCorps staff coordinate further with the staff of the various agencies and nonprofits on-the-ground to develop detailed scopes of work and schedules and to determine training requirements and tool selection. These scopes of work are used to contract with the crews from each state.

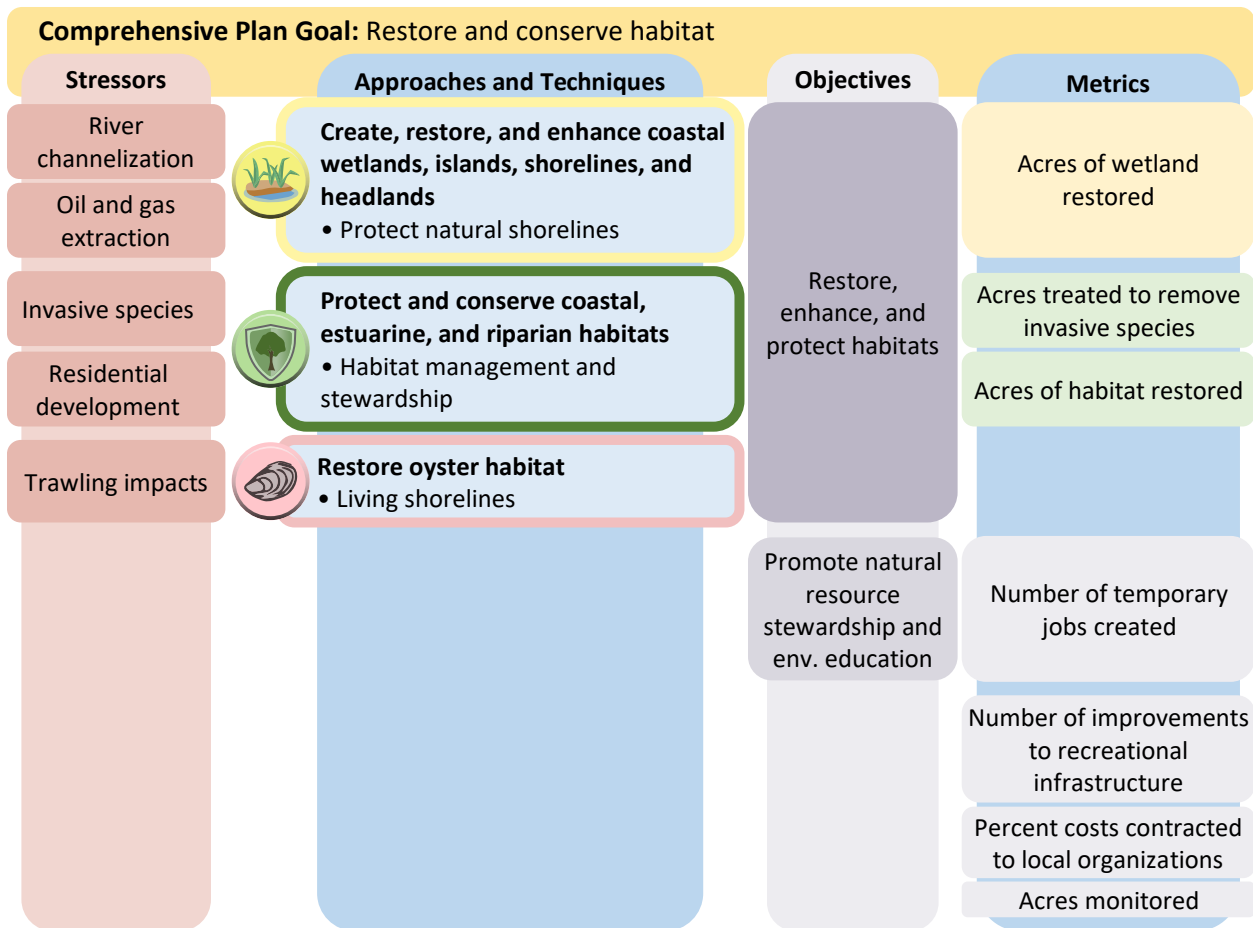


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NOAA Fisheries would act as the fiscal sponsor, environmental compliance lead, project advisor, and liaison to the RESTORE Council for the GulfCorps Program. NOAA would partner with The Nature Conservancy, the implementation lead of the Program, who would manage the conservation and project planning, monitoring, subawards, contracts and overall operations components of GulfCorps. The Student Conservation Association would lead the development and implementation of annual orientations and would manage logistics for the region-wide, technical training of the conservation corps. The Corps Network would implement a professional development program intended to help the conservation corps prepare GulfCorps members and leaders for careers in conservation and restoration while actively assisting the placement of participants with opportunities that lead to those positions. The Forest Stewards Guild would be the technical training provider for the federally regulated certifications required for chainsaw operation and prescribed fire qualifications.

The program proposes to continue working with over 60 distinct project partners from varying departments or offices within each agency and non-profit organizations across all five Gulf states. The proposed program model builds on years of capacity building, planning, partnerships and collaboration between program partners, project partners and Conservation Corps partners (Corps) in all five Gulf states. The six Corps organizations that operate the 11 GulfCorps crews have helped to shape the program's goals through the diversity of audiences that they serve.

Individuals trained under the program would help execute restoration projects that are funded for implementation by other sources. Council-Selected Restoration Component funding, if approved, would support education and training of GulfCorps members, including hands-on work on Gulf conservation and restoration activities. GulfCorps members would work only on activities that are in compliance with all applicable environmental laws and regulations. Council approval of implementation funding for this training activity would not involve or lead directly to ground-disturbing activities that may have any independent significant effects on the environment individually or cumulatively. Accordingly, the implementation of training under this program would be covered by the Council's National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion for training, technical, and other related activities (Section 4(d)(1)(vi) of the Council's NEPA Procedures).

Tribal Youth Coastal Restoration Program

The [Tribal Youth Coastal Restoration Program description](#), developed and sponsored by the U.S. Department of the Interior, provides additional detail on the project, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget.

The Council is considering approval of \$927K in planning and implementation funds as FPL Category 1 for the *Tribal Youth Coastal Restoration Program*. The program is proposed to be implemented over the course of 3 years in coastal Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana ([Figure 25](#)). The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), is the sponsor of this proposed program.

This program would continue the restoration work begun under the Council's 2015 Initial FPL of the following Federally recognized tribes: (1) Chitimacha Tribe; (2) Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians; (3) Poarch Band of Creek Indians; (4) Seminole Tribe of Florida; and (5) Miccosukee Indian Tribe, and would add the Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana. Activities would take place on tribal lands in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana ([Figure 25](#)). Tribal lands identified for this program include those on the Gulf coast as well as further inland within watersheds that drain into the Gulf. Activities have been selected and designed to primarily benefit the Gulf coast region through direct restoration, and training that would educate youth on the importance of these natural habitats, as well as the development of skills to restore and conserve coastal

habitats throughout the region.⁴ Investing in programs that provide work opportunities for young people has economic and physical benefits while also enhancing the environmental vitality of the area’s natural resources directly tied to the Gulf.

The initial work would support the restoration of 995 acres through the vehicle of training 239 students. Tribes would continue to create projects to protect natural resources and the environment, and maintain a healthy ecosystem, while learning cultural values. These training projects should engage a similar number of students as previous initiatives to restore habitat on tribal lands.

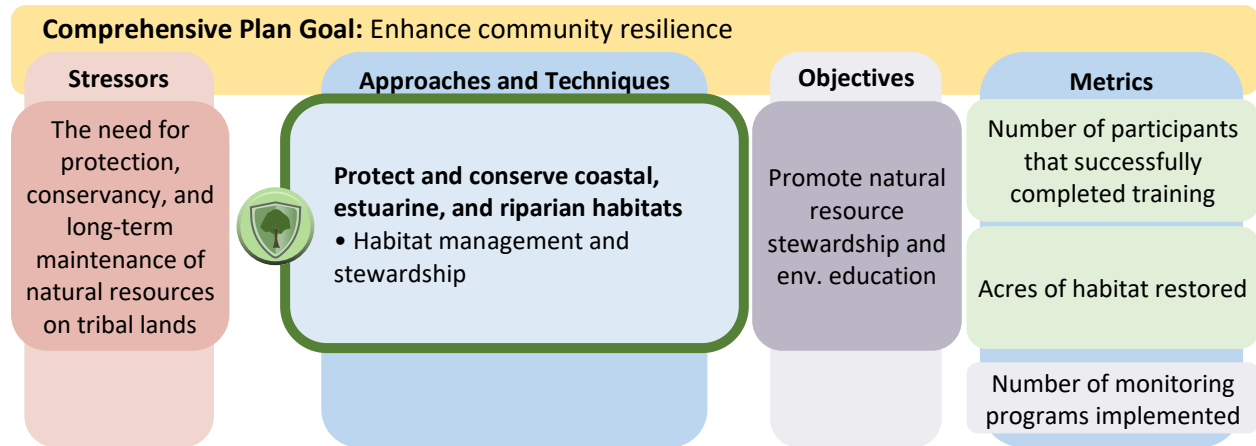


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The primary Comprehensive Plan goal of this program is to enhance community resilience ([Figure 29](#)). Investing in programs that enhance the environmental vitality of the area’s natural resources directly tied to the Gulf while also providing work opportunities for young people provides both economic and physical benefits. Each tribe has selected projects to implement that are relevant to environmental issues on their lands and consistent with the overarching goals and objectives of this program. Through this program, tribal youth would undertake projects to learn to protect natural resources and the environment through native plant

⁴ Under the RESTORE Act, to be eligible for funding in an FPL an activity must be carried out in the “Gulf Coast Region.” The Act defines “Gulf Coast Region” as “(A) in the Gulf Coast States, the coastal zones (as that term is defined in section 304 of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. § 1453)), except that, in this section, the term ‘coastal zones’ includes land within the coastal zones that is held in trust by, or the use of which is by law subject solely to the discretion of, the Federal Government or officers or agents of the Federal Government)) that border the Gulf of Mexico; (B) any adjacent land, water, and watersheds, that are within 25 miles of the coastal zones described in subparagraph (A) of the Gulf Coast States; and (C) all Federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico.” Pursuant to the Department of the Treasury regulations for the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund, “[a]n activity selected by the Council is carried out in the Gulf Coast Region when, in the reasonable judgment of the Council, each severable part of the activity is primarily designed to restore or protect that geographic area” 31 CFR § 34.202(a).

restoration, site cleanup, water and soil sampling, as well as take part in environmental and cultural education.

This program would continue to train youth in long-term stewardship of the Gulf Coast environment. Anticipated environmental benefits include disrupting the process of shoreline erosion, mitigating the impacts of climate change and associated sea level rise, restoring a critical environmental balance in a threatened area, and building in tribal youth a knowledge and commitment to protecting the environment, as well as providing an introduction to skills useful for future work in the field of environmental restoration. The impact of this education and training should continue for many generations to come.

This proposed program would be covered by DOI NEPA Categorical Exclusion 43 CFR § 46.210 (e) and (j) and associated environmental compliance documentation.

Request for Public Comment and Next Steps

The proposed FPL 3b is available for a 50-day public review and comment period beginning November 16, 2020. The deadline for submitting public comments on the proposed FPL 3b is 11:59 MT January 5, 2021. During this time frame, the RESTORE Council is providing an overview of the proposed FPL 3b via live public webinars. The schedule is provided on its [website](#). The public can provide feedback using one of the following options:

- Go to www.RestoreTheGulf.gov for:
 - Online link to the Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) site
 - Live public webinars schedule
- By email to RestoreCouncil@RestoreTheGulf.gov

The Council will review all comments received before the deadline. The Council will develop a written response to comments, and consider public comment as it determines how to proceed with the proposed FPL 3b. If the Council decides to proceed to a vote to approve FPL 3b, the public will be notified in advance of this vote via automatic email updates. Similarly, the final version of FPL 3b that would be subject to Council vote, will also be available via automatic updates.

The Council appreciates those stakeholders who are not only interested in Gulf restoration but also participate in the Council's restoration activities by offering comments during the public comment period. If you are interested in receiving notifications of upcoming webinars, public meeting or public comment periods, subscribe to receive the RESTORE Council's automatic email updates at www.restorethegulf.gov/contact-us and select the "Public Meetings and Public Comment Periods" category in addition to other categories of interest to you.

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