**Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council**
**Request for Public Comments on Proposed Funding Approval**
**November 2024**

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) is seeking public comments on a proposal to approve $1,564,636 in implementation and planning funds for the FPL 1 Pensacola Bay Living Shoreline - Phase 1 project in Florida (see pages 165 and 176). Background on this proposed funding approval is provided below. Before voting on whether to approve the proposals, the Council is publishing this FPL amendment for a 15-day public comment period beginning on November 12, 2024, and concluding at 11:59 pm (CST) on November 27, 2024. You may submit comments using one of the two methods below:

**By Email:** To restorecouncil@restorethegulf.gov
Email submission of comments ensures timely receipt.

**By U.S. Mail:** Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
Attn: FPL Amendment Comments
500 Poydras Street, Suite 1117
New Orleans, LA 70130
Mail must be posted no later than November 27, 2024, to be included in this public comment period.

**Background:**

Pursuant to the *Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act of 2012* (33 U.S.C. § 1321(t) and *note*) (RESTORE Act), the Council is responsible for administering portions of *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill settlement funds for the purpose of restoring the environment and economy of the Gulf coast. The Council administers two funding programs, one of which is the Council-Selected Restoration Component, or "Bucket 2." Under Bucket 2, the Council votes to approve Gulf ecosystem restoration projects and programs proposed by the Council members. Bucket 2 projects and programs approved for funding by the Council are included in what is referred to as a Funded Priorities List.

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 (NEPA) and other applicable laws.

Category 2 activities are Council priorities for potential future funding but are not currently approved for funding. As appropriate, the Council reviews the activities in Category 2 in order to determine whether to move the given activity to Category 1 and approve it for funding via a Council vote. Such funding approvals are done via amendments to the FPL containing the given project(s) or program(s). FPL amendments are also required for other changes to listed projects (e.g., material changes in scope or cost, transfer of sponsorship to another Council member). The projects that are the subject of these proposed FPL amendments are described below.

**Pensacola Bay Living Shoreline - Phase 1 Project**

The Council is proposing to approve $1,564,636 in implementation and planning funding for the Pensacola Bay Living Shoreline - Phase 1 project, sponsored by FDEP. In 2015, these funds were budgeted in Category 2 of FPL 1. Most of this funding will be used by FDEP for implementation of this living shoreline project. FDEP proposes to approve approximately $43,800 of the total amount budgeted in FPL Category 2 to pay for the completion of planning activities necessary to move this project into the implementation phase.

In 2015, the Council approved planning funds for this living shoreline project in FPL 1. These planning funds have been used by FDEP for engineering and design and permitting for the living shoreline project. FDEP is completing this planning work and is now in a position to initiate implementation of this project. The Pensacola Living Shoreline Phase I is a multi-phase living shoreline project that totals approximately 24,800 linear feet of rock and oyster reef breakwater and 205 acres of emergent marsh and submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) habitat. This component of the project is for the implementation and Construction, Engineering and Inspections (CEI) services for the project.

The environmental benefits of this living shoreline project would include improved water quality, new oyster reef habitat, new emergent marsh habitat, and new SAV habitat for fish, shrimp, crabs, birds, sea turtles and other estuarine species. The shorelines would be stabilized with vegetation, wave energy would be attenuated by the offshore oyster reef breakwater, and shoreline erosion would be reduced and provide shoreline protection. Water quality benefits would include reduced turbidity and increased water clarity resulting in increased light penetration for photosynthesis. Increased fishery production and increased fishery economic opportunities would be provided by the new fishery habitat created. The improvements to water quality would be important for ecotourism and recreational opportunities for visitors and local citizens. Additionally, socio-economic benefits would include increased recreation and commercial fisheries production, increased shoreline and infrastructure protection, including protection of military assets at Naval Air Station Pensacola, increased property values for protected properties, and utilization of local engineering and construction work forces. Escambia County has identified an additional $32.4 million to construct the project. Once underway, construction is expected to take 10 to 12 months to complete.

On October 24, 2024, the Naval Air Station Pensacola received Clean Water Act Section 10/404 authorization under the Department of Army Permit SAJ-2019-01849. To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council is proposing to adopt the October 9, 2024, Corps of Engineers Environmental Assessment (EA) for this permit. The permit and associated EA also address the Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The environmental compliance documentation for this project can be found here.