

# Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council Funded Priorities List 3a

February 12, 2020



# Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council Members

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## Executive Summary

This document describes the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council)'s funding decisions for two ecosystem projects. The funding for these two projects 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 comes 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 approval of this document, the Council had approved two other FPLs. The Council is including two ecosystem projects in the first of two phases of a third FPL, FPL 3.

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, comprised of a list of restoration projects and programs addressing ecosystem needs across the Gulf coast. As a result of the collaborative process, the Council has determined that developing FPL 3 in two phases enables the Council to respond to ecosystem needs, save money, and take advantage of important partnership opportunities to advance large-scale ecosystem restoration in the first phase. In the second phase of FPL 3, the Council will consider restoration projects and programs that address additional ecosystem needs across the Gulf.

In the first phase of FPL 3, referred to as FPL 3a, the Council is:

- (1) Identifying the River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp as a priority for potential future funding, and budgeting \$130,000,000 in implementation funds for this project. This project would restore processes that will enhance ecosystem health and reduce or minimize future loss of approximately 45,000 acres of bald cypress-water tupelo forest in coastal Louisiana by reintroducing Mississippi River water into the Maurepas Swamp. Louisiana is the sponsor of this project.
- (2) Approving \$26,880,000 in planning and implementation funds for the Perdido River Land Conservation and Habitat Enhancements project, which involves the acquisition, conservation, management, and restoration of approximately 10,000-12,000 acres of coastal habitat in Alabama. In addition, the Council is identifying a separate implementation component of this project as a priority for potential future funding, and budgeting \$1,120,000 for this additional implementation component. Alabama is the sponsor of this project.

The sponsor proposals for both projects, along with the Best Available Science (BAS) reviews of the two proposals, may be found at [www.restorethegulf.gov](http://www.restorethegulf.gov).

FPL 3a adheres to the FPL development process committed to by the Council, including BAS, public engagement and transparency, and the Planning Framework. Where applicable, the final project descriptions were modified based upon internal and external reviews and public comments. The process for developing FPL 3b will also adhere to the FPL development process. The Council plans to focus on the development of FPL 3b during 2020, with an anticipated Council vote in the first half of 2021. In FPL 3b, the Council will focus its investments in other areas of the Gulf, and will consider proposals that address ecosystem needs in Texas, Mississippi, Florida, and Alabama, along with regional and Gulf-wide proposals. The FPL 3b process will continue to be developed collaboratively and transparently, with both state and federal members eligible to submit proposals. Federally recognized Tribes will continue to be able to submit proposals via federal Council member sponsors.

## Introduction

This document describes the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council's (RESTORE Council or Council) funding decisions for two ecosystem projects. The funding for these two projects 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 comes 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 approval of this document, the Council had approved two FPLs. The Council is including two ecosystem projects in the first of two phases of a third FPL, FPL 3. This first phase is referred to as FPL 3a. The following provides background on the RESTORE Act and Bucket 2, along with an overview of the two projects.

### **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, which is comprised of 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 (Bucket 2) and (2) the Spill Impact Component (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.



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 Chair. The other federal members do not have a vote. 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 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.

### **Comprehensive Plan and Funded Priorities Lists**

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. This goal pertains to expenditures by the Gulf Coast states authorized in the RESTORE Act under the Direct Component (administered by the Department of the Treasury) and the Spill Impact Component (Bucket 3), and ensures that these investments can be considered in the context of comprehensive restoration. This goal does not apply to Bucket 2.

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 Priority 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 estuarine 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 these reviews, 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 practices.

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

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

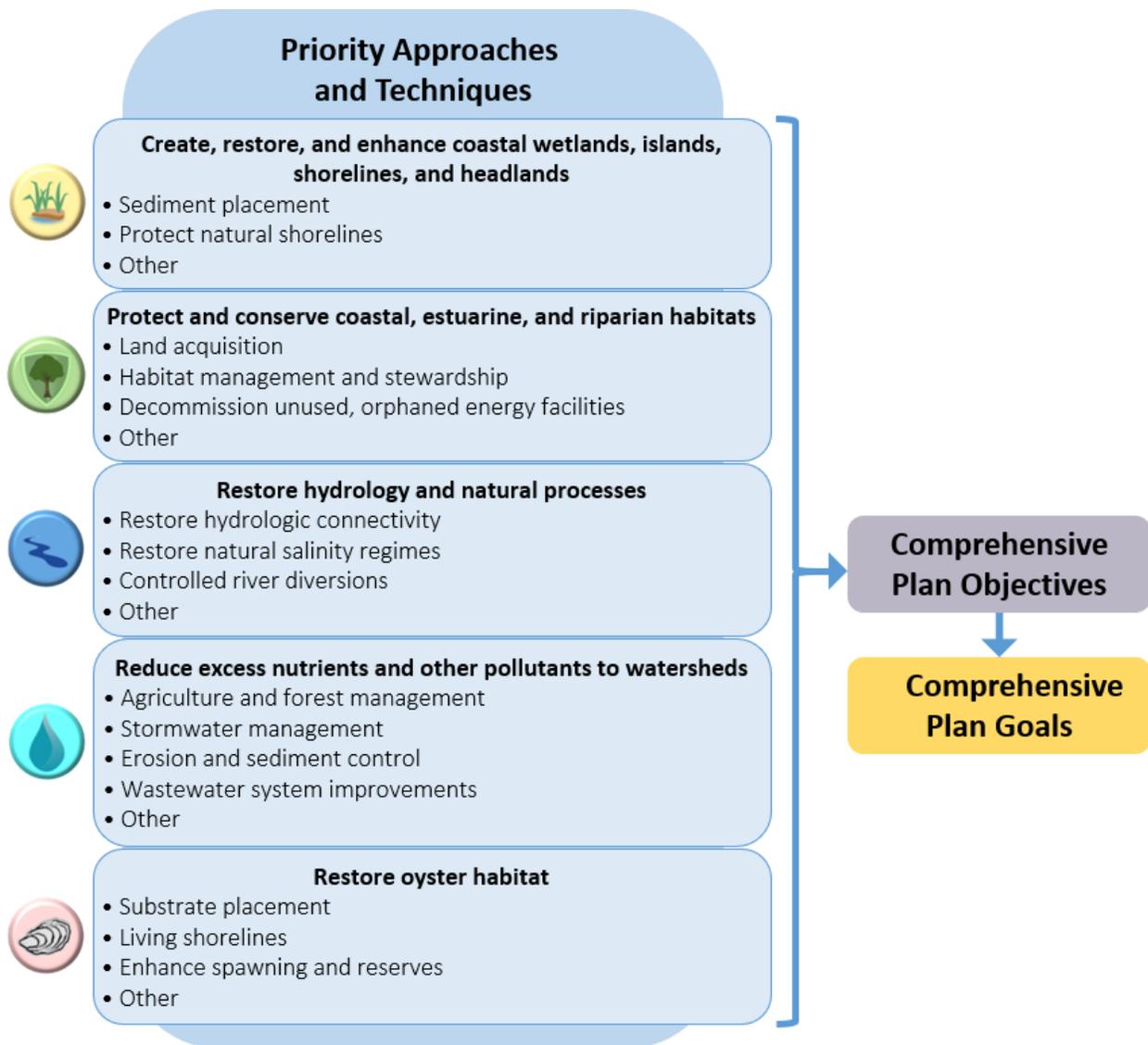


Figure 2. The 2019 Planning Framework priority approaches and techniques can be applied to support the Comprehensive Plan objectives and goals.

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 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 that are anticipated to be developed for FPL 3 funding consideration. As part of the process of developing future FPLs, the 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.

It was also through this collaborative process that the Council recognized that developing FPL 3 in two phases will enable the Council to fund projects requiring near-term attention and take advantage of important partnership opportunities to advance large-scale ecosystem restoration in the first phase, FPL 3a. In the second phase, FPL 3b, the Council will consider 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 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 best available science (BAS) and environmental compliance. This section also discusses the FPL categories and 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, BAS, 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 be worthy of potential future funding. Upon Council approval of FPL 3a, funding is budgeted for potential use on the Category 2 activities, but the Council is not in any way committed to such activities. As appropriate, the Council will review the activities in Category 2 in order 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, environmental compliance and 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 Trust Fund at the time of the Council vote to approve FPL 3a.

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## Overview of FPL 3a Projects

### River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp

*The Council hereby identifies the River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project as a priority for potential future funding (FPL Category 2), with \$130,000,000 budgeted for implementation of this project, pending a future Council vote.*

In FPL 1, the Council approved approximately \$14.2 million for planning, engineering and design, and permitting for the River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp (Maurepas project). This project would restore processes that will enhance ecosystem health and reduce or minimize future loss of approximately 45,000 acres of baldcypress-water tupelo forest in coastal Louisiana by reintroducing Mississippi River river water into the Maurepas Swamp. There are many ecological problems in this area, but probably the most significant is the current hydrologic regime, which is no longer conducive to sustain swamp forest habitat ([Shaffer et al. 2009, 2016](#)). Historically, the swamp received oxygenated water, sediment, and nutrient inputs from the Mississippi River during seasonal river flooding and via a smaller distributary, Bayou Manchac. That process was interrupted by the construction of local and eventually federal levees along the Mississippi River for flood control as well as the blockage of its connection with Bayou Manchac. This altered hydrologic regime has prevented natural connection of the swamp to the river's life-sustaining waters and resulted in oxygen-poor, stagnant water conditions that impair forest health and associated aquatic habitats. The reintroduction of river water would help revitalize the Maurepas Swamp by providing freshwater, nutrients, and sediments needed for healthy trees and long-term sustainability. This river reintroduction project (also known as a river "diversion") involves an intake and control structure on the Mississippi River, a channel to convey the river water to the swamp, and "guide levees" along the channel to ensure the water gets to the intended location and to prevent flooding ([Figure 3](#)).

Recent developments have created a situation where near-term Council action could facilitate this large-scale Gulf coast ecosystem restoration project, save money, and improve community resilience. Congress recently approved emergency appropriations for a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) hurricane risk reduction levee in the vicinity of this restoration project. This levee, called West Shore Lake Pontchartrain Hurricane and Storm Damage Reduction Project (WSLP), overlaps with a portion of the guide levees for the Maurepas project. There is an opportunity to save money by consolidating the engineering, design, and construction of the overlapping portions of the two projects.

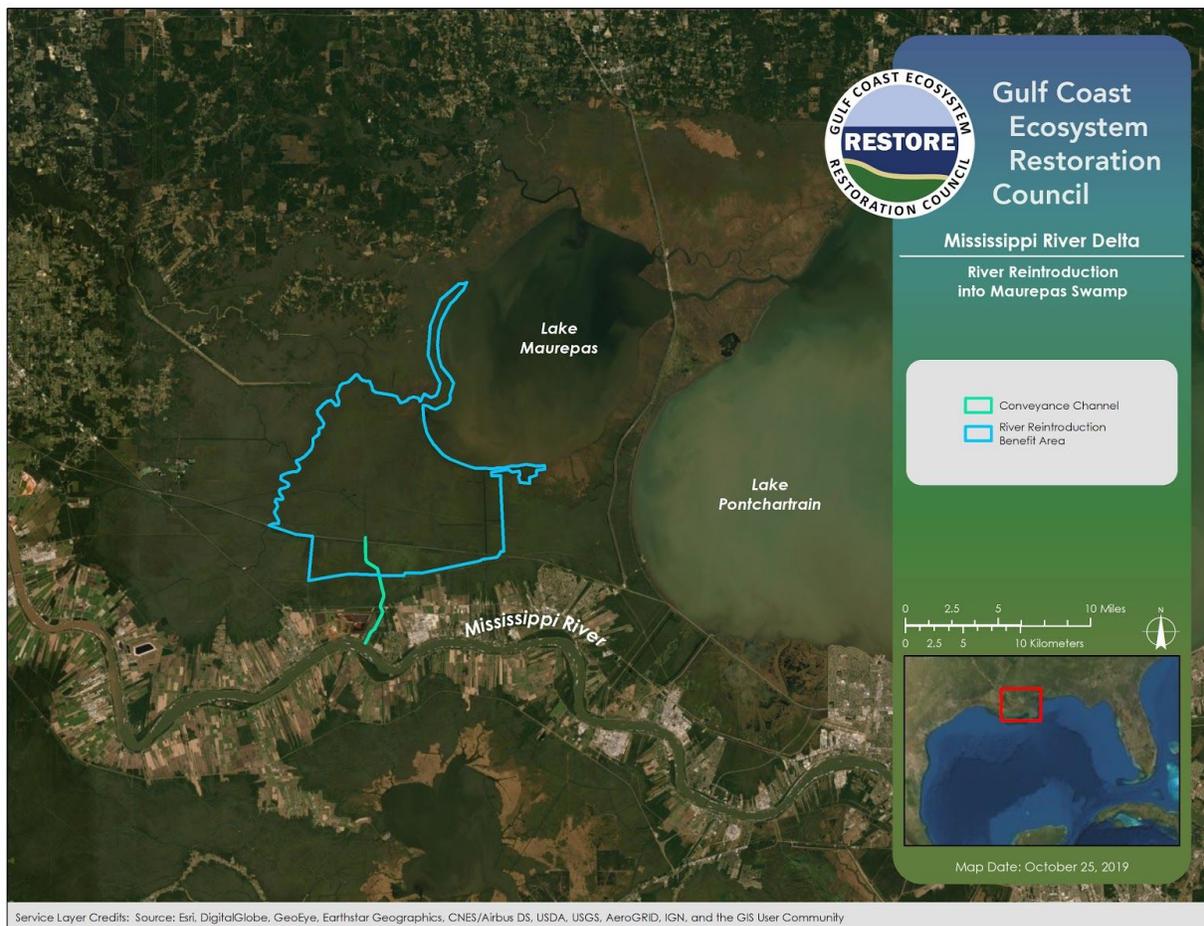


Figure 3. Area map of the River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project. The green line from the Mississippi River into Maurepas Swamp depicts the conveyance channel. The area outline depicts the anticipated benefit area.

The total estimated implementation cost of the Maurepas project is \$190 million. The Council is budgeting \$130 million for this project, and Louisiana is planning to use approximately \$60 million from Bucket 3 and/or another source to cover the remaining cost. The State and USACE are currently considering whether a portion of the environmental benefits that will be derived from implementation of the Maurepas project could be used to mitigate for swamp habitat impacts that will occur from the implementation of the WSLP levee project. The Council has no role in determining how to mitigate for the WSLP levee impacts, and defers fully to the State and USACE on that matter. The Council's budgeting of \$130 million of Bucket 2 funds and Louisiana's plan to use approximately \$60 million from Bucket 3 and/or another source for the Maurepas project do not depend on whether the levee mitigation concept advances.

The planning, engineering and design, and permitting phase of the Maurepas project are ongoing. For this reason the Council is not presently in a position to approve implementation funding for the Maurepas project. The Council is therefore listing the implementation component

of the Maurepas project as a priority for potential future funding by placing the project in Category 2 of FPL 3a. This action is intended to support the coordinated implementation of the Maurepas project and the WSLP levee as these processes continue, with the goal of realizing the cost savings and strategic advantages discussed above. When the planning phase is complete, the Council will be in a position to vote on whether to approve implementation funding for the project.

In addition to the cost savings discussed above, implementing both the Maurepas project and the WSLP levee would provide substantially improved resilience for the communities and infrastructure in the area. The baldcypress-water tupelo swamp can serve as a valuable storm surge buffer. The restored area of the Maurepas Swamp would complement the WSLP project by providing an additional layer of natural flood defense in front of the levee. This strategy of layering complementary flood risk reduction measures is known as “multiple lines of defense.” Building both the levee and the Maurepas project would serve as a prime example of multiple lines of defense, providing substantial, long-term improvements in community resilience. By partnering with the USACE, the Council has a unique opportunity to help facilitate two important coastal projects, thereby providing for greater overall community resilience in the area.

This Council action is based on an extensive history of planning and science, federal and state support, and Congressional authorization of the Maurepas project. In 2001, the federal-state Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act Task Force approved planning funds for the Maurepas project. In 2004, the USACE built on this initial investment and identified the Maurepas project as a near-term priority in the Louisiana Coastal Area (LCA) Ecosystem Restoration plan ([USACE 2004](#)). The LCA Plan, including the Maurepas project, was then authorized by Congress in the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 ([WRDA 2007](#)). The Maurepas project has been included in the 2007, 2012, and 2017 Louisiana Comprehensive Master Plans for a Sustainable Coast ([CPRA 2007](#), [2012](#), [2017](#)). In 2012, the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (Task Force) Strategy called for expedited construction of authorized river reintroduction projects ([GCERTF 2011](#)). The RESTORE Act subsequently directed the Council to include in its Comprehensive Plan, the strategy, projects, and programs recommended by the Task Force. By including the Maurepas project in this FPL, the Council is building upon this history, previous investments in project planning, and fulfilling the Task Force recommendation to expedite its construction.

The Maurepas project is consistent with the RESTORE Act Priority Criteria and the Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives ([2015 Initial Comprehensive Plan](#)). [Figure 4](#) shows the relationship between the Maurepas project and these requirements, as well as the Council’s Planning Framework with respect to the restoration of hydrology and natural processes through the use of controlled diversions.

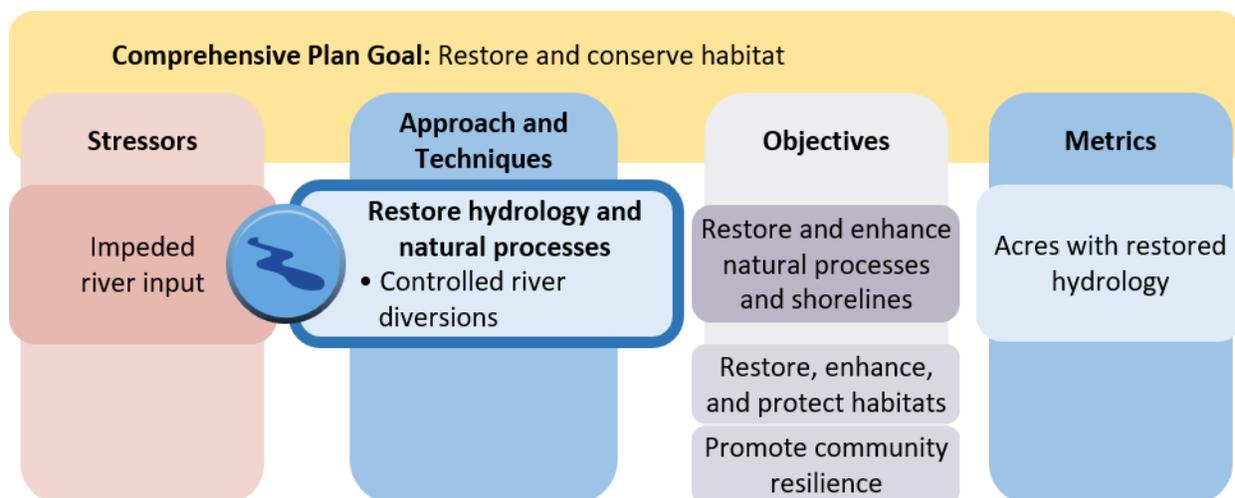


Figure 4. The River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project applies Planning Framework approaches and techniques to support Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives. The controlled river diversion technique will address impeded river input into Maurepas Swamp, supporting the primary objective to restore and enhance natural processes and shorelines. Success in meeting this objective may be tracked using acres with restored hydrology as a metric.

The Maurepas [final project description](#), developed by Louisiana, provides additional detail on the project, including information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget. This project description has been revised in response to internal and external reviews.

### Perdido River Land Conservation and Habitat Enhancements

*The Council hereby approves \$26,880,000 in planning and implementation funds (FPL Category 1) for the Perdido River Land Conservation and Habitat Enhancements project. In addition, the Council is listing a separate implementation component of this project as a priority for potential future funding (FPL Category 2), with \$1,120,000 budgeted for this additional implementation component, pending a future Council vote.*

Through the FPL collaborative planning process, Alabama has identified an opportunity for a large-scale, multi-member, multi-project, coordinated program in the Perdido Watershed. The States of Alabama (70%) and Florida (30%) share the watershed and the Perdido River as a border. This watershed includes floodplain forests, hydric pine forests, longleaf pine forests, and freshwater wetlands. Water quality and quantity protections are derived through its floodplains, which store and disperse runoff from storms and floods and recharge aquifers. Undeveloped areas act as natural filters, protecting water quality and sustaining wildlife such as recreationally and commercially important fish and oyster resources. Land use conversion and urbanization have contributed to habitat loss and water quality degradation in this watershed ([Kirschenfeld et al. 2007](#)). Much of the forested land in this area is in silviculture which impacts water quality via runoff to area water bodies ([NFWFMD 2017](#)); and contributes to habitat fragmentation, loss,

and degradation. This area of Baldwin County also is rapidly urbanizing, with significant development pressures.

This project involves the acquisition and placement into state conservation management of approximately 10,000 - 12,000 acres of habitat that will serve as a cornerstone for advancing the vision of a large-scale, coordinated program in the Perdido watershed. The State is seeking parcel(s) that would supplement an existing 17,337 acres in public ownership in Alabama, and roughly 12,400 acres in public ownership in Florida. Alabama has identified a potential parcel for acquisition, referred to as Magnolia South, and is engaged in conversations with the owner. This property has extensive frontage along the Perdido River and is located adjacent to existing publicly-owned conservation lands ([Figure 5](#)). The property is currently in silviculture (timber management) and contains inland forested wetlands, riparian buffers (stream buffers), and tributaries of both the Styx and Perdido Rivers.

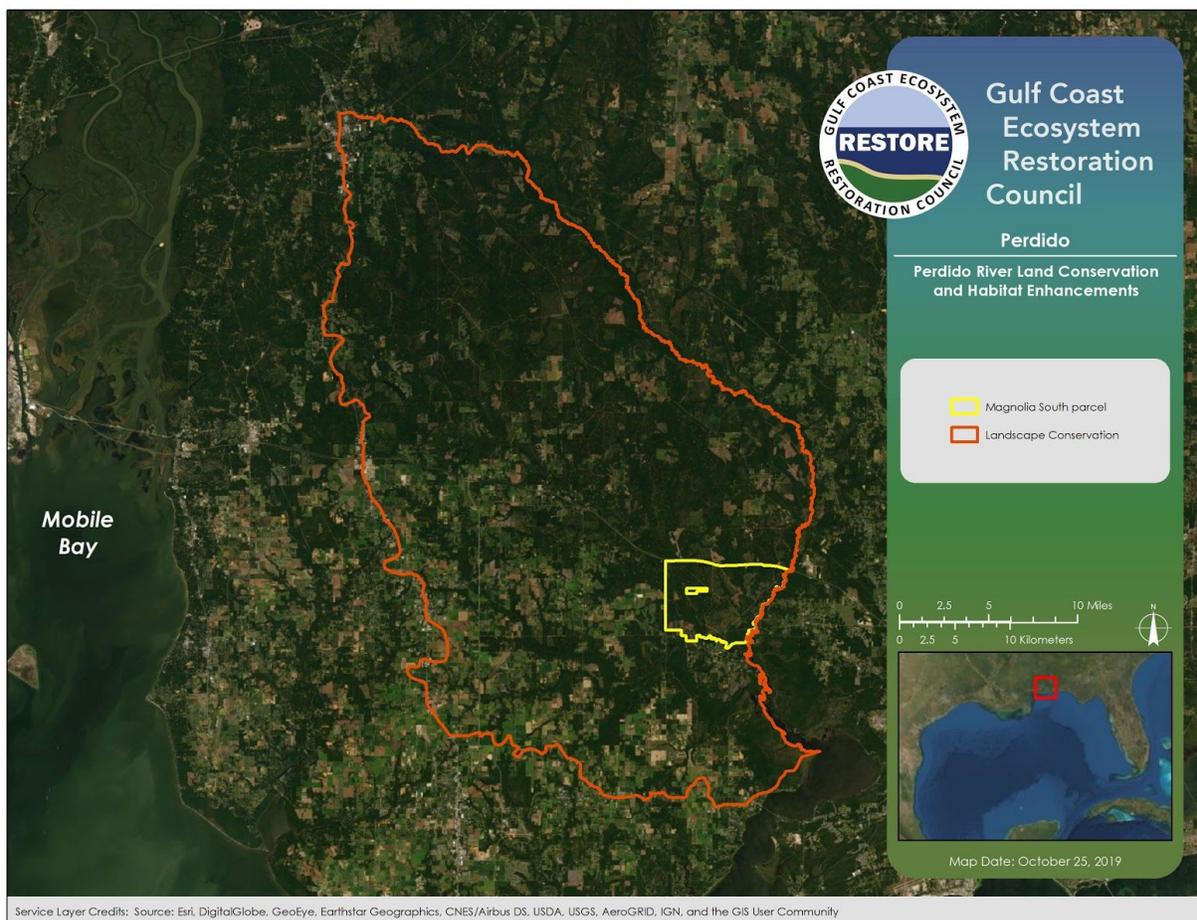


Figure 5. Region of the Perdido watershed where the State of Alabama will acquire, conserve, and manage approximately 10,000 - 12,000 acres of habitat. The smaller area outlined in yellow, the Magnolia South parcel, may be suitable to meet project goals.

Should this property not be available, the State of Alabama will consider other suitable parcel(s) for acquisition and management based on the following criteria: (a) Parcel is currently nominated or could be nominated for acquisition into the State's Forever Wild program; (b) Parcel(s) are located in the Perdido Watershed; (c) Parcel(s) are adjacent to or near existing lands under conservation management; (d) Habitat characteristics are similar to target parcel such that management measures could be expected to yield the same or similar benefits. Utilizing these criteria, there are currently a number of alternative parcels that could be suitable for acquisition and management.

In addition to acquisition, the State will conduct habitat management and stewardship on the tract which could include prescribed burning, invasive species removal, longleaf pine restoration, and protection and habitat enhancements for species including the gopher tortoise. Education and outreach activities, including installation of signage and an educational display about the Perdido watershed, will be conducted. Acquired land will also be available for recreational use by the public and become part of the Perdido Wildlife Management Area.

Acquiring this property in the Perdido watershed can reduce the amount of land available for development and the associated ecosystem stressors that are the inevitable result of urbanization. If successful, this acquisition will connect with public lands to the north and south. In addition to placing large parcel(s) of land into state conservation, management and stewardship will result in increased habitat connectivity and sustained or enhanced biodiversity of natural communities with an emphasis on those species found within the longleaf pine ecosystem ([Outcalt and Brockway 2010](#)). Additionally, this action will serve as a cornerstone for a broader ecosystem conservation and restoration effort where stressors affecting water quality and habitat quality and function could be addressed synergistically ([NWFWMMD 2017](#)). By acting now, the Council will protect this valuable habitat while also facilitating future watershed restoration efforts in this area.

This project is consistent with the RESTORE Act Priority Criteria and the Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives ([2015 Initial Comprehensive Plan](#)). [Figure 6](#) shows the relationship between this acquisition, conservation, and management project and these requirements, as well as the Council's [2019 Planning Framework](#), specifically with respect to protect and conserve coastal, estuarine, and riparian habitats. This geographic area also is included in the Planning Framework.



Figure 6. The Perdido River Land Conservation and Habitat Enhancements project applies Planning Framework approaches and techniques to support Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives. The land acquisition technique and the habitat management and stewardship technique will address land use change and urbanization, habitat fragmentation, and silvicultural runoff, supporting the primary objective to restore, enhance, and protect habitats. Success in meeting this objective may be tracked using acres acquired in fee, acres under improved management, and number of management plans developed as metrics. The metric number of educational displays installed may also be used to track success in meeting the secondary objective to promote natural resource stewardship and environmental education.

In the draft FPL 3a, only the planning portion of the Perdido River Land Conservation and Habitat Enhancements project was listed for potential inclusion in FPL Category 1, which indicates those projects or programs that are approved for funding. The implementation component was listed in FPL Category 2, which indicates that these actions have been designated as priorities for potential future funding. Since publication of draft FPL 3a, Alabama worked with other members of the Council in an effort to make some of the implementation activities eligible for FPL Category 1 prior to a Council vote on the final FPL. Specifically, Alabama worked with the US Department of Interior and the US Department of Agriculture to address compliance with the environmental laws applicable to the land acquisition and management activities of this project. FPL 3a reflects this change in the funding approval for the Perdido River Land Conservation and Habitat Enhancements project. Some proposed implementation activities remain in FPL Category 2, including minimal thinning of existing forested areas to facilitate future management and restoration actions, invasive species removal, and minimal hydrologic restoration work. The environmental compliance documentation that supports the approval of Category 1 implementation funding for this project can be found [here](#).

The Perdido [final project description](#), developed by Alabama, provides additional detail on the project, including updated information regarding compliance with the RESTORE Act,

environmental laws, background, methods, risk and uncertainties, and budget. This project description has been further revised in response to internal and external reviews of the original proposal and public comments.

## Public Comment Process for FPL 3a

The draft FPL 3a was available for a public review and comment period that began on December 9, 2019, and ended on January 10, 2020. During that time the RESTORE Council provided an overview of the proposed FPL 3a via live public webinars and public meetings in Louisiana and Alabama, and accepted public comments. The Council has reviewed all comments received by the deadline, developed a written response to comments, and has considered these comments as it determined how to proceed with FPL 3a. The Council decided to proceed to a vote to approve FPL 3a and notified the public in advance of this vote via automatic email updates and information made available on the Council's website at [www.restorethegulf.gov](http://www.restorethegulf.gov).

## Next Steps - FPL 3b Process

FPL 3b will focus on proposals that address ecosystem needs in Texas, Mississippi, Florida, and Alabama, along with regional and Gulf-wide proposals. Development of FPL 3b will continue to be collaborative and transparent, using the process previously set forth by the Council. Specifically, the FPL 3b development process will include continued member pre-proposal collaboration to identify the most promising concepts. The members will then develop and submit proposals, which will be reviewed for BAS and consistency with the RESTORE Act and the Comprehensive Plan. These proposals and the reviews will be available to the public at [www.restorethegulf.gov](http://www.restorethegulf.gov). The Council will then develop and seek public comment on the draft FPL 3b. After considering and responding to this public comment, the Council will move to a vote to approve FPL 3b. Federally recognized Tribes will have the opportunity to submit proposals through a federal Council member sponsor. The Council anticipates completing FPL 3b sometime in the first half of 2021.

The Council appreciates those 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](http://www.restorethegulf.gov/contact-us) and select the "Public Meetings and Public Comment Periods" category in addition to other categories of interest to you.

## References

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