

## Council Member Applicant and Proposal Information Summary Sheet

<b>Council Member:</b> Department of the Interior	Point of Contact: Cindy Dohner Phone: 404 679-4000 Email: Cynthia_Dohner@fws.gov
<b>Project Identification</b>	
Project Title: Gulf Coastal Habitat Restoration Program	
State(s): TX, LA, MS, AL, FL	County/City/Region: Potentially all counties within the Gulf Coast Region
Specific Location: <i>Projects must be located within the Gulf Coast Region as defined in RESTORE Act. (attach map or photos, if applicable)</i> Throughout the 5 Gulf States, specifically within the Gulf Coast Region	
<b>Project Description</b>	
<b>RESTORE Goals:</b> <i>Identify all RESTORE Act goals this project supports.</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> _P_ Restore and Conserve Habitat	<input type="checkbox"/> _S_ Replenish and Protect Living Coastal and Marine Resources
<input type="checkbox"/> _S_ Restore Water Quality	<input type="checkbox"/> _S_ Enhance Community Resilience
<input type="checkbox"/> _S_ Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy	
<b>RESTORE Objectives:</b> <i>Identify all RESTORE Act objectives this project supports.</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> _P_ Restore, Enhance, and Protect Habitats	<input type="checkbox"/> _S_ Promote Community Resilience
<input type="checkbox"/> _S_ Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources	<input type="checkbox"/> _S_ Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education
<input type="checkbox"/> _S_ Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources	<input type="checkbox"/> _S_ Improve Science-Based Decision-Making Processes
<input type="checkbox"/> _S_ Restore and Enhance Natural Processes and Shorelines	
<b>RESTORE Priorities:</b> <i>Identify all RESTORE Act priorities this project supports.</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> _X_ Priority 1: Projects that are projected to make the greatest contribution	
<input type="checkbox"/> _X_ Priority 2: Large-scale projects and programs that are projected to substantially contribute to restoring	
<input type="checkbox"/> _X_ Priority 3: Projects contained in existing Gulf Coast State comprehensive plans for the restoration...	
<input type="checkbox"/> _X_ Priority 4: Projects that restore long-term resiliency of the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries...	
<b>RESTORE Commitments:</b> <i>Identify all RESTORE Act Comprehensive Plan commitments that this project supports.</i>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _X_ Commitment to Science-based Decision Making	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _X_ Commitment to Regional Ecosystem-based Approach to Restoration	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _X_ Commitment to Engagement, Inclusion, and Transparency	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _X_ Commitment to Leverage Resources and Partnerships	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _X_ Commitment to Delivering Results and Measuring Impacts	
<b>RESTORE Proposal Type and Phases:</b> <i>Please identify which type and phase best suits this proposal</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> _ Project <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _X_ Planning <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _X_ Technical Assistance <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _X_ Implementation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _X_ Program	
<b>Project Cost and Duration</b>	
<b>Project Cost Estimate:</b> Total :        \$ <u>26,795,100*</u>	<b>Project Timing Estimate:</b> Date Anticipated to Start: <u>06/2015</u> Time to Completion: <u>60/5</u> months / years Anticipated Project Lifespan: <u>50</u> years

\*Project is scalable.

## Gulf Coastal Habitat Restoration Program PROPOSAL

### **Executive Summary**

The proposed Gulf Coastal Habitat Restoration Program (GCHRP) is designed to execute on-the-ground projects that embody the specific goals and objectives of the RESTORE Act and the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council. The primary goal of the GCHRP is to restore and conserve the health, diversity, and resilience of key coastal, estuarine, and marine habitats – and the living resources that depend on them. While individual projects may be discrete in construction, this Program will collectively assess success on a broader landscape scale. Focusing work to accomplish defined habitat objectives across the Gulf will secondarily benefit other priority issues important to the Council, including water quality, coastal and living marine resources, community resilience, and economic revitalization.

Over the next 5 years, the GCHRP could provide up to \$20 million in direct on-the-ground project funding for conservation actions in the 5 Gulf States. This request, while readily spendable, could be scaled to meet lower funding levels.

The Service is volunteering to lead an effort that involves a core group of state and federal partners interested in carrying out the GCHRP. To capitalize on successful practices, this Program will be modeled after existing voluntary habitat restoration programs such as the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's National Coastal Program and Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, and other successful on-the-ground conservation delivery programs such as the Environmental Protection Agency's National Estuary Program and NOAA's Community-based Restoration Program, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, and other public-private partnerships such as America's Longleaf Range-wide Conservation Initiative and the Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership. A priority of the GCHRP will be to collaborate with other programs focused on finding opportunities to help train a local, highly-skilled restoration workforce.

This Program will use funding mechanisms such as cooperative agreements, grant agreements, and private landowner agreements to implement projects within the Gulf Coast Region. The GCHRP may fund projects directly or provide funding and technical expertise through partnership agreements using the same type of mechanisms. The types of projects expected to be funded through the GCHRP can include (but are not limited to) the use of prescribed fire for habitat management; control of invasive or exotic species; restoration of oyster reefs, wetlands, coastal prairie, coastal dune lakes, agricultural fields, colonial rookery islands, riparian habitats, coastal forest ecosystems such as longleaf pine savanna, cypress tupelo and mangrove habitats; living shoreline protection; fish and aquatic passage and barrier removal; beneficial or direct use of dredged material to create marshes or other habitats; transplanting and re-introduction of

native plant species; and land conservation, including voluntary easements with landowners or fee-title acquisition.

The GCHRP is designed to use proven mechanisms and provide crucially needed capacity to focus and synergize on-the-ground implementation of restoration projects through entities who may not have direct access to Deepwater Horizon Spill-related funding sources (i.e., NRDA Trustee Council, RESTORE Council, etc.). It will also provide technical support to bring together complimentary partner priorities that accomplish meaningful on-the-ground results which help move the needle for conservation of fish and wildlife resources.

## **Proposal Narrative**

### *Introduction and Background*

The RESTORE Council (Council) has the daunting task of overseeing potentially billions of dollars in fines related to the 2010 DWH Oil Spill through what is being referred to as the “Bucket 2” funding mechanism under the RESTORE Act legislation. The Council has provided guidance that includes overarching goals and objectives for restoration to its members and other external partners in the Comprehensive Ecosystem Restoration Plan. Now, Council members are being asked to collaborate and develop the first suite of projects and programs to be prioritized for funding and included in the Funded Priorities List (FPL). As request by the Council, this initial suite of proposals is to be focused on two primary focus areas - habitat or water quality - and be foundational, sustainable, have a high likelihood for success, and benefit the human community. The proposed Gulf Coastal Habitat Restoration Program (GCHRP), by design, fills each of these needs and embodies the specific goals and objectives of the RESTORE Act and the Council. The GCHRP will facilitate the delivery of on-the-ground coastal habitat restoration projects over the next 5 years throughout the Gulf Coast Region (GCR) using both existing and emerging partnerships.

### Model Programs

To craft a business model poised for long-term service to Gulf restoration, the GCHRP plans to build from successful components of existing programs and leverage their individual capacities. While proposed as a new program to provide technical support and on-the-ground restoration, this effort would be patterned after successful voluntary restoration programs such as the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service’s (Service) National Coastal Program (CP), Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (PFW), and Fish Passage Program and other successful on-the-ground conservation delivery programs such as the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) National Estuary Program (NEP), NOAA’s Community-based Restoration Program (CRP), U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), as well as public-private partnerships such as America’s Longleaf Range-wide Conservation Initiative and the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership. Additional information to support the basis of these programs into the GCHRP model is included as Appendix B.

## The GCHRP Business Model

The GCHRP will be a true Gulf-wide partnership by combining the proven elements of existing voluntary restoration programs plus stakeholder and partner engagement aspects of other national and regional partnerships. The end goal here is to not only provide more effective and efficient delivery of on-the-ground restoration but also take these collaborative efforts to the next level and begin to provide answers as to how projects funded under the GCHRP are helping to move the Gulf restoration needle (Figure 1).

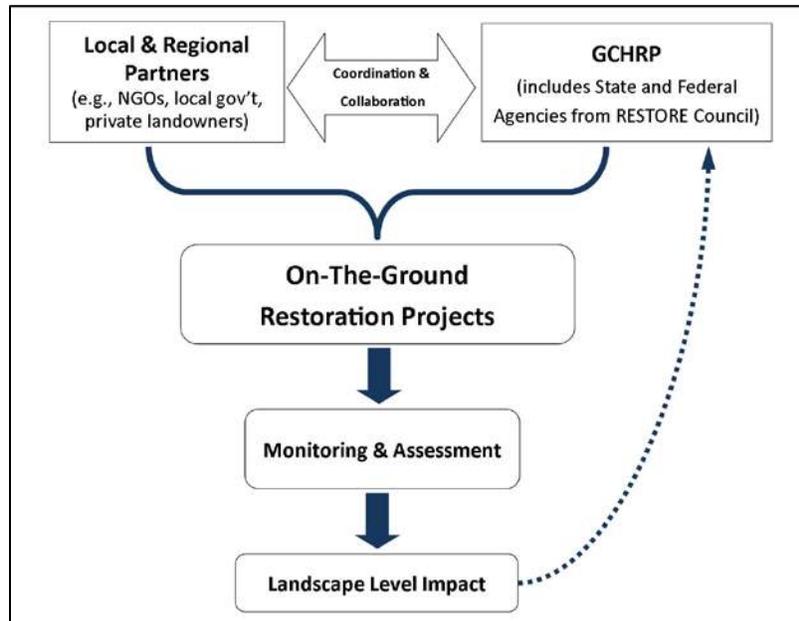


Figure 1. Conceptual Model for the GCHRP.

Each of the programs described in Appendix B brings a unique and successful component to the GCHRP. For example, the existing watershed planning work and local expertise of the CP and NEPs will help focus and align priorities. The administrative template of contracts and agreements with local partners born out of the CRP can facilitate ease in the distribution of funding. And, the GCHRP can capitalize on the relationships with private landowners developed by the NRCS.

The GCHRP model is based on the following premise. State and Federal agencies, organizations, and individuals have invested significant effort to identify, plan and permit projects ready for implementation as well as areas where further focus for conservation science, planning and design is needed. We proposed to establish a core team of both state and federal agency partners as the vehicle to execute the GCHRP and incorporate the work of these individual entities into setting restoration goals for the Program. Funding will be distributed to projects throughout the Gulf states to implement restoration, and monitoring and assess how these outcomes are helping to accomplish broader biological objectives across the landscape. Ultimately, this tactic will provide a larger watershed approach that maximizes alignment of

activities across the Gulf (such as State Wildlife Action Plan priorities and other regional conservation planning), yet will seek to involve local partnerships and a workforce that may include private landowners, county and city governments, citizen science groups and business interests. This model promotes integration of existing standard operating procedures, a breadth of experience and support for all of these efforts as well as the flexibility to develop new approaches for nearly any given situation.

### Setting a Solid Foundation

The Council recognizes that now is the time to establish foundational efforts, both through discrete projects and program establishment. The GCHRP is designed to be a cornerstone for on-the-ground project implementation throughout the GCR by providing a framework and the additional (and currently missing) capacity necessary to execute what will be an unprecedented number of restoration projects. It will be based on existing and emerging strategic, science-based landscape planning and operate under proven business models.

The Gulf Coast will see more dedicated restoration funds in the upcoming years than ever before. While this is a rare opportunity born out of a terrible tragedy, we believe it is our collective responsibility to ensure this unprecedented opportunity is not squandered. This Program is a mechanism to deliver the big picture by leveraging not only resources resulting from the DWH spill but also the existing grant programs dedicated to restoration in the Gulf Coast Region.

**One of the most critical concerns restoration partners have is where lies the capacity to actually implement on-the-ground projects funded through all these sources? This proposal seeks to address this critical organizational and functional shortfall.** State and Federal agencies have suffered declining budgets for several years. NGO partners struggle as well. We will soon face an unparalleled workload resulting from new funding mechanisms that direct money to a relatively small number of partners. The Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program (NRDAR), the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council), and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation each serve as vehicles to administer DWH spill related fines to specific Trustees, Council members, and states, respectively. While there are opportunities for entities outside these receiving bodies to peripherally engage and potentially implement restoration projects, a Program does not currently exist that focuses on providing funding to those entities who are capable of providing on-the-ground implementation capacity. And, it is possible that smaller-scale and/or local community priorities may not be readily incorporated into the larger-scale multi-million dollar projects that are being proposed by Trustees, Council members, and the states.

Additionally, now more than ever, there needs to be a high level of understanding of what other partners may be working on (to minimize duplication) and what local governments and citizens are concerned about (to leverage resources). We propose that this Program can effectively serve as a conduit to synergize and align priorities and complement our collective assets. For example,

the GCHRP can employ local relationships to allocate money to local partners who have the expertise to execute contracts, engineering, permitting, construction, and monitoring; all while using national and regional networks (such as Migratory Bird Joint Ventures, Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, Watershed Partnerships throughout the Florida Panhandle and other regional implementation teams) to address the most critical conservation needs in the right places with the right tools.

Funds provided to the GCHRP will be primarily obligated for on-the-ground project implementation, rather than programmatic support. The Service is volunteering to lead this multi-agency effort and could, if needed, initially deliver funds to high priority work throughout the Gulf as we work with our agency partners within the GCHRP to develop a consensus for Gulf-wide restoration needs. However, it is the intent of this Program to collectively develop the multi-agency approach to delivering funds (similar to the NOAA CRP Partnership with the Gulf of Mexico Foundation). The GCHRP is not intended to duplicate existing grant or assistance programs (such as the Coastal Impact Assistance Program or State Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Grants) but rather complement ongoing work, maintain and grow the vital network of partners in local communities, and bridge the gap between larger watershed and landscape planning and local community-based implementation. This Program is needed to fill the niche of “Think Globally, Act Locally” for Gulf restoration.

#### Addressing RESTORE Comprehensive Plan Goals and Priority Criteria

**The primary goal of the GCHRP is to restore and conserve the health, diversity, and resilience of key coastal, estuarine, and marine habitats – and the living resources dependent upon them.** While individual projects may be discrete in construction, this Program will assess the overall contribution of funded projects on the broader landscape scale. Focusing work to accomplish defined habitat objectives across the Gulf will secondarily benefit other priority issues important to the Council, including water quality, coastal and living marine resources, community resilience, and economic revitalization.

The GCHRP will utilize a place-based implementation strategy to deliver restoration. The overall concept of the GCHRP, however, is to synergize existing planning and outreach work on a larger scale by utilizing local and regional partnerships for the implementation. For example, we have developed a map (see Figure 2) where we overlaid strategic and priority geographies that could serve as foundational planning units. These include the Gulf Focus Areas as outlined in the Service’s *Vision for a Healthy Gulf of Mexico Watershed*, the seven NEPs within EPA, NOAA’s Gulf NERRs, and USDA’s Gulf of Mexico Initiative area, and show how we can begin to see where “x marks the spot” of overlapping priorities. The GCHRP will provide the platform to integrate other current planning efforts and priorities outlined for that geography (e.g., a NEP Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan) with the overall scientific goals and objectives for the broader landscape and the Gulf Region (e.g., Migratory Bird Joint Venture population

objectives) (See Appendix E for a list of reference planning efforts). The GCHRP partners will then collectively define a step-down strategy to reach restoration implementation. This method has proven to be a very effective path for implementing local on the ground conservation that rolls up into the greater effort. The GCHRP will look to partnerships and efforts such as the America's Longleaf Local Implementation Teams, Southeastern Aquatic Resources Partnership, National Estuary Programs, and the Joint Venture Programs for landscape-scale guidance, as well to local partnerships that can integrate those efforts with local restoration needs.

It is becoming standard practice to design coastal restoration projects with a changing climate in mind. This leads to a more resilient design for construction that is geared towards a longer lifespan (if not full restoration) and oftentimes increased protection of coastal natural resources and community infrastructure. Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) are public-private partnerships that share and provide science to support the sustainability our land, water, wildlife and cultural resources. Four LCCs serve the Gulf Coast Region -the Gulf Coastal Plains and Ozarks, Gulf Coastal Prairie, South Atlantic, and Peninsular Florida. These LCCs along with the Southeast and South central Climate Science Centers and the Southeast Regional Climate Hub will be foundational partnerships for providing science-based objectives and climate science to the regional effort and downscaled information to the implementation teams and focus areas. Many tools, including the Gulf Coast Vulnerability Assessment and other physical and social science studies and risk assessment studies will aid in project development and selection.

#### Addressing Objectives of the Comprehensive Plan

A major strength of the GCHRP will be the flexibility to fund the development and delivery of a wide range of on-the-ground coastal habitat restoration and land conservation activities. Examples of project types include, but are not limited to: the use of prescribed fire for habitat management; control of invasive or exotic species; restoration of oyster reefs, wetlands, coastal prairie, coastal dune lakes, agricultural fields, colonial rookery islands, riparian habitats, coastal forest ecosystems such as longleaf pine savanna, cypress tupelo and mangrove habitats; living shoreline protection; fish and aquatic passage and barrier removal; beneficial or direct use of dredged material to create marshes or other habitats; transplanting and re-introduction of native plant species; and land conservation, including voluntary easements with landowners or fee-title acquisition.

The GCHRP will address many of the overall objectives of the Comprehensive Plan; however, implementation of on-the-ground projects will primarily target habitat conservation, restoration, and protection objectives. Valuable byproducts from the variety of restoration actions anticipated to be funded would undoubtedly benefit and indirectly address the remaining Comprehensive Plan Objectives. For example, restoration of nearshore barrier island habitats in the Gulf not only provides important habitat for many breeding, wintering and migratory birds (Harrington 2008, Withers 2002, Moore et al. 1990, Leumas 2010, Sprandel et al. 2000), but also provides crucial buffers against tropical storms and sea level rise to coastal infrastructure and

recreation for thousands of people (Anthony et al. 2009, Stone et al. 2005, Day et al. 2007, Dias et al. 2003, Farber et al. 2002). Restoration of the extensive Gulf Coast salt, brackish, and freshwater marshes not only boost productivity of nursery habitats for many economically important species such as crabs, shrimp and fish (Beck et al. 2001) but also reverses shoreline degradation and enhances coastal resiliency (Constanza et al. 2008). Protection and restoration of submerged aquatic vegetation communities, including seagrasses, not only provide shelter and foraging habitat for many fisheries species (Beck et al. 2001), but also indicate suitable water quality and serve as a nutrient pump by taking up nutrients from surrounding sediments, transporting them through the plant, and releasing them into the water column (Zieman and Zieman 1989). Riverine floodplain restoration provides many benefits including habitat for fish and wildlife (Buler et al. 2007, Gauthreaux and Belser 2003) but also serve to protect communities from flooding and erosion (Verhoeven et al. 2006, Tockner and Stanford 2002) and their forests serve as conduits for groundwater exchange (Sun et al. 2000). In general, wetlands help maintain and improve water quality by intercepting surface water and storm water runoff (Verhoeven et al. 2006, Tomer and Stanford 2002, Mitsch and Day 2006), removing or retaining nutrients (e.g., nitrogen and phosphorus) (Mitsch et al. 2001), processing chemical and organic wastes, and reducing sediment loads downstream (Tockner and Stanford 2002).

The GCHRP will benefit from strong relationships that already exist throughout the GCR and will establish a mechanism to fund implementation at the local level by primarily non-Trustee/Council groups. For example, ties with landowners provided by the NRCS to work on ranches, commercial forests, farmlands and other working lands and shorelines will help secure the Nation's food supply, provide a boon to local economies, reduce flood and storm risk, clean our air and water, and provide valuable habitat for fish and wildlife. It is a goal of the GCHRP to keep working lands working and in partnership to ensure continued benefits and resiliency for fish, wildlife, and their habitats, as well as for human communities by using voluntary private landowner incentives such as conservation easements and other proven tools. In the same manner, the GCHRP will work with public land managers to provide and develop guidelines and conservation actions on those lands to maintain the missions critical to Program partners while restoring habitat and providing mutual benefits. For example, living shoreline initiatives, such as those supported by EPA, NOAA, and the Service, coordinated through the GCHRP can help local governments and public landowners make their shorelines less erodible and vulnerable to sea level rise.

Through a strong commitment to outreach and education, the GCHRP model will provide opportunities for environmental education and promote natural resource stewardship through direct on-the-ground involvement in habitat restoration projects and classroom instruction. Many of the projects and initiatives are volunteer implemented and encourage citizen-based monitoring and management. In addition, the GCHRP will rely on our formal science partnerships and relationships with academia and professionals to ensure a landscape-level

approach is delivered at the local level, and appropriate conservation design, monitoring, and supportive adaptive management frameworks are in place for projects across the Gulf.

#### Addressing Commitments of the Comprehensive Plan

The decisions made by the GCHRP will be based on the best available science and will evolve over time to incorporate new science, tools, and products that come on line as a result of RESTORE Trust Fund investments such as the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Science Program, the Centers of Excellence, and other large science efforts that may be developed. The GCHRP will rely heavily upon the work pursued by the LCC network and other science-based partnerships in the Gulf to determine watershed-wide restoration goals and objectives and the desired project-specific application in the local landscape.

The GCHRP will functionally work as the restoration project implementation and local partnership delivery and development arm for the larger regional ecosystem-based planning efforts and monitoring networks as needed. Within each implementation focus area, the larger Gulf goals can be stepped down to the local level and monitored for achieving desired habitat conditions and biological response. Because this Program model is locally driven and partnership oriented, it is meant to engage all ranges of stakeholders, from local residents, landowners, and businesses to large national corporations or multi-agency programs. The GCHRP will benefit from each agency's long history of success in engaging private landowners and restoration-focused partners to develop working landscapes that are critical to the success of any ecosystem approach. Together, we will develop and fund the restoration projects in strategic areas and work with the landowner to implement the habitat projects on their properties that promote the desired goal, whether that is connectivity between protected lands, large landscape restoration needs such as prescribed fire or hydrologic restoration, or species-specific recovery goals across the species range.

No amount of planning and knowledge is ultimately successful for restoring habitat without the commitment to delivering actual projects, tracking results and measuring intended impacts. This is the core of the proposal and the work of the GCHRP – delivery of successful conservation actions that are specific and measurable at the site and across the landscape/waterscape.

#### Using the Best Available Science

Restoration efforts uninformed by science represent at best “random acts of conservation” that restore habitats but may not be strategic in nature. Although numerous planning efforts and products exist, they are often underutilized by many restoration biologists because of a lack of awareness or experience with these tools. Similarly, monitoring efforts and adaptive management are often conducted in isolation despite standardized protocols and semi-coordinated efforts. The GCHRP is committed to use of best available science in guiding delivery, delivering on-the-ground components, and evaluating its impact, through adaptive management.

To begin, the GCHRP will employ information and conservation planning efforts promoted by the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council members within local implementation focus areas (based on highest synergy of priorities among partners). GCHRP member agencies will leverage their expertise and provide access to existing programs, plans, data, and analyses to help determine the current state of restoration science, assistance and tools to develop monitoring and adaptive management programs tailored to specific restoration projects, connections to the larger restoration science community, and comprehensive tracking for restoration success benchmarks. This will assist the GCHRP in developing conservation goals and targets, drive decision-making for project selection, identify monitoring needs and determining success criteria.

The GCHRP will apply the work pursued by the LCC network and other science-based partnerships in the Gulf to help determine watershed-wide restoration goals and objectives and the desired project-specific application in the local landscape. LCCs are applied conservation science partnerships with two main functions. The first is to provide the science and technical expertise needed to support conservation planning at landscape scales – beyond the reach or resources of any one organization. Through the efforts of in-house staff and science-oriented partners, LCCs are generating the tools, methods and data managers need to design and deliver conservation using the Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) approach. The second function of LCCs is to promote collaboration among their members in defining shared conservation goals. With these goals in mind, partners can identify where and how they will take action, within their own authorities and organizational priorities, to best contribute to the larger conservation effort. LCCs don't place limits on partners; rather, they help partners to see how their activities can "fit" with those of other partners to achieve a bigger and more lasting impact.

### *Implementation Methodology*

#### **Steering Committee Establishment**

The GCHRP will establish a multi-agency steering committee (modeled after the EPA's NEPs, possibly using the existing structure of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance) to effectively guide the Program in soliciting restoration needs, assisting in project development, reviewing and selecting projects for funding, ensuring required federal, state, and local permits and assurances are acquired and monitoring project progress and compliance. The Steering Committee (Committee) is not designed to be another executive level group similar to the Council (or direct function of the Council), but will be composed of at least one member from each of the Gulf States, and regional representation from the USFWS, NOAA, EPA and USDA. This initial group will develop the final membership roster of the GCHRP Steering Committee after award of this proposal and the intention is for further decisions to be made by majority vote.

Once established, the Committee will also make decisions on the need for additional working groups or committees within the Program. We foresee a need to focus capacity in the areas of science and monitoring, specifically. A Science Working Group, for example, would be

instrumental in pulling together the best available science in order to help the Committee establish Program goals and targets, which ultimately feed into what projects are selected for funding. A Habitat Working Group could assist in setting restoration goals and conservation targets for the Program. We also suggest a Monitoring or Adaptive Management Working Group tasked with developing plans and strategies to begin to assess Program impacts on a larger scale.

### **Set Restoration Goals**

The expected outcomes and goals of the GCHRP will ultimately be agreed upon by the Committee. Within the first year of the GCHRP, a strategic plan will be developed outlining the criteria, overlapping priorities and focus areas in which funding will be prioritized. Conservation targets will also be set and approved by the Committee. Based on the experience of other programs and partnerships the GCHRP could be expected to positively impact potentially tens of thousands of acres in the next five years. Specific acreage targets for habitat types or other biological outcomes will be determined by the Committee after award by the RESTORE Council.

### **Build on Overlapping Priorities**

As previously stated, there are numerous local, state or regional plans that identify various resource conservation goals along the Gulf Coast (Appendices D and F). Plans such as the NEP's Comprehensive Conservation Management Plans, NERR Conservation Management Plans, State Wildlife Action Plans, Watershed Protection Plans, Bird Conservation Plans and others have identified habitat restoration and conservation among their highest priorities. As well, Gulf-wide partnerships exist, such as the state-led Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA) that has identified "six priority issues that are regionally significant and can be effectively addressed through increased collaboration at the local, state and federal levels". Among these, habitat restoration and conservation was again a top priority. This overlap has established a positive platform from which to leverage the time and resources of various organizations. Also, we cannot overlook the contribution of so many of the NGO organizations who are diligently advocating for Gulf restoration concerns, including The Nature Conservancy, Ocean Conservancy, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Restore America's Estuaries, The Audubon Society, and Ducks Unlimited just to name a few. These organizations provide a wealth of information and expertise and will be integrated into the process of assimilating restoration priorities.

Ultimately, the GCHRP will enhance each member's existing relationships and allow for more strategic actions in focal geographies where important fish and wildlife resources, priorities and opportunities for restoration and conservation merge. This will collectively expand both the capacity and accomplishments for coastal restoration to make a landscape scale difference for Gulf coast fish, wildlife, and people.

## **Field Level Engagement and Project Development**

Using the established infrastructure and field personnel of the Committee member organizations, the GCHRP will provide a voluntary approach that strengthens coordination between science, implementation, and monitoring by working directly in and with the community (building off the NOAA CRP and Service's CP and PFW models). Projects will be developed strategically through direct engagement specifically looking at overlapping priorities shared among the Committee organizations. The Committee will use the funds of the GCHRP to provide direct financial and technical assistance to projects (through many levels of partners – state and federal agencies, local communities, NGOs) to benefit coastal fish, wildlife and their habitats. Proposals will be developed at the field level and submitted to the Steering Committee for final vetting and funding approval.

## **Selection Criteria Development**

Project selection criteria already exist in many forms, varying levels of detail, and from various partnership perspectives. The GCHRP Committee will, stemming from the following list of broad criteria, develop the final project vetting process and ultimately oversee final project selection each year. It is expected that additional considerations for fund leveraging and cost effectiveness will be encouraged by potential applicants.

- **Coastal and community resiliency.** Restoration projects and activities that incorporate ecosystem adaptation and help coastal ecosystems and communities to address the effects of habitat degradation and climate change.
- **Habitat continuity and connectivity.** Restoration projects and activities that expand priority habitats, reduce habitat fragmentation, establish conservation buffers, and provide habitat corridors for Federal trust and other priority species. Where they may exist, this includes projects to benefit private lands/working landscapes.
- **Water Quality.** Restoration projects and activities that improve fresh, estuarine, and marine waters either directly or by decreasing impairments such as sedimentation, stormwater runoff, nutrient loading or physical barriers.
- **Proximity to conserved lands.** Restoration projects and activities that complement conservation practices on conserved lands such as National Wildlife Refuges, State Wildlife Management Areas, National Parks, National Forests, other Federal or State land holdings or on public or private conservation lands.
- **Regional strategic plans and priorities.** Restoration projects and activities that are located in geographic focus areas identified in regional strategic plans. Where they exist, the priority will be to advance specific habitat or species population objectives on those focus areas.

- **Species at risk.** Restoration projects and activities that improve habitat for federally listed species, candidate species, species proposed for listing, State-listed species, imperiled species, species of conservation concern, priority species (e.g., focal or surrogate species), or other declining species. Conservation benefits may also have the potential to preclude the need to list certain species under the Endangered Species Act.

### **Eligible Recipients and Activities**

One of the major strengths of the GCHRP business model is the flexibility to fund all phases of projects through a wide variety of award recipients, notably those without direct access to some of the larger sources of DWH Spill related funding. Partners, including federal, state, tribal or local governments, NGOs and private landowners (See Appendix C for examples), will be able to apply for and receive funds and/or technical assistance for initial work such as project planning, development and design as well as for implementation activities such as construction, oversight, and monitoring. This Program will fill a niche for restoration implementation at a local level where the potential for inclusion into Trustee or Council related projects may be less likely.

As mentioned previously, a major strength of the GCHRP is the flexibility to fund a wide range of on-the-ground activities. Examples of project types include, but are not limited to: the use of prescribed fire for habitat management; control of invasive or exotic species; restoration of oyster reefs, wetlands, coastal prairie, coastal dune lakes, hydrologic impediments, sedimentary processes, agricultural fields, colonial rookery islands, riparian habitats, coastal forest ecosystems such as longleaf pine savanna, cypress tupelo and mangrove habitats; living shoreline protection; beneficial or direct use of dredged material to create marshes or other habitats; transplanting and re-introduction of native plant species; and land conservation (e.g., voluntary easements with landowners or due diligence associated with fee-title acquisition).

### **Funding Mechanisms**

Cooperative or interagency agreements will be the primary mechanism for delivering GCHRP implementation funds for activities to reach desired restoration objectives. Each project phase funded through the GCHRP will require monitoring to be tailored to the specific deliverables of each project. Each project will also have the direct involvement of project biologists who will track the progress and compliance with agreement conditions including any specific monitoring requirements.

### **Project Scale**

Over the next 5 years, the GCHRP intends to focus on-the-ground restoration in strategic ways to engage local partners and positively move the conservation needle for Gulf Coast restoration. The GCHRP envisions funding restoration projects in the each of the Gulf States, specifically within the GCR as defined by the RESTORE Act. The goal is to focus on the size and scale of

projects that fall in the gap of other Gulf funding streams. Typical applications to the GCHRP will range from \$10,000 to \$500,000 or more.

### **Utilize Local and Regional Workforce**

Restoring the Gulf is a daunting task with real potential for numerous simultaneously occurring construction projects across the Gulf Coast region. With this challenge is an opportunity to expand opportunities to build a conservation workforce that will be sorely needed to accomplish the goal of Gulf restoration. Although the primary focus of funding will be towards actual on-the-ground implementation, one component of the GCHRP would be to collaborate with other programs focused on finding opportunities to help train a local, highly-skilled restoration workforce. The GCHRP Steering Committee will pursue conversations towards prospects such as Conservation Corps or other voluntary workforce models. One example of a growing volunteer workforce is the Mississippi Wildlife Habitat Stewards Program. This program is aimed at providing additional land management capacity to the more than 60,000 acres of public lands in Mississippi that are managed by a fairly small staff. Volunteers are trained in a series of habitat management activities for wildlife, including prescribed fire, invasive species treatment, and safe access for people. Once training is completed, the volunteer is paired up to a particular site(s) and a work plan is collaboratively established and executed.

### **Monitoring**

Monitoring protocol within the GHCRP will be established to serve two purposes: (1) individual project performance and compliance; and (2) assessment of landscape level impacts and adaptive management. The Program's project officers (see budget narrative for position description) will ultimately be responsible for ensuring that projects are completed as detailed in the funding agreement documents. This will include aspects such as environmental compliance and contractual obligations. It will also be important to record information such as economic impacts (i.e., jobs created, workforce utilization, use of local goods and services, and volunteer participation) and how the project eventually met the proposed desired outcomes. These features, and potentially more (as determined by the Committee), will be incorporated into the formal agreements with funding recipients.

On another scale, the GCHRP will assess what impacts the Program is having from a larger landscape perspective by examining project outcomes and feeding this into other landscape level conservation efforts. In order to focus on this piece, 5% of the proposed budget is requested to support capacity, which may come in a variety of internal or external ways (e.g., NGOs, citizen science groups, academia, etc.). Each state and federal agency targeted for inclusion in the GCHRP is uniquely invested in partnerships that collectively span across the Gulf coast region. Most of these efforts have a monitoring component focused on standardization and coordination of effort towards shared objectives. In this way, the burden on any individual collaborator is reduced and expertise in design or analysis is maximally leveraged and doesn't need duplication

in each agency of a partnership. Already this model has been successfully implemented in Joint Ventures, LCCs, and Inventory and Monitoring programs.

Existing federal and state planning efforts will help focus initial implementation investments within each state. However, the eventual goal continues to be Gulf-wide ecosystem restoration. Assessment of our collective restoration successes will be most capably accomplished by a Program whose focus ultimately spans across geopolitical boundaries and all ecosystem types that make up the Gulf of Mexico watershed. The Service, with our mission to work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people, is offering to coordinate this multi-agency Program to assess the landscape level impacts of our restoration efforts.

By focusing not solely on discrete project effects but rather on outcomes, monitoring efforts can provide clear insight into progress towards achievement of biological objectives and a reality check on the reasonableness of the objectives in the first place. For example, we can ask the question of how a barrier island restoration project in Louisiana utilizing dredged material to create beach and intertidal marsh habitats accomplishes gains for particular shorebird, wading bird and waterfowl species population objectives cited by the Gulf Coast Joint Venture. The GCHRP will provide the capacity needed to serve as a collective sampling of multiple partners leveraged across time and space. This will help supply the replication necessary to achieve the statistical power required to make further informed decisions and deductions.

#### *Measures of Success*

Success of the GCHRP will be measured by several essential elements: 1) the on-the-ground benefits to coastal wildlife and their habitats, 2) the readiness of projects or plans to meet strategic habitat conservation goals for Gulf Coast ecosystem restoration, 3) the extent of partner/stakeholder engagement, 4) the ability to deliver technical assistance at a local scale, and 5) the ability develop a true Gulf Coast Region-wide restoration implementation planning effort that has partner buy-in.

The first measure of accomplishment comes in the question, “Was the project successful? Did the on-the-ground activities achieve the desired outcome of the proposed project”? For coastal restoration projects, this is typically measured in number of acres restored, number of miles of stream restored or now unimpaired, etc. We will not only look at these measures of success on a project-by-project basis, but also identify metrics to answer the question, “How does this project progress us towards the specific objectives (e.g., community resilience, water quality improvements, etc.) identified by partners in this focal area”?

To further account for how we may be collectively working to move the conservation needle, the GCHRP is particularly interested in assessing impacts on a broader landscape scale. To this end, we will pay particular attention to the shovel-ready projects already previously identified,

priorities identified within geographic focal areas and how restoration plans developed across the Gulf coast region build into and off of one another.

Throughout this proposal we have expressed the importance of working collaboratively and engaging with stakeholders to align restoration priorities. We will monitor this success by the number and types of partners who support or are involved in planning and implementation of the funded projects and leveraged funds and services.

The GCHRP will need a mechanism to track project progress and overall success. It is likely that many, if not all, of the individual agencies who would make up the GCHRP core team have existing systems or databases. Ultimately, the GCHRP will work together to identify the most efficient web-based accomplishment tracking system that incorporates geographic information system mapping capabilities that can also document technical assistance, and report program accomplishments.

#### *Risks and Uncertainties*

The primary risks and uncertainties in successfully delivering the GCHRP are those standard with any environmental restoration project along the Gulf Coast and include uncontrolled risks associated the weather, inflation, workforce turnover and sometimes the apparent whims of wildlife or partners/landowners. These risks and uncertainties can be both economic and environmental. The economic risks inherent in contracting with small and local entities will be addressed as required by executing a financial risk assessment for each project or contract as required by federal contracting laws as applicable. Because of the long history of involvement in on-the-ground project implementation in the region, there is a cadre of skilled personnel, procedures, processes, and mechanisms that have been developed to work with private landowners, LLCs, small and minority-owned businesses, NGOs, academic institutions, county and local governments, and tribes.

Environmental risks and certainty of biological success will be assessed as part of the project selection and prioritization. Employing an adaptive management strategy and the use of experienced staff and infrastructure within partner agencies can ameliorate many of the negative effects of such factors. For example, most agencies have experienced project management staff and similarly capable colleagues who are skilled at avoiding and managing risk that may include the capability of the project managers, feasibility of construction techniques, regulatory compliance, job costing analysis, contracting, etc.

As well, the best predictive models, science and history will be used to forecast changes resulting from relative sea level rise, tropical storms, rainfall and other environmental factors likely to affect implementation. Where feasible, an appropriate amount of flexibility and resilience can be incorporated in the project's design or construction methodology.

### *Outreach and Education Opportunities*

Strong public support is necessary to protect, conserve, and enhance the quality of our environment. Thus, a key element of the GCHRP is to further ecologically sound stewardship of our coastal resources through education and outreach. Each of the Steering Committee members will bring with them a host of diverse groups who have been involved in previous partnerships and projects, including school children and other community volunteers, universities, nonprofit groups, business and industry, and coastal planning organizations. Collaboration between the partners, many of which have their own public outreach programs, will link with the GCHRP and result in a more cumulative long-term stewardship of the restored resources and generate a greater community conservation ethic. However, in order for the GCHRP to reach its full potential the Committee will continue to bring in additional collaborators and stakeholders from around the Gulf Region and take advantage of the outreach, education, and training opportunities provided through those groups, organizations, and collaborations. In addition, there will be a major focus on engaging underserved or economically disadvantaged communities, as well as efforts to reach non-traditional partners to promote local stewardship of their natural resources.

Targeted outreach/public education activities within the Gulf Coast region inform and motivate key public stakeholders and decision-makers about the ecological importance of the living resources of the target watershed or ecosystem. These efforts also spur behavioral changes and catalyze actions that help solve problems and promote ecologically sound decisions. For example, efforts can be focused toward a specific group (private landowners who have land with degraded riparian habitats who are interested in voluntary land conservation actions), around a specific management goal (increased biodiversity), specific conservation measures (easements, zoning, restoration of hydrology, eradication of exotic plant species, etc.), a specific location (lands surrounding a National Wildlife Refuge within an NEP estuary), or some combination of actions. However, to be most effective, outreach and education activities will be part of a comprehensive approach, to be undertaken in concert with coordinated habitat conservation and management.

### *Leveraging of Resources and Partnerships and Program Benefits*

In 2013, the Service produced a peer-reviewed analysis reporting that the agency's habitat restoration programs are extraordinary engines for the U.S. economy. The report, *Restoration Returns: The Contribution of Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and Coastal Program Projects to Local U.S. Economies*, found that, in working directly with partners to implement vital on-the-ground habitat restoration, Service programs created more than 3,900 jobs in Fiscal Year 2011, generating a total economic stimulus of \$327.6 million. On average, the CP leverages non-Federal dollars 7:1, and the PFW Program leverages non-Federal dollars 10:1. Also the report concluded that for every \$1 that the PFW Program or the CP contributed to a project, the programs generated \$15.70 and \$12.78 in economic returns, respectively (Laughland et al, 2013).

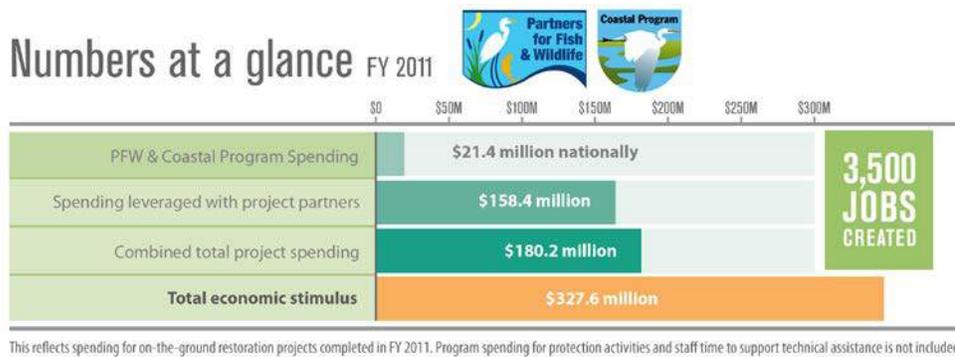


Figure 3: Economic stimulus of program spending from the PFW and CP (does not consider economic impacts of ecological services, improved recreational opportunities or proximity to open spaces) from Laughland et. al. (2013).

We include this leveraging and economic information as only one member of the GCHRP Steering Committee. We suspect that our fellow federal and state agency counterparts likely either already produce similar figures or would be capable of doing so through the collaboration of the GCHRP. The cumulative effect of the GCHRP in terms of leveraging economic benefits will be quite powerful.

Although this proposal is directed toward the RESTORE Council’s “Bucket 2” funding source, we recognize that there are numerous other mechanisms that have been established as a result of the DWH oil spill, as well as, existing grant and assistance programs that have funding restoration efforts along the Gulf coast for years, if not decades. While there is an unprecedented amount of restoration funding descending upon us, there is now an unprecedented opportunity to leverage funding, technical assistance and partnership support. Every effort will be made by the GCHRP to do just that. Fortunately, the relationships and business practices of both our sister state and federal agencies have proven quite successful in leveraging many more times their original individual program funding level. We anticipate a similar trend in the ability to leverage resources through the operation of the GCHRP.

Quick Synopsis of Program Benefits

- Proven programmatic infrastructure to focus the delivery of technical assistance and an unprecedented amount of restoration implementation dollars
- Provides administrative efficiencies for distributing money from the RESTORE Council throughout each of the Gulf States to entities who may not have direct access to environmental restoration funds from larger DWH Spill related funding mechanisms
- Focuses and builds on work from existing planning efforts
- Broad partnership base including Federal, Tribal, State and local government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private corporations, foundations, land trusts, and individual landowners
- Maintain vital network of local community partners and enhance the local workforce

## Location Information

The GCHRP is committed to fund projects in each of the five coastal states that comprise the primary geography of the Gulf Coast Region. In discussions with other region and watershed-based affiliations, it makes sense to begin prioritizing those geographies where the most potential exists to synergize planning efforts and priorities and leverage financial and technical resources. An example of this is shown in Figure 4 where we overlay the EPA's NEPs, NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserves, USDA NRCS's GoMI areas, and the Service's Gulf Focal Areas.

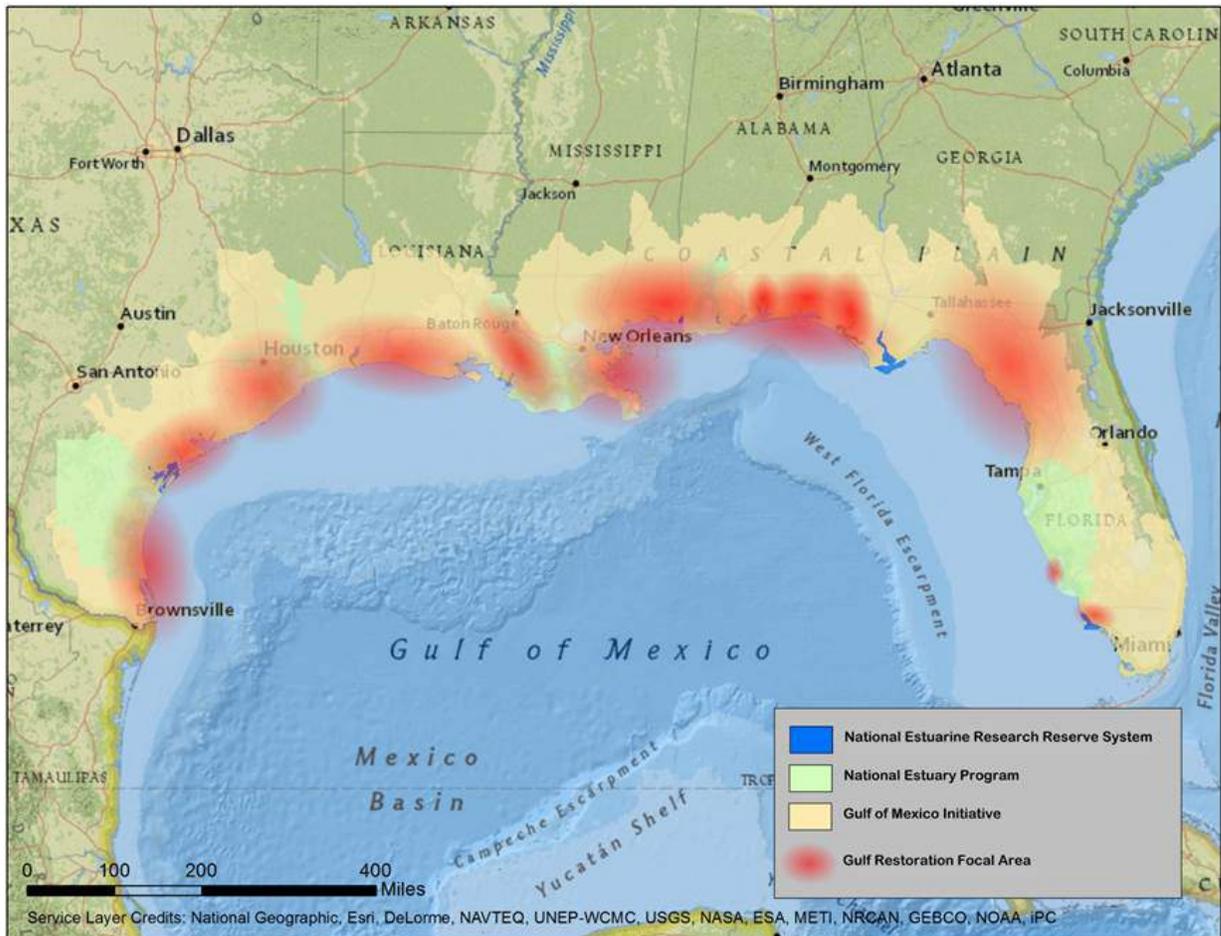


Figure 2. Overlay of Gulf partner geographic focal areas.

## Data/Information Sharing Plan

Project specific data and or monitoring data will be gathered and will be available for sharing among GCHRP members, with the intention of having a publically accessible portal as well. Ultimately, the GCHRP will work together to identify the most efficient web-based accomplishment tracking system that incorporates geographic information system mapping capabilities that can also document technical assistance, and report program accomplishments.

### High-Level Budget Narrative

We are requesting funds from the RESTORE Council to operate the GCHRP over the next five years. The majority of funds will be obligated to partners through cooperative agreements for on-the-ground restoration project implementation throughout the five Gulf states. A portion (<15%) of the budget request is necessary to employ staff needed to manage the contractual and data management workload (Table 1). These positions may be filled through existing Committee member capacity, new hires, contractual agreements, or a combination of these options.

The business model of which the GCHRP is based upon encourages leveraging of additional funds and technical/in-kind services. With some speculation, based on years of successful project execution through Service voluntary restoration programs, we would anticipate a return on the Council's investment of at least 4:1.

Table 1. Proposed GCHRP Budget.

	<b>Annual Budget</b>	<b>Total Program Cost</b>
Project Implementation	\$4,000,000	\$20,000,000
Staffing	\$867,000	\$4,335,000
Monitoring		\$1,000,000
Overhead	\$292,020	\$1,460,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$5,159,020</b>	<b>\$26,795,100</b>

**Project Implementation Funds: \$4M per year** (\$20M total over 5 years) to be obligated to on-the-ground projects within the 5 Gulf States. This funding level may be scaled based on funding availability.

**Staffing (includes base salary and fringe benefits): \$867,000 per year** (\$4,335M total)

Program Coordinator (1 position) = \$125,000 per year

- Provide regional coordination to the Project Officers in each state and serve as a liaison to regional and national restoration planning partnerships.

Project Officer (1 in each Gulf State) = \$530,000 per year

- Each position is responsible for contract management and project management as needed.

Contracting Specialist (1 position) = \$106,000 per year

- Provides oversight and administratively executes agreements with recipients

Data analyst/database manager/GIS support (1 position) = \$106,000 per year

- Manage and update centralized project database and provide geospatial support for

project planning and design

**Monitoring (5% total of implementation funds): \$1,000,000 over 5 years**

It is anticipated that monitoring needs will ramp up as projects begin to be completed, likely in years 2-5. Monitoring activities will be scaled appropriately to individual projects and the capacity to oversee and conduct monitoring efforts may come from either internal staffing of GCHRP members or externally through entities such as NGOs, academia, citizen science groups, veterans, and conservation corps organizations.

**Program Overhead (6% per year): \$292,020 per year (\$1.46M total)**

Calculated as 6% of the sum of project implementation funds plus salary costs.

**Total Program Request: \$5,159,020** in Year 1 (not including monitoring costs). Years 2-5 will have varied levels of monitoring, dependent upon project size and completion times. The GCHRP total cost over 5 years = \$26,795,100.

## Appendix A: Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council Environmental Compliance Checklist

The GCHRP will fund habitat conservation and restoration actions primarily through financial assistance agreements with State, federal or local agencies, NGOs, private landowners or other suitable recipient. On April 1, 2014, the Director of the USFWS required the immediate implementation of New Financial Assistance Award Guidance reinforcing that [Service] “Programs are responsible for making sure all legally required compliance reviews are completed **before** the recipient starts any potentially impactful activities funded under a grant or cooperative agreement.” Our guidance requires evidence that all legal compliance requirements including National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) were met.

The project types may vary and as a result each project will undergo an individual compliance review and certification even if that project may fit NEPA Categorical Exclusions or other programmatic environmental clearance. We will also document that clearance on the Checklist for a New Financial Assistance Award (FWS 3-2460 dated March 7, 2014) as part of our evaluation of every financial award.

**Please check all federal and state environmental compliance and permit requirements as appropriate to the proposed project/program.**

Environmental Compliance Type	Yes	No	Applied For	N/A
<b>FEDERAL</b>				
National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA)				X
Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA)				X
Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act				X
Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA)				X
NEPA – Categorical Exclusion				X
NEPA – Environmental Assessment				X
NEPA – Environmental Impact Statement				X
Clean Water Act – 404 – Individual Permit (USACOE)				X
Clean Water Act – 404 – General Permit(USACOE)				X
Clean Water Act – 404 – Letters of Permission(USACOE)				X

<b>Clean Water Act – 401 – WQ certification</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Clean Water Act – 402 – NPDES</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Rivers and Harbors Act – Section 10 (USACOE)</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Endangered Species Act – Section 7 – Informal and Formal Consultation (NMFS, USFWS)</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Endangered Species Act – Section 7 - Biological Assessment (BOEM,USACOE)</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Endangered Species Act – Section 7 – Biological Opinion (NMFS, USFWS)</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Endangered Species Act – Section 7 – Permit for Take (NMFS, USFWS)</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) – Consultation (NMFS)</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Marine Mammal Protection Act – Incidental Take Permit (106) (NMFS, USFWS)x</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Migratory Bird Treaty Act (USFWS)</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act – Consultation and Planning (USFWS)</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act – Section 103 permit (NMFS)</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>BOEM Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act – Section 8 OCS Lands Sand permit</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>NHPA Section 106 – Consultation and Planning ACHP, SHPO(s), and/or THPO(s)</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>NHPA Section 106 – Memorandum of Agreement/Programmatic Agreement</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Tribal Consultation (Government to Government)</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Coastal Barriers Resource Act – CBRS (Consultation)</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>STATE</b>				
<b>As Applicable per State</b>				<b>X</b>

**Appendix B: Model Programs** – The following provide supplemental information on each of the Federal Agency voluntary restoration programs mentioned on page x of this proposal.



**Program Name:** EPA's National Estuary Program

**Mission or Vision:** The EPA National Estuary Program (NEP) established by Congress in 1987, is a voluntary adaptable coastal ecosystem-based network program established to improve the quality of estuaries of national importance. This successful ecosystem-based management program works to restore and maintain the water quality and ecological integrity of estuaries of national significance.

**Operational Structure:** Each NEP consists of a collection of stakeholders, organized in a decision-making framework that facilitates collaboration, consensus-building, and public input. EPA is a participant and provides management guidance, along with financial and technical assistance. Together the group works to articulate common goals and take action to address a wide range of issues and undertake actions that produce measurable results for habitats and water quality. NEPs are guided by a director and staff that are housed in a program office located within the estuarine watershed.

The NEP looks broadly across the watershed and recognizes the connection between upstream sources of pollution and downstream impacts. It offers an effective means of securing commitments necessary to achieve tangible environmental results by successfully leveraging federal seed money through the development of finance plans, building strategic alliances and providing seed money or staff to initiate and develop new funding. Their approach includes the following elements:

- Establish a governance structure and neutral forum
- Involve community stakeholders as equal partners
- Engage the public throughout the decision-making process
- Collaborate to identify problems and solutions
- Set measurable goals and objectives and monitor effectiveness of actions
- Decisions are based on sound science and actions are implemented using adaptive management

**Success/Project Example:** NEPs and their partners have protected and restored over 1.5 million acres of habitat since 2000 and have become efficient at leveraging funds to increase their ability to restore and protect their coastal ecosystems. On average, NEPs raise \$15 for every \$1 provided by EPA. Between 2003-2009, the NEPs leveraged \$1.98 billion from \$140 million in EPA grants for on-the-ground efforts since 2003.

**Partner Examples:** NEP partners typically include representatives from Federal, state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, affected business and industries, academia, and the general public.

**More information:** [http://www.epa.gov/owow\\_keep/estuaries/](http://www.epa.gov/owow_keep/estuaries/) [www.nationalestuarines.org](http://www.nationalestuarines.org)



**Program Name:** The Community-based Restoration Program (CRP)

**Mission or Vision:** Created in 1996, The Community-based Restoration Program provides funding and technical assistance for habitat restoration projects and instills strong conservation values by actively engaging citizens in on-the ground restoration projects.

**Operational Structure:** The Community-based Restoration Program conducts meaningful habitat restoration and promotes hands-on community participation to encourage local stewardship of our nation's coastal resources. Through the program, NOAA awards millions of dollars to national and regional partners and local grassroots organizations every year to restore coastal, marine, and migratory fish habitat. The NOAA Restoration Center staff helps to identify potential projects, strengthen the development and implementation of habitat restoration activities within communities, and generate long-term national and regional partnerships to support community-based restoration efforts across a wide geographic area.

CRP specifically:

- Awards and leverages millions of dollars funds annually for habitat restoration projects, leveraging double and triple the outcome by working with partner organizations.
- Provides technical advice on restoration techniques, environmental compliance, and scientific monitoring
- Promotes community involvement and stewardship of local projects.
- Builds partnerships to identify local priorities and share resources.

**Success/Project Example:** In the past decade, more than \$50 million in NOAA funds have generated 3 to 5 times that amount in cash and in-kind contributions from partners, helping to expand on-the-ground projects. Special initiatives under this program include efforts to remove debris from our oceans and coasts and projects to open historic river habitat to migratory fish. The CRP has provided funding and technical support for thousands of projects around the United States.

The Southeast Region, which encompasses the southern East Coast and Gulf of Mexico, is home to mangroves, coral reefs, wetlands, and oyster reefs. This unique habitat provides jobs, food, and recreational opportunities, but they also face threats from development, pollution, fish passage barriers, and erosion. Since 1996, the NOAA Restoration Center has been working in the region to restore habitat and has supported approximately 670 community restoration projects, benefiting more than 40,000 acres of marine fishery habitat and opening almost 150 stream miles for fish passage.

**Partner Examples:** NOAA Examples: ion, which encompasses the southern East Coast and Gulf of Mexico, is home to mangroves, coral reefs, wetlanders include: The Nature Conservancy, Restore America's East Coast and Gulf Rivers, Association of National Estuary Programs, FishAmerica Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Ecotrust, The Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment, The Gulf of Mexico Foundation, Gulf of Mexico Sea Grant College Programs, The National Wildlife Federation, Trout Unlimited and The Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership.

**More information:** <http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/restoration/programs/crp.html>



**Program Name:** National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)

**Mission or Vision:** NRCS is an agency committed to “helping people help the land”. Our mission is to provide resources to farmers and landowners to aid them with conservation. Ensuring productive lands in harmony with a healthy environment is our priority.

**Operational Structure:** NRCS uses landscape conservation initiatives to accelerate the results that can be achieved through voluntary conservation programs. All NRCS programs are designed to support farmers, ranchers, and foresters in improving the environment while maintaining or improving a vibrant agricultural sector. Most program delivery is driven primarily by grassroots input and local needs. Landscape conservation initiatives enhance the locally driven process to better address nationally and regionally important conservation goals that transcend localities. Through these initiatives, NRCS and its partners coordinate the delivery of assistance where it can have the most impact in these broad ranges. With tools like the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, the 2014 Farm Bill further emphasizes the focus on building effective partnerships and obtaining meaningful results for key natural resource concerns. Within individual initiatives, the best available university and government science resources are used to define targeting approaches. NRCS seeks to maximize the success of initiatives by leveraging partner interest and resources through programs and other tools.

**Success/Project Example:** For six consecutive years NRCS in Florida has received the largest NRCS easement program funding allocation in the nation. Over the last four years spanning 2010-2013 NRCS in Florida has obligated the following financial assistance funds to implement conservation practices on private lands for programs identified below:

- Wetland Reserve Program (WRP; aka Wetland Easement Program) - \$344.9 million
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) - \$71.5 million
- Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) - \$5.6 million
- Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) - \$4.4 million
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) - \$3.0 million
- Farm & Ranchland Protection Program - \$ 19.4 million

In December 2011, NRCS launched the Gulf of Mexico Initiative (GoMI), an innovative water and wildlife conservation initiative, which focused up to \$50 million over three years in conservation assistance to farmers and ranchers in priority areas along seven major rivers that drain to the Gulf. All five states along the Gulf Coast are part of this effort. Many communities and cities along these rivers—such as Pensacola, Mobile, and Biloxi—will benefit from the cleaner water, more abundant wildlife, and healthier fisheries produced by this project. By the end of 2012, the GoMI program had obligated over \$8 million through nearly 140 contracts (EQIP, CSP and WRP) which provided treatment to over 49,000 acres throughout all five Gulf states.

**Partner Examples:** Private land owners including farmers, ranchers, and foresters.

**More information:** <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/national/home/>



**Program Name:** Coastal (CP) and Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) Programs

**Mission or Vision:** To efficiently achieve voluntary habitat conservation through financial and technical assistance for the benefit of Federal Trust Species: migratory birds; threatened and endangered species; inter-jurisdictional fish; certain marine mammals; and species of international concern.

**Operational Structure:** The CP, established in 1985, has staff located in 24 priority coastal areas, including the Atlantic, Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, Great Lakes, and the Pacific. The PFW Program, established in 1987 with a core group of biologists and a small budget for on-the-ground wetland restoration projects on private lands, has grown into a larger and more diversified habitat restoration program assisting thousands of private landowners across the Nation. Collectively, these Programs serve as the Service’s vanguard for non-regulatory, voluntary, citizen and community-based stewardship efforts for fish and wildlife conservation. Five major goals have been identified as core components of both Programs: *conserve habitat* for the benefit of priority fish and wildlife species; *broaden and strengthen partnerships*; *improve information sharing and communication*; *enhance our workforce*; and, *increase accountability*.

The Partners Program is guided by a national policy that identifies the following objectives:

- Promote and implement habitat improvement projects that benefit Federal Trust Species
- Provide conservation leadership and promote partnerships
- Encourage public understanding and participation
- Work with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to implement conservation programs

The Coastal Program integrates all Service activities in high priority coastal ecosystems to:

- Identify the most important natural resource problems and solutions;
- Influence the planning and decision-making processes of other agencies and organizations with the Service's living resource capabilities;
- Implement solutions on-the-ground in partnership with others; and
- Instill a stewardship ethic, and catalyze the public to help solve problems, change behaviors, and promote ecologically sound decisions

**Success/Project Example:**

2013 Coastal Program Accomplishments in the Southeast and Southwest Regions\*

	Southwest Region	Southeast Region
Number of Projects	17	101
Upland Acres	6,876	6,809
Wetland Acres	478	12,169
Service Contribution	\$274,613	\$890,307
Partner Contribution	\$812,502	\$3,346,851

\* These Regions include the five Gulf states

**Partner Examples:** Collectively, both programs work with hundreds of partners, including private landowners across the Gulf states. For a snapshot of partners, see Appendix C.

**More information:** <http://www.fws.gov/partners/aboutus.html>  
<http://www.fws.gov/coastal/>

**Appendix C: Potential Partners** (This is not an exhaustive list, but one derived from previous or existing relationships with one or more of the Model Programs, whether through funding and/or technical assistance)

Gulf-Wide

Audubon Society	NOAA - Community Based Restoration
Coastal America	NRG Energy Corp.
ConocoPhillips	Partners for Wildlife Association
Ducks Unlimited	Ocean Conservancy
EPA Gulf of Mexico Program	Ocean Trust
Fish America Foundation	Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership
Gulf of Mexico Foundation	Restore America's Estuaries
Gulf of Mexico Alliance	The Nature Conservancy
National Fish & Wildlife Federation	The Conservation Fund
National Wildlife Federation	Trust for Public Land
National Wildlife Refuge Association	U. S. Army Corps of Engineers
Natural Resources Conservation Service	U. S. Geological Survey

Alabama

AL Clean Water Partnership	Dauphin Island Sea Lab
AL Coastal Foundation	Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium
AL Dept of Conservation and Natural Resources	Mississippi Alabama Sea Grant Consortium
- Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries Division	Mobile Baykeeper
- Marine Resources Division	Mobile Bay National Estuary Program
AL Forestry Commission	University of South Alabama
Auburn University Shellfish Lab	

Florida

All Gulf Coastal Counties	FL Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission
Apalachicola Bay and Riverkeeper, Inc.	FL Sea Grant
Apalachicola Natl Estuarine Research Reserve	FL State Marine Lab
Apalachicola Reg Stewardship Alliance CISMA	Gulf Islands National Seashore
Big Bend Coastal Conservancy	Sarasota Bay Estuary Program
Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program	South FL Water Management District
Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance	Southwest FL Water Management District
City of Gulf Breeze	St. Andrew Bay Resource Management Assoc
Earth Ethics, Inc.	Suwannee River Water Management District
Ecosphere Restoration Institute	Tampa Bay Estuary Program
Eglin Air Force Base	Tampa Bay Watch
FL's Aquatic Preserve Program	University of Central Florida
FL Coastal Islands Sanctuaries	University of FL
FL Division of Forestry	West FL Regional Management Council
FL Dept of Environmental Protection	

**Appendix C. Continued.**

Louisiana

America's Wetland Foundation	LA Office of Coastal Protection & Restoration
Apache Louisiana Minerals, LLC (subsidiary of Apache Corp)	LA Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program	Lake Arthur Hunting Club
Continental Land and Fur Company	Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation
Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana	Louisiana Wildlife Federation
Delacriox Corporation	Miami Corporation
Environmental Defense Fund	Restore or Retreat
Gulf of Mexico Alliance	Sweet Lake Land and Oil Corporation
E. A. McIlhenny Company	Terrebonne Parish Consolidated Govt
LA Department of Wildlife and Fisheries	Vermilion Corporation
	Women of the Storm

Mississippi

Grand Bay NERR, NOAA	MS Dept of Marine Resources, Coastal Preserves
Gulf Coast Research Lab, University of Southern Mississippi	MS Fish and Wildlife Foundation
Land Trust for the MS Coastal Plain	MS Habitat Stewards
Mississippi Alabama Sea Grant Consortium	Wildlife Mississippi
MS Department of Environmental Quality	

Texas

Artist Boat	Meadows Foundation
Bay Harbor Community Association	Port of Brownsville
Cameron County	Port of Houston Authority
City of Texas City	Private Landowners
City of Port Aransas	San Antonio Bay Partnership
Coastal Bend, Bays and Estuaries Program	Mission-Aransas NERR
Friends of National Wildlife Refuges	Texas Comm. on Environmental Quality
Galveston Bay Foundation	TCEQ Galveston Bay Estuary Program
Galveston Bay National Estuary Program	Texas A&M University
Guadalupe Blanco River Trust	Texas General Land Office
Gulf Coast Bird Observatory	Texas Master Naturalists
Houston Audubon Society	Texas Parks & Wildlife Department
Houston Wilderness	Texas SeaGrant
Jefferson County Drainage District	University of Houston

### **Appendix C. Continued – Additional Regional and Local Partnership Examples**

- Laguna Madre, Texas Mid-Coast and Chenier Plain Initiative teams of the Gulf Coast Joint Venture
- Habitat Committee of the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program
- Natural Resources Uses Subcommittee of the Galveston Bay Estuary Program
- Texas Parks and Wildlife's Seagrass Workgroup
- Salt Bayou Workgroup
- Grazing Land Conservation Initiative of Texas
- NRCS WRP State Technical Committee
- Texas Prairie Wetlands Partnership
- Aransas Cooperative Weed Management Program
- San Antonio Bay Partnership
- Texas Colonial Waterbird Working Group
- FL Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area Partnerships
- Florida Living Shorelines Initiatives
- Apalachicola Bay and Riverkeeper
- Alabama Coastal Foundation
- Mississippi Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability Coastal Working Group
- Gulf of Mexico Regional Sediment Management Team
- America's Longleaf Local Implementation Teams
- Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership Fish Passage Initiative
- Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Wildlife Diversity Committee
- Mississippi Beneficial Uses Group
- Alabama Beneficial Use of Dredge Material Group
- Pascagoula River Basin Alliance
- Tchoutacabouffa Watershed Management Team
- Biloxi Back Bay Watershed Management Team
- Ducks Unlimited-ConocoPhillips
- Rainey Conservation Alliance
- Perdido, Pensacola, St. Andrews, St. Joe Bay Watershed Partnerships

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## Appendix F: Letters of Support

November 13, 2014

Secretary Penny Pritzker  
Chair, Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council  
500 Poydras Street 1117  
New Orleans, LA 70130

Dear Secretary Pritzker:

I am writing on behalf of The Nature Conservancy to express our view that the project titled, “The Gulf Coast Habitat Restoration Program” being submitted by the Department of the Interior to the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council for funding under the provisions of the RESTORE Act is a sound project deserving of strong consideration for approval by the Council.

We have reviewed the project proposal, and it has several very positive attributes:

- It would advance two of the Conservancy’s primary goals for Gulf restoration:
  - Restoring healthy shorelines
  - Protecting freshwater resources
- It reflects restoration priorities set out in the Council’s comprehensive plan
- It uses existing local, state and federal agencies, organizations and partnerships to deliver results in what should be a cost-effective way
- The Program would use appropriate criteria to select individual project sites including areas identified in existing regional strategic plans and priorities
- There is a strong reliance on science and follow-up monitoring
- The Program intends to reach across agency lines to achieve restoration with multiple benefits

From the perspective of The Nature Conservancy’s extensive on-the-ground conservation and restoration experience, we believe that this project can provide tangible on-the-ground results. We would be enthusiastic about participating in this program if it is funded.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,



Bob Bendick  
Director, The Nature Conservancy’s Gulf of Mexico Program



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November 11, 2014

**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Chair, Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (the Council)

**From:** Ducks Unlimited, Southern Region

**Re:** USFWS Gulf Restoration Program proposal for *Gulf Coast Habitat Restoration Program*

Ducks Unlimited (DU) has reviewed the proposal submitted by the Department of the Interior to the Council entitled *Gulf Coast Habitat Restoration Program* and we support the project as a means to conserve lands that will contribute to the generational viability of the Gulf Coast Region for wildlife and people.

DU is directly engaged in on the ground conservation across the Gulf Coast Region and we remain committed this area as one of the most critical waterfowl wintering areas on the continent. The goal of the proposal to secure up to \$20 million in direct on-the-ground conservation funding for conservation actions that demonstrably improve habitat quality and quantity, aligns well with DU's mission of a Gulf Coast that can support North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) population objectives in a sustainable fashion.

The cataclysmic DWH event in April of 2010 was damaging in many known and as yet unknown ways, but it provides a once in a lifetime opportunity to leave a lasting conservation legacy in the five gulf coast states.

On behalf of the DU, we thank you for your consideration of this important work that our Partnership supports. If you have questions about any of our comments please contact Dr. Tom Moorman, Ducks Unlimited Director of Operations Southern Region, 601-956-1936, [tmoorman@ducks.org](mailto:tmoorman@ducks.org).

Respectfully,

Thomas E. Moorman  
Director of Operations  
Ducks Unlimited Southern Region



# ELIGIBILITY REVIEW

Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

**PROPOSAL TITLE**

Gulf Coastal Habitat Restoration Program

**PROPOSAL NUMBER**

DOI-2

**LOCATION**

Potentially all counties within the Gulf Coast region

**SPONSOR(S)**

Department of the Interior

**TYPE OF FUNDING REQUESTED (Planning, Technical Assistance, Implementation)**

Planning, Technical Assistance, Implementation

**REVIEWED BY:**

Bethany Carl Kraft/ Ben Scaggs

**DATE:**

November 18, 2014

**1. Does the project aim to restore and/or protect natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitat, beaches, coastal wetlands and economy of the Gulf Coast Region?**

YES     NO

Notes:

Proposal seeks funding to establish a Gulf-Coastal Habitat Restoration Program to execute on-the-ground projects that embody the specific goals and objectives of the RESTORE Act and the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council.

**2. Is the proposal a project?**

YES     NO

**If yes, is the proposed activity a discrete project or group of projects where the full scope of the restoration or protection activity has been defined?**

YES     NO

Notes:

**3. Is the proposal a program?**

YES     NO

**If yes, does the proposed activity establish a program where the program manager will solicit, evaluate, select, and carry out discrete projects that best meet the program's restoration objectives and evaluation criteria?**

YES     NO

Notes:

**4. Is the project within the Gulf Coast Region of the respective Gulf States?**

YES     NO

**If no, do project benefits accrue in the Gulf Coast Region?**

YES     NO

Notes:



## Eligibility Determination

ELIGIBLE

## Additional Information

---

## Proposal Submission Requirements

1. Is the project submission overall layout complete? *Check if included and formatted correctly.*

- |                                |                                     |                                       |                                     |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| A. Summary sheet               | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | F. Environmental compliance checklist | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| B. Executive summary           | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | G. Data/Information sharing plan      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| C. Proposal narrative          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | H. Reference list                     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| D. Location information        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | I. Other                              | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| E. High level budget narrative | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |                                       |                                     |

If any items are NOT included - please list and provide details

2. Are all proposal components presented within the specified page limits (if applicable)?

YES     NO

Notes: