

**Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
Public Engagement Meeting
Mobile, Alabama
December 11, 2012**

GOV. BENTLEY: Today, we take another major step forward in making the Gulf Coast stronger and more resilient for the oil spill. The Gulf Coast is truly a national treasure and I'm confident that if we communicate openly and work together, that we will take the positive steps necessary to make this region whole again. Welcome to Mobile, Alabama and thank you for being here today.

DR. BLANK: Thank you very much Governor Bentley and thank you for hosting our first council meeting here in Mobile.

I want to recognize all of the federal and state officials that are here on the council and in the room as well as the staff representing a number of members of Congress. And, of course, it is great to see leaders of this community and from the entire region here today to start the conservation. So, thank you to everyone for joining us.

The Commerce Department is honored to have been selected by the Gulf Coast states to serve as chair of this council. All of us up on this stage take our responsibilities on this council very seriously.

Clearly, today, I hope is going to be a new milestone in our ongoing efforts to restore and strengthen the Gulf Coast. It's important for us to start by acknowledging just how important the Gulf is to our nation and our economy. Its waters and coasts are home to one of the most diverse environments in the world – including 15,000 species of sea life. Twenty two million Americans live in its coastline counties – working in crucial U.S. industries like commercial seafood. It is home to ten of America's 15 largest ports – where nearly half-a-trillion dollars in two-way trade took place in the first nine months of this year alone. I could keep going, but I hope I've communicated the importance of this region.

I should also note that the challenges existed in the Gulf Region before the spill even happened. So the Federal Government and Gulf States were already working together to address eroding shorelines, lost habitats, development issues, and more.

And then, as you all know, as the governor referred to, on April 20, 2010 an offshore drilling explosion and fire killed eleven people and injured seventeen others. It set off a major oil spill with millions of barrels of crude entering the Gulf –the worst environmental disaster in recent memory. The spill caused serious damage to our ecosystems and put tremendous strain on businesses and on this region's economy.

The Administration responded immediately with a major government-wide mobilization. Experts at the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) began tracking the oil's spread and providing specialized forecasts. Booms were deployed through the close coordination of the Coast Guard as well as the Departments of Defense and Interior. And the EPA began collecting water samples to monitor public health and environmental concerns.

In addition, The Commerce Department's Economic Development Administration sent 21 teams to evaluate the impact on infrastructure and industry. The SBA began providing loans for businesses that had experienced a drop in sales. The Department of Labor started providing retraining and re-employment assistance for displaced workers. And Commerce's International Trade Administration helped with initial plans to bring back tourism.

I'm sure my fellow federal government colleagues on this Council could list many, many more examples. Clearly, the administration's commitment to the Gulf extended far beyond simply capping the well, as

President Obama has said many times. And today we renew our partnership with state and local governments because the work is not complete. Today, our collective focus is on how to ensure the long-term health, prosperity and resilience of the vital Gulf region. I'm confident that we can do that in a way that restores our environment, reinvigorates local communities, and creates jobs in Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, and here in Alabama.

The Restore Act dedicates 80 percent of the total civil and administrative penalties paid in connection with the oil spill to Gulf Coast restoration. Now, let me be clear. That settlement has not yet occurred. So we do not yet know how big that settlement is going to be and how much money we actually have to work with here with this council. But, we are waiting to see what this is and we are not letting the fact the settlement hasn't occurred from stopping us from moving forward with the early work of this council, working closely with the states as they develop plans.

The money will be coming back here to this region to benefit the people who live and work here. Once money is deposited in the Trust Fund, it will be used in five different ways. 35 percent of the funds will be divided evenly among the five Gulf Coast States for ecological and economic restoration. 30 percent will be distributed to this Council to develop and implement a Comprehensive Plan focused on restoration projects to benefit Coastal communities. 30 percent will be dedicated to the Gulf Coast states for projects based on impacts from the oil spill. And if you're paying attention, we're still missing 5 percent. 2.5 percent will be dedicated to creating what's called the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration, Science, Observation, Monitoring and Technology Program. And the remaining 2.5 percent is dedicated to Centers of Excellence in each state that will provide research grants for science, technology, and monitoring related to Gulf restoration.

What we don't know – because litigation is still pending – is how much money will be in the fund or quite when it will become available. In the meantime, however, the Council has some important deadlines to meet and we are moving forward, as this first meeting shows.

Due to the leadership of Administrator Jackson and the Gulf Coast Restoration Task Force, we have a very strong foundation on which to build.

The Task Force did an excellent job in coordinating with community leaders and stakeholders from across the Gulf to address immediate concerns, while also establishing overarching goals and a framework for restoration. The strategy they developed will be an invaluable, basic document for us to use as we move forward. And I want to start, appropriately, by thanking Administrator Jackson and a number of other people who were on that task force for all the work they did. Let's give them a round of applause.

Looking forward, this Council will use the expected funds for coastal restoration, economic development, and travel and tourism. We will be working closely with the people in coastal communities to identify projects and programs that will accomplish these goals.

And, I've said a number of times that economic development and coastal restoration are not either or's, they are both ands. We need to do these together. All of us here know that the Comprehensive Plan that we must develop must take an integrated approach, recognizing-it's in my speech-coastal and ecosystem restoration is inextricably linked to economic growth and development. So we must have a broad understanding of everything from the effects of coastal erosion on the Gulf to the unique cultures and communities that exist along its 1,600 miles of shoreline. Overall, the goal of this Council is simple: to use the money ultimately provided to get the Gulf Coast back to its feet –stronger, healthier, more economically resilient and more vibrant than ever.

My commitment is the six federal agencies on the Council, from this administration as a whole, will continue to be fully engaged. And, importantly, we will work closely with our partners who share the

Council's vision for restoration and sustainability. That includes the Natural Resource Damage Assessment Trustees and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

We know we don't have all the answers in Washington. Some people think we don't have very many, I know that.

President Obama has made it clear: he wants the plans to come from the Gulf to Washington, not the other way around.

That's why the five states that are represented here are key members of this Council and their voices will help lead the process. That's also why we are holding our first meeting here today – with representatives from localities, agencies, nonprofits, and other from the Gulf Coast who can help begin this important work.

Furthermore, we plan to be visible in the region as the process moves forward. I'm pleased to say that early next year we will be holding a series of public meetings and listening sessions in each of the five Gulf States. Later this afternoon, we're going to have the opportunity to hear from some of you. I hope you took advantage of the "comment booth" during the Open House this morning. If not, I hope you'll consider offering comments during the second Open House session following that meeting, particularly if you're not someone who gets to the microphone this afternoon.

Simply put, we need your ideas and your energy to ensure that this Council develops plans that will have the best possible impact on the Gulf Region.

All of us here believe, the Gulf is a national treasure.

People from across the country and around the world travel to see what this region has to offer. It is the basis for lives and livelihoods of thousands of hardworking Americans.

Thank you again for being here today, for your commitment, and for your passion to this set of issues. I look forward to our discussion and I look forward to working with everyone here in the months and the years to come.

And with that, let me turn to comments from Administrator Jackson.

ADMINISTRATOR JACKSON: Good afternoon again everyone. First, Governor thank you for hosting us here in your beautiful state and for those welcoming remarks and reminding us that it is about the people sir, I wholeheartedly agree. Dr. Blank, best wishes as you embark upon one of the more important things that will happen in terms of the environment, I think, in the next year. And so I wish you and the council and all of us and everyone here the best of luck and the best of outcomes.

And I want to give greetings to the members of the council, I'm actually addressing them but I cannot help but looking at this audience and address you as well. Please allow me, I have fifteen minutes to summarize what, in many ways, was a labor of love, but definitely labor, I want to make sure and do justice, not just to the work we did but the energy, enthusiasm, urgency and passion for Gulf Coast ecosystem restoration that was represented during the year-plus as a task force together.

First, let me please thank John Hankinson, the Executive Director of the Task Force. He's sitting in the front row. Please join me in thanking him. I also want to acknowledge Ken Kopocis, who will be representing us on the council, most days. He's also the president's nominee for heading the office of water and Administrator Gwen Keyes-Fleming from our Atlanta office and Administrator Ron Curry from our office in Dallas, Texas.

I have to say hi to one of our local government advisory committee members, who's actually chair for us, Mayor Ron Davis of Pritchard. Thank you for coming sir, as well. So many people who are here... Billy were you on it well? Okay, just want to make sure. Anyone else who is on our local advisory committee, I want to make sure we acknowledge.

It's an auspicious day for all of us, and especially for the millions of our fellow Americans who live in the Gulf region. In 2010, President Obama formed the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force and formalized a commitment that his administration had made to this region. The president charged me and my colleagues from the five Gulf States and eleven federal agencies with tackling the long-term challenges of this critical ecosystem. And he gave me the great honor of serving as the chair of the task force.

I can tell you after twenty plus years in public service there really is nothing you can do that's more gratifying than being able to serve a place you call home. To be able to come back and hopefully do honor to the people that were your neighbors and your friends. I was raised in New Orleans and I lived there for most of my formative years and know how the local waters and wetlands impact the health of the region. They shape the industries and the jobs that support Gulf Coast families and they inform the way of life for millions of people.

It has been a true privilege for me to witness everyone with a stake in the Gulf's future-from wherever they come from, live, sit, worship-come together to develop a comprehensive long-term strategy for its future and for protection. Now as you heard from Dr. Blank, one thing the president has made clear even before we started back in 2010 is that the best restoration plans will not come from Washington to the Gulf but from the Gulf to Washington. It's the wisdom and experience and humor of the people that call this area home that proved to be the most valuable resource that we tapped when we were working as a task force. The task force held meetings in every one of the Gulf States-Florida got hit twice, we took grief for that one, it was a great meeting both times. We had the opportunity to hear about and even see firsthand a number of innovative ideas and energy and work that was happening on the ground to address the challenges of the regions. These interactions and our listening sessions with local experts and scientists and tribal leaders and academics and members of the public guided the formation of the restoration strategy that we released almost a year ago-to the day-in Houston.

Thanks to unprecedented collaboration and compromise, long hours of hard-work, the strategy lays out a clear detailed and achievable blueprint for action in the Gulf. I want to go over the main parts of that. It identified four broad goals to facilitate long term restoration. Let me take a moment to talk about those for a second and why each one I believe is an important priority as this council moves ahead.

The first one is to restore and conserve habitat. Science shows us that ongoing loss and degradation of wetlands and barrier islands and other coastal habitats threatens everything from imperiled species to commercial fisheries to energy security to community resilience. In my home state of Louisiana alone, on average an area of wetlands the size of a football field turns into open water every thirty eight minutes. If nothing changes, it's expected that we'll lose one third of the wetlands we see today by 2050.

Everyday Gulf Coast communities are losing more and more of the wetland buffers, the barrier islands that serve as natural pollution filters and protection against storm surges. Gulf species are losing their habitats and Gulf Coast residents who have built their lives and their livelihoods working in fishing and tourism and other industries that rely on a thriving ecosystem are at risk. The strategy we developed places restoration on equal footing with other river management priorities. It supports more holistic river management, smart use of sediments and expanded habitat conservation all of which are vital if we want to reverse the trend of destruction.

The second goal the task force identified was to restore water quality. It does not take a scientist to recognize how essential clean water is to a healthy community. But clean Gulf waters are not only critical to the health of millions of people, animals and fish that call the gulf home, they're also critical to the health of the economy. If the direct link between the environment and the economy is clear anywhere, it's here.

In 2009, the Gross Domestic Product of the five Gulf States was nearly \$2.4 trillion, 17 percent of U.S. GDP. In addition to the millions who live here, millions more visit the Gulf Coast each year to vacation, to sail, to swim, to fish, to enjoy the great water body. In 2008, national and international tourists spent about \$145 billion in the five coastal states and approximately 1.7 million people were employed in travel and tourism. The Gulf is also home to a multi-billion dollar fishing that relies on healthy waters. In 2008, the commercial fish and shellfish harvest from the five US Gulf States was estimated at 1.3 billion pounds, worth as much as \$661 million.

To protect the coastal communities and the key economic drivers that depend on the clean Gulf we have to take action to reduce the excessive nutrients and pathogens and other pollutants that are degrading our waters. That will require, among other things, a commitment to reducing nutrients entering the Gulf, to reducing pollution from storm water and other sources, to improving the quality and quantity of freshwater flows to estuaries.

The third goal that should drive long-term restoration is to replenish and protect living and coastal marine waters. More than 15,000 species are found in the Gulf's waters. This region is the only spawning ground of the critically depleted Western Atlantic population of the Blue Fin Tuna. And Louisiana's wetlands alone provide wintering ground for 70 percent of the nation's migratory water fowl. But the rich diversity of fish, wildlife and other living resources is at risk. Far too many of the Gulf's living resources are in decline or at abundances that are far below historical records. As the strategy outline is to reverse these trends, we have to concentrate our efforts on conserving and protecting offshore environments, on restoring the depleted population of living coastal and marine resources, protecting oyster and coral reefs and on minimizing, or eliminating if we can, invasive species. We also have to expand and better coordinate our monitoring of sentinel species.

The fourth and final goal of the restoration strategy is to enhance community resilience. It comes back to the people. And while all the goals are critical, it was always my favorite. You all know that I grew up in New Orleans but I was in also in New Orleans a few days before Katrina hit. I wasn't there for anything like work, I was there to celebrate my mom's birthday. We didn't do much celebrating, like so many people along the Gulf Coast we got in the car and drove north. When she returned to her neighborhood, she saw that the storm destroyed everything. She sat on the sidewalk in her wheelchair to watch demolition crews remove everything from the house, where she had raised a family and lived for decades.

Before that storm, my mother would have never thought of herself as an environmentalist and couldn't understand why her daughter had become that instead of a doctor. In the time that followed she learned that the flooding had been worse because of the loss of wetlands, the loss of natural defenses, and today she can hold her own in a conversation about why wetlands preservation is not something you do for some far off species but to protect your own. She can hold her own with any expert and she's one of the people from the Gulf who have a new appreciation for resilience in the context of our environment.

The loss and degradation of the Gulf Coast undermines community resilience. It threatens your economy. It threatens the cultural vitality of your communities and it removes nature's critical defense against storms and sea level rise and other dangers. But if we repair the damage that has been done to the coast, if we work to build stronger and more sustainable communities with engaged citizens who are educated on the issues of the environment that affect them, then maybe the next time a storm like Katrina touches ground it won't take as long for the Gulf to recover or bounce back to its wonderful, vibrant self.

The unfortunate truth is that there will be a next time. It's common sense that communities along the Gulf will continue to see power and destructive storms as we have for years. It's a scientific fact that if we don't take action to address what could be the greatest crisis we face-climate change-in the future those storms will be more and more frequent. Anyone who loves the Gulf and has watched it suffer and struggle and recover and rebuild over the last seven years knows that we cannot wait until the next time to begin to act. We have to know that's because we care about our economy as well and the lives of the millions of people who will be affected if we don't.

I feel like this is the moment so many of you have worked for. It's your Restore Act and it wouldn't have happened without you. It's really the piece, the signature piece of environmental legislation from the last congress and it passed in a bipartisan fashion. Don't let anyone say that it can't happen when the people ask their representatives to do it for them. And I do salute the delegation here in Alabama and in the other states who showed the leadership to make it happen. It's time to move from the homegrown solutions and the state plans to action, for an ecosystem that deserves that and more. I think our strategy is based on science, not on politics and for that reason, we all came together to support it. So here's my charge to the council, humbly, don't let this become another plan that sits on the shelf. Follow through on all those meetings, on the community-driven solutions that the strategy outlines. We owe it to the citizens of the Gulf to do what they want, not what developers or special interests or anyone else wants. And we owe it to the citizens to put in place an advisory council so that they may give advice as soon as possible. Let's continue to move forward, we have a lot of work ahead. It has been my true privilege. I want to just thank Ben Scaggs, who will be running our Gulf office and Brian for all the hard work.

And please allow me to just say, with respect to all my federal partners, all eleven of them: Jerry Patterson, Helen Young, Mimi Drew, Gunter Guy, Alice Perry, Garret Graves-we're a family and I thank you for what has been the best experience in my four years. Thanks.

DR. BLANK: Thank you very much Administrator Jackson and thanks to Executive Director Hankinson, who is going to speak next.

JOHN HANKINSON: My goodness, look at all these folks. I really appreciate all of you being here as we get the Restore Council off to a good start. I was thinking back to our first meeting with the Task Force in Pensacola, where we had this many people in a room about a third of its size. Those of you are here will remember that very well. We learned after that we got the Gulf of Mexico Room to come run our meetings and it worked a lot better after that.

As the administrator said, we will be riding off into the sunset but we are riding off with a great blueprint that you helped produce over the last year or two: The Gulf of Mexico Ecosystem Restoration Strategy. There are not very many bound copies of this left but you will all get one in your binders when you are given your binders at the end of this. I see we almost have a task force quorum here and I want to thank all the task force members for all the hard work you did.

In the binders I just mentioned, there are a few memos on the roles of the task force in the RESTORE process because we do have a continuing role even as we dissolve. I'm not quite sure how we will do that, we'll have to do that from some ESP process but we're working hard with the council right now. There's a good highlights piece in there about the strategy. And there's two staff pieces that did get finally approved by the task force but they were asked for by the task force. One is called the inter-agency restoration assessment team process, which tries to address the need to have more efficiency in terms of getting projects done. If we're going to get an influx of money, and we all hope we're going to get an influx of money to do restoration the Gulf needs, we need to really look at how we can do that in a way that we don't sit holding this money while there's important work needing to be done for the environment and the communities. We've sort of taken off on that but we will give our initial products over to the council for your consideration.

The second one of those is the conservation framework. One of the key pieces of the habitat goal that the administrator talked about is that we need to protect those areas and conserve those areas that are an important part of the Gulf. We talked about creating a landscape linkage of important lands and conservation activities involving public and private lands across the Gulf and this is an effort that was done by our staff, Chris Piece with the Department of Interior, principally designed that. It will help guide how we select those kinds of projects going forward, again, when we do have resources. So I'm very excited about that, I think that's actually something that could move fairly quickly while we may be designing more complex restoration efforts.

In addition to the goals the administrator discussed, there are some, what I'd call, process or infrastructure pieces of the strategy that I think are very important to mention. The first is the science part. This army runs on science. We got tremendous support from the scientific community in developing the strategy. They're all very organized out there. We have some tremendous scientists in the Gulf and there's a lot of important and organized work that needs to be done, maintaining the science basis for restoration, if we're really going to do this right.

I mentioned the need to address the barriers to restoration, in addition to efficiency, there are policy issues that come up that this council may need to address. One thing we called attention to in the strategy is state-level planning, like the Mississippi Coastal Improvement Plan and the Louisiana Master Plan, Alabama's been doing planning with their coastal mission but I think moving forward that state-level planning we ought to keep the accelerator down on that while we're working out all the details of this process because it really helps move the ball to get those visions firmly in place.

The other thing that I discovered when I came down here is the tremendous network of people already working together on restoring the Gulf. Now, we've not had much money to work with but that hasn't stopped folks from getting together and really thinking through, okay what is it that we can do now and what is it we would do later if we did get the resources? And hopefully that's coming. I'm talking to all my friends: you got folks down there who know what they're doing, let them do the work and just support them and don't get in their way. In closing I just want to say, thank you so much, it's been a tremendous two years for me. I actually managed to lose about twenty pounds in the process. I'm not quite sure whether that was good or bad or different but we'll probably discover that. But it's been tremendous working with this task force; these people are just a tremendous group. The states really stepped up and put tremendous pieces of importance in the strategy. Alice Perry from Mississippi was very helpful in herding that part. It's just been a tremendous opportunity. I'm going to go back to St. Augustine and crank up my Blues Band, some of you know I like to play music but they told me I couldn't play today, I'm sorry. But anyway, anyway I can help in the future just give me a shout. And again, good luck for the Gulf, we've really got to do all we can for this wonderful resource. Thank you.

DR. BLANK: Thank you very much John. We are now open for discussion until two o'clock, which I have about twelve minutes according to my watch, for that. And this is a discussion here amongst the council members. And let me start by saying since the Task Force has finished its work and turned their reports over and this is something for us to build on as we start the RESTORE Council: in what ways can the work of the Task Force inform our work as we move forward, how can we use this to leverage it? And let me start by asking Rachel Jacobson of the Department of the Interior to say a few words about this.

RACHEL JACOBSON: Sure, thank you so much Secretary Blank. The Task Force really laid the groundwork for comprehensive Gulf of Mexico restoration. As just eloquently articulated by Administrator Jackson, to recap the four pillars of restoration strategy laid out by the Task Force with full public input are the following: Restore and conserve habitat, Restore Water Quality, protect coastal and marine resources and enhance community resilience. These four pillars should be the goals of the comprehensive plan that this RESTORE Council is embarking on right now.

Through the RESTORE funding and looking to these pillars, as established by the Task Force, the RESTORE money, hopefully combined to the extent possible with natural resource damages and other sources of funding give us an unprecedented opportunity to accomplish meaningful, long-lasting Gulf of Mexico restoration. And as mentioned by Governor Bentley and Secretary Blank, this will not only contribute to the health of the ecosystem but it will also contribute to the health of the regional economy. And, as the Task Force did in developing this strategy, we the Council must engage the public at every single step of the way, because as everybody else has mentioned today, and it can't be said enough, this is a public, transparent process.

The road ahead of us is long and the work is challenging but the commitment is very strong. So we're grateful to Administrator Jackson and the whole team that we have this Task Force to guide our way. Thank you.

DR. BLANK: Thank you Rachel. Other comments that people here on the council want to make as we think about moving forward.

HARRIS SHERMAN: Yes, again, I'm Harris Sherman Undersecretary at USDA. First, you know, I just want to commend the Task Force for the collaborative effort that was undertaken. It was a tremendous example of how state and federal governments can work together and really make a difference. I think the other thing that resonated most with me on the Task Force was that the Task Force really did seek public involvement and the public involvement made a tremendous difference in what the strategy now looks like. So I would just urge the public to keep at it, to stay with us and to give us your best and most thoughtful ideas going forward. At USDA, and particularly the agency that deals directly with these issues-The Natural Resources Conservation Service-two of the goals that resonated with us were restoring and conserving habitat and restoring water quality. And I just want to emphasize that NRCS is an agency that works on a voluntary basis with private land owners and most of the land in the Gulf region-I think something like 86 percent is private land-so we are focused on the fact that we have spent something like \$4 billion in the last six years in the Gulf Region, working on restoration of wetlands, improving soils and dealing with water quality. And on the water quality side, I just want to emphasize that we're really trying to do here is to protect the water quality that flows into the Gulf. I think as you know, cropland is one of the dominant sources of nutrient and phosphorous that ends up flowing into the Gulf. So we are very focused on how we can work to avoid, to control and to trap nutrient runoff into the Gulf, how we can work to reduce sediments that go into the Gulf. This is a very important part of the strategy and NRCS has worked very hard recently in launching the Gulf of Mexico initiative-some \$50 million initiative-separate and apart from the RESTORE Council but very, very complementary to what the RESTORE Council is doing.

And we are working very hard to look at the Mississippi River in its totality to see how we can deal with controlling and reducing nutrients there because obviously this hypoxic zone in the Gulf is affected very centrally by the water quality of the Mississippi River. So, these are incredibly important initiatives. We are proud to be a part of this. I want to thank all of you and again, to urge you stay with us, to give us your best and most creative ideas as we go forward with the comprehensive plan.

DR. BLANK: The state representatives are not going to let the federal representatives do all the talking I'm sure.

GARRET GRAVES: I'm going to filibuster for five minutes. I'd like to go back and discuss perhaps a question you posed to Interior with regard to the other plans that were put together. The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force did put together a comprehensive plan for the Gulf. I think it's important to recognize that the five Gulf States have different goals, different citizens, different

objectives, different industries, different ecosystems and the Task Force Strategy was an attempt to begin pulling that together.

In regard to the differences Governor Bentley noted earlier, the fact that a lot of people from Louisiana come visit Alabama. For one week a year, they come to Alabama and the other fifty one weeks a year they go back to Louisiana. And that's an important distinction just recognizing the differences among the five Gulf States. But seriously, the Task Force for the first time began pulling together kind of a thematic approach to the Gulf, recognizing the sovereignty, recognizing the goals of those individual states and the economies and the different estuaries in those different states. But trying to determine what we can do to make sure the efforts of various states are complementary, rather than conflicted. I think this Council is going to play a critical role as we move forward, noting as Ms. Jacobson did earlier, that we're going to have billions of dollars ultimately spent through the Natural Resource Damages process, billions of dollars through the RESTORE Council. Recently announced, billions of dollars through the criminal settlement, plea agreement, associated with the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. In addition to that, nearly a billion dollars is being spent right now through the Coastal Impact Assistance Program and I anticipate hundreds of millions of dollars, if not more, through the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act in the future.

And of course adding all the other federal programs, as Mr. Sherman noted the NRCS investment and others, making sure these are being spent in a manner that recognizes some type of comprehensive approach as opposed to doing conflicted or contrary goals among the various states. And so I think that the Gulf Coast Task Force work is going to be very important as we move forward, but these individual state plans, as many states have developed, are going to be the foundation, ultimately, for these investments.

MIMI DREW: I can't let that go because the last time I flew out of Panama City and Texas and back, the plane was packed with people from Texas and Louisiana on their way to Panama City. I think that we all have resources we share and I think this terrible adversity brought us all together. In fact, the states and the federal agencies involved have a lot more similarities than differences. And certainly working through the Task Force and NRDA process, you know I think we've all made some good friends across those five states and within the federal agencies. I'm personally grateful for that, and I think that will help us move forward with this effort. I appreciate all my buddies on all the different task forces and groups and look forward to working with everybody on this effort.

DR. BLANK: Anyone else have something you want to say? Or we will move on to the next item on the agenda. Alright, in that case I'm now going to turn to Trudy Fisher, who is the Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality for a presentation on the RESTORE Act and our *Path Forward*.

TRUDY FISHER: Thank you. Good afternoon, thank you all for being here today. As Gov. Bentley reminded us, and we're all picking up on that, it was such a great reminder, it's about the people, it's about you, all of you that are here today. We're looking forward to getting to the part of the agenda where we get to hear from you and your thoughts and comments as we start this important process of the RESTORE Council. Now I was reminded when I looked out across the audience, the size of this

gathering is a visible commitment, a visible proof, that all of our commitment to restore our Gulf Coast is as strong as it was two and half years ago, if not stronger.

Our goal then, just as it is now, is to hold those who are responsible, accountable, and to secure both environmental and economic restoration of the Gulf region. Now you've already heard us talk and you recognize that many of us wear different hats on the RESTORE Council. Although we do wear many different hats, we all share a common passion and fortitude for the work that lies ahead of us.

And so it is with great pleasure that I offer my comments today on the role of the RESTORE Council on achieving our ultimate goal. Now, how do we as the RESTORE Council...how can we be successful?

Again, it comes back to you, the people. Your involvement throughout this process, the public's involvement throughout this process, is critical to the success of the council and to the implementation of the RESTORE Act as intended by Congress. The political leadership in all five Gulf States worked hard to secure passage of the RESTORE Act. Many of you work hard for the passage of the RESTORE Act. All the way through that effort, our leadership, our public, recognizing that we would make the most out of the monies of the RESTORE fund if we focused on partnerships and maximize a state-centric focus implementation of the RESTORE Act. The Act: I'm sure everyone in here has read it and is familiar with it. It's bold, something that's never been done quite like it before. It offers a wide platform for restoration of both the environment and the economy. We are a dynamic partnership of federal and state entities and we are bound together by the important of our work and its lasting legacy on our gulf region.

Clearly, and as you've already heard mentioned some this afternoon, overall recovery and restoration will occur on a number of fronts. And we will have many worthy partners working shoulder to shoulder through us, with us, through other organized bodies. You've already heard mention of the *Deepwater Horizon* Trustee Council and the Natural Resource Damage Assessment Process. We've also made mention of the criminal plea agreement and those monies that will be available, all focused on the Gulf Region. The RESTORE Council however, is poised to lead this effort and build on the work of the Gulf Coast Restoration Task Force and to embody Congress's intent and carry that Task Force document forward, and make sure that it carries forward the intent of the RESTORE Act.

Administrator Jackson, as always I want to thank you and the Task Force for that work. And as a Council, we look forward to building upon the Task Force document and that final report as we carry forward our responsibility of implementation of the RESTORE Act.

Now just a few details of the RESTORE Act: as many of you know it's funded, will be funded, by 80 percent of the Clean Water Act civil penalties. And I'm going to emphasize civil because it's not criminal penalties. There are so many different activities and discussions going on with various groups and within the media that we want to make sure we focus on what our responsibilities are on the civil penalty portion that will actually fund the RESTORE Act.

Now as Secretary Blank has already mentioned, these civil penalties, where are they going to come from? They're going to come from either a settlement with the responsibility parties or the civil penalties are going to result from a series of trials that are yet to take place.

Well, as you know, we haven't had a settlement on the civil penalties and we haven't had a conclusion of any litigation so we're not funded. There's no money in the RESTORE Act as we sit here today. But has that made a difference on the work we've been doing as a Council? The answer is a resounding no. It is not made a difference. We do expect to be funded. None of us have a crystal ball that can tell you when or what the amount is. But there is one thing that is very clear to us: our path forward.

Since the passage of the RESTORE Act, in July of 2012, our work has been urgent, our work has been urgent, and it will continue to be with a sense of urgency. Our governors, our local leaders, you the public, and the president have made it all clear to everyone of us who serves on the council that we are be ready, we are to be prepared, to carry forward our responsibilities on the Act, when it is funded by the civil penalties.

Now, you're sitting there going what has the RESTORE Council been doing since July, 2012? There's been a tremendous amount of foundational work that has led to us being here today; to this public meeting. And we were so focused. We wanted to make sure we had this meeting before the completion of this year so that we could begin the public engagement process to hear from you. And as Secretary Blank said earlier, do we have all the answers as stand before you today? No. Do we know exactly what a comprehensive plan is going to look like in July of 2013? Absolutely not. Because that's what we want to hear about from the public, from you, from other public meetings that we'll be having. This day is but a prelude of other events yet to come. Now, you notice from looking at the RESTORE Act, we're required to publish a proposed plan by the end of this year. And we're going to accomplish that proposed plan, and that is going to be quickly followed by a series of public engagement sessions across the five Gulf States. Those meetings are going to be held in late January and early February, they're going to be highly publicized, with the goal of securing the same energy and participation that we feel in this room today.

A draft Comprehensive Plan is scheduled for release for public comment in the spring of 2013. Our plan is to release a draft Comprehensive Plan in the spring of this next year and it will be followed by the release of an initial Comprehensive Plan by July 6, 2013, which is the one year anniversary of the passage of the RESTORE Act. Now as a reminder (we have one more speaker) before we get into the most important part of the day when we hear from you, I want to quickly go over again the way the RESTORE fund is allocated, very high level. 35 percent of the funds are divided evenly among the five Gulf States for ecological and economic restoration. 30 percent of the funds are dispersed through the Council. 30 percent of the funds are dedicated to the Gulf Coast States based on a formula. 2.5 percent of the funds are dedicated to the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration science, observation, monitoring and technology program. And 2.5 percent of the funds are dedicated to the Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program.

This has been said already but I feel like it's worth repeating, we've got a lot of work ahead of us, we've got congressional deadlines ahead of us. We have the fortitude and the sense of urgency, the excitement to be here and to hear from you as we carry forward our responsibilities. While we do have a lot of work and challenges ahead of us, and I was thinking about my comments today, I thought I would just share with you one of my most famous quotes. I find it very helpful and inspirational. It's in the words of one of America's poets. "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." Let's reach into what lies within us and let's begin this process in hearing from all of you. I ask you to seize the day and let us hear from you. Thank you so much for being here.

DR. BLANK: Thank you very much, Trudy. Before we move to our final speaker, is there anything that any of the Council members here want to say about what they need to keep in mind as we forward with our clear next job, which is to start developing this Comprehensive Plan. Things that folks want to put on the table in addition to what Trudy already said?

TRUDY FISHER: You got me talking now. I just think we need to...in our public engagement and public involvement and notice of our meetings, we're going to get that pushed out there. We're going to continue to get that information out, and information about the meetings, the where, the when, the details as soon as we can so everyone can make plans all across the Gulf States to be here with us as we meet all across the Gulf Region.

DR. BLANK: Anyone else? Alright, in that case, let me turn to Dr. Paul Sandifer. He is the Senior Science Adviser at NOAA's National Ocean Service. Dr. Sandifer has a long and distinguished career and has played an important role as a researcher and a leader in his field; he has received lots and lots of awards. He's recently has played a key role in developing and implementing the National Ocean Policy inside the administration. And we're very pleased that he's leading the efforts to establish the Gulf of Mexico coordinated ecosystem restoration Research, Monitoring, Observation, Science and Technology program, which will get 2.5 percent of the funding. So, Dr. Sandifer, tell us something about this.

DR. SANDIFER: Thank you very much for that kind introduction, Secretary Blank. You can tell I'm the designated science geek on the program. I'm the only one with power points. Most of us raised in the sciences find it difficult to talk about something to hang on to. So, I'll hope you'll bear with me. I also want to remind you how many times we've heard reference to science as the foundational element for decision-making in restoration, recovery and sustainability. I think it's highly appropriate that this small piece of the RESTORE Act be brought out this afternoon.

My purpose is to tell you where we are within NOAA and development of the framework for Gulf of Mexico coordinated ecosystem restoration Research, Monitoring, Observation, Science and Technology program, which is to be administered by NOAA, as required under section 1604 of the RESTORE Act. This program, as Trudy just mentioned, is to be funded by 2.5 percent of the 80 percent of the Clean Water Act funds when they arrive after the settlement penalties, after it is settled. It also will be augmented by 25 percent of the Trust Fund's annual earned interest and investment percent. I also want to point out to you that the Act lists a number of things that these funds may be used for. But it also states very explicitly some things that they may not be used for. And they may not be used for any existing or planned research by NOAA unless agreed to in writing by grant recipient. They may not be used to implement existing regulations or initiate new regulations. They may not be used to develop or prove a new limited access program, just so you know. This one, you just heard again from Trudy, and I just want to make sure we're all on the same page with what the RESTORE Act funding is. And there's five interrelated program elements: 35 percent of the funds will be distributed to the five Gulf States, 30 percent to go to this Council for implementation its comprehensive plan, 30 percent to be distributed to the states based on impact and 2.5 percent each to go to this program I'm talking about today and the Centers of Excellence for the five states.

So let me get to what we've been doing. To develop this framework NOAA established a cross agency team led by three senior executives representing the National Fishery Service, National Ocean Service

and the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research within NOAA. We quickly added senior representation from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to meet the requirements of the act for the NOAA Administrator and the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to jointly develop this program and I can tell you we have worked seamlessly together since we have joined forces. As we began our work we received initial guidance from Dr. Lubchenco, the NOAA Administrator, as to the importance of looking at the Gulf of Mexico as an integrated system, looking at the whole thing and focusing on the sustained delivery of ecosystem services and inclusion of all areas of the Gulf from the coasts out to the deepwater. And throughout this effort we have begun engaging with partners and stakeholders, paying some particular attention to the requirement of the act that we consult with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council in carrying out the program. However, I point to the bottom little paragraph in italics here. Due to the considerable uncertainties related to when and how much funding will be available, we have not yet been able to get into the details of program implementation plan. We will do that in collaboration with many, many people in this room and other partners and stakeholders in the Gulf when we have a better idea of the dimensions of the program. Now, our fish and wildlife service and NOAA team developed a draft purpose statement that is founded upon language of the act and the guidance provided us by the NOAA Administrator. And so our purpose is to achieve an integrative, holistic understanding of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem and support to the maximum extent practicable, restoration efforts and the long-term sustainability and resiliency of the ecosystem including its fish docks, habitats and fishing industries. We also developed a long list of guiding principles and philosophies. I've selected several to emphasize here. That is the program is to require an ecosystem approach. It should build on and utilize existing activities in what is already being done here in many different institutions and organizations. Focus on integrating that information. It should leverage existing partnerships and develop new ones wherever possible. It should work within a policy framework that includes the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commissions and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and to the degree possible, it should be scalable, modular, collaborative and not duplicate other efforts.

We're proposing to organize this science into four major bins that would allow us then to fit specific projects for implementation a little bit later on. So the first of these is development of periodic health reports, state of health reports for the Gulf that would incorporate environmental, socio-economic and human benefits and elements. This Gulf health assessment will include an inter-rater gap analysis to identify essential research that is not already being done. And it will support development and monitoring of ecosystem health indicators, including those for fisheries. A good example of something we might consider to build on for these indicators for Gulf help is a recently released ocean health index, developed and communicated by a team of researchers led by Ben Halpern and published in the scientific journal *Nature* in 2012. This index provides a quantitative way of looking at the comparative status of ecosystem services in terms of direct support of human needs, goals and values.

The second bin emphasizes integration and synthesis of data, both existing and new information developed under this program and elsewhere. This is often talked about but frequently overlooked in research programs that get all tied up in developing new information. But it's essential if we are going to develop information products that actually inform policy and improve management.

Our third bin is research on ecosystem processes and functioning to support restoration planning and implementation, including for fisheries and fishery science.

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And our fifth bin, I mean our fourth bin, our fourth bin includes holistic, that is emphasizing the entire Gulf again, ecosystem observing and monitoring technologies and data integration tools that would include needs for natural resources and fisheries as well as other things.

We spent a good bit of time deliberating as to how this program might best be structured and administered within NOAA. And what we have recommended is that the program be housed in one of our line offices but with oversight and participation by all. And for those of you who don't speak NOAA speak, line offices are the sub-entities that make up the agency. Those are The National Environmental Data, Satellite and Information Service, The National Marine Fishery Service, The National Ocean Service, The Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research and the Office of Program Planning and Integration.

Senior executives from these five offices plus the Fish and Wildlife Service plus NOAA finance will constitute an oversight board for the program. We will also staff the program with a very small team from across NOAA and utilize to the greatest extent possible some of our highly experienced staff here in the Gulf, who know this territory, know what's going on, and know what you need better than us in Washington do. By the way, I'm in Charleston, South Carolina, not in Washington.

And we will be prepared to use the full gambit of funding mechanisms that is available to us, including grants, contracts and cooperative agreements in order to have the most flexibility to work with partners. And finally, all of the science that we intend to fund will be competitively reviewed. So now I'd like to conclude with very few final observations. First, we intend this program to not be business as usual. This is a unique opportunity to integrate and tie together results from the numerous science efforts ongoing across the Gulf, with the goal of producing an enhanced understanding of the Gulf that would be much more than just a sum of its various parts.

Secondly, we expect the program to deliver science that will specifically support the long-term sustainability and resiliency of the Gulf. And as we move from the framework to actual implementation, it will be important for us to figure out how best we can coordinate with other activities in the Gulf. A Coordination plan is required by the act but it's going to be incumbent upon us to go beyond just the elements of the RESTORE Act in coordination amongst all of the other scientific activities in the Gulf. It's also important to note that we will coordinate with the NRDA process and that's the Resource Damage Assessment Process but direct NRDA activities will be excluded, that's to keep us in our appropriate swimming lanes.

Finally, I would just like to remind you that this is just 2.5 percent of a much larger program on ecological and economic restoration, so there's no way that it by itself is going to be able to support all of the science needed for monitoring of the various restoration activities.

DR. BLANK: Thank you, Paul. Again, we've got a few minutes here. I think I might start by asking Administrator Jackson to say a little bit from their experience with the Task Force about how we here on the RESTORE Council as we move forward can best coordinate with not just this science program but the Centers of Excellence and all the other scientific work and researchers that are out there.

ADMINISTRATOR JACKSON: Thank you, Dr. Blank and thank you Dr. Sandifer for that very helpful actually, just like there's a need for coordination of action, there's a huge need for coordination of science. And many of us are excited by the prospect of that because in and of itself many of the people

who are motivated to action are motivated because they're scientists or because they've been working on these issues and so I think it just leverages the kind of interest that we see here. A couple of just quick observations, I think John Hankinson mentioned many of them, the first was that, to borrow scientific terms from electrical engineering, this will have to be done in parallel and not in series. While we are working on the plans that Trudy talked about and building on the things we already know, we're going to have science that continues to emerge, that continues to be refined, that continues to broaden. I would hope that broadening includes lots of institutions around the Gulf so that there's a real buy in around the Gulf, around educational institutions at many levels to help make this part of the education process and the consensus process. So that's number one, you're going to have that challenge, it's actually an opportunity. We don't have time to wait to get it all right, that would be nice but we have a sense of urgency here.

The second is, as mentioned I think by John, there is a wealth of information out there already and so the challenge here is with the huge infusion, it may sound like a lot, but when you look at all these different pots, there's going to be a huge infusion of money to fund great research around this Gulf that can only help. And so building that network of people and not starting from scratch is a huge opportunity and I certainly wish you well and know you will do well with it.

The third is adaptive management. That concept is throughout the strategy report, the idea that as you learn you adapt the plan and as you do something different to the plan you might adapt the monitoring. And so, I can't stress enough how important it is, as important as academic research is that the connection ties the communication between the research efforts and the plans and restoration opportunities on the ground really allow for adaptive management because no plan is perfect.

And, last but not least, measurable results. I think many of us have felt that one of the things that will help a lot is a very good tool, scientifically robust tool, but a simple one in many ways to explain to people whether the Gulf is getting better, worse, where it's challenged, where it's not, how that matters, who it's hurting, whether the people are being disproportionately impacted in one community or another, one place or another. And all those things are possible and I think that again would become an extraordinarily important tool for policy makers and people to leverage interest in funding, private sector NGO funding.

DR. BLANK: Anyone else want to contribute to the conversation here? Rachel?

RACHEL JACOBSON: Sure, thank you. I think as Dr. Sandifer mentioned in his last remark, at a mere 2.5 percent this will not even put a dent in the amount of science and monitoring and other analyses that we need to make sure these investments are sound. And I think it behooves all of us to look at our own internal science functions that we have: Department of Interior, of course we have the US Geological Survey that's doing a lot of important science work in the Gulf, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management also doing a lot of important science work in the Gulf. We've established together with federal and state partners, landscape cooperation and conservation cooperatives throughout the region that are specifically intended to look at how we accomplish landscape-level conservation. And together with the great science being done by many of our NGO partners and the universities, there's so much good science to bring to the table.

The Gulf of Mexico alliance, as Administrator Jackson reminds me, so we really have to think hard to make sure our science is as aligned as possible, as transparent, as peer reviewed as possible so these investments are sustainable.

DR. BLANK: Thank you. Anyone else have anything to add? All right, in that case I think it's time to move to the public comment portion of the period, of this meeting. We have set out a substantial period of time for public comment; I think we have two hours. And I want to welcome Roberta Swann. Roberta you want to come up to the podium? Roberta is director of the Mobile Bay Estuary Program. As I understand it, she takes a very collaborative approach in working with all of her stakeholders to support water shed management and is in fact in the midst of working with all of them to develop the estuaries next five year plan.

Roberta, thank you for helping us out today. She is going to be the moderator for the public session and she will tell us how it will proceed.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you very much Secretary Blank. Good afternoon. I welcome you to the first of many public info sessions to gather feedback on the Council's planning efforts to chart a course for restoration of the Gulf's ecosystems and coastal communities. My job is to set out the rules and pray to God you all follow them. So, let's get started. This session will run from two 2:30pm to 4:30pm. There are quite a few people signed up to speak, so we will do our best to manage the time so that I'll have a chance to provide their comments. A few of the Council members may have to leave a bit early but they have asked members of their senior staff to stay behind to represent them for the remainder of the session. Speakers will be called to the microphone in groups. We have a Group A and Group B. When your group is called, please go to the back of the room and a staff person will direct you to the microphone and you can line up, first come, first serve. Once all the groups have been called, if there are any speakers who missed an opportunity to speak, you'll be given a chance at that time.

This meeting is being recorded so please speak clearly into the microphone. Before you give your comments, please state your name, where you're from and your affiliation if you have one. You have a three minute limit for comments. There was a timekeeper sitting right there, I'm not sure where he went. There you go, okay. We have a timekeeper who will raise his hands at two and a half minutes, so that will give you an indication that you have thirty seconds to wrap up your comments and there will be no sharing of time. Written comments will be accepted at the public comment booth located in the next room. There are computers for those of you who want to submit your comments electronically or you can submit them in written format in a box that's also on the table. And that booth will be open until 7:00pm.

You can also provide input to the Council at Restorecouncil@doc.gov at any time. All comments should be addressed to the Council and not other members of the audience. Representatives of the Council will be available during this afternoon's open house to answer any questions that you might have and you can also submit your questions at Restorecouncil@doc.gov. And finally, please be respectful and courteous to the speakers and the Council members. So can we have Group A please come up?

Okay. Go ahead.

REV. EDWARDS: Good afternoon, Reverend Tyrone Edwards from the greatest parish, Blackburn Parish, from the East Bank of the river. I represent an organization called Zion Travel Cooperative

Center, on the board of Oxfam America, Gulf Coast Community, I represent a lot of communities on that. I want to say to Lisa Jackson, because I've met her when she first came to Louisiana, in New Orleans, Louisiana and I want to say that today I had a very awakening experience. I consider myself a conspiracy theorist kind of person but that has changed today as I went around in that room and found out that there was a lot of assumption on my part. And I found out that there are a lot of people in government that are really doing some great work representing us. I just want to tell you that I'm very proud of the work that you have done with the Task Force. The only thing that I'm really hoping that most of us here as community of people that we can see some results that community of people are being restored. It's one thing to say we want to restore a community of people because when you look at the whole BP experience, a lot of businesses came back but there are fishermen still have been hurt, their lives have been destroyed and haven't been restored at all. So we have to make sure that happens.

One of the ways we think that this Task Force can help them; we have to look at workforce development in a real serious way, we have to make sure that community people are really employed in a real meaningful way in this process. We got to make sure that big businesses aren't the only ones advancing from the work that's taking place in restoration work. I believe, if you do that and be serious, it is good to have all this paperwork here, but there's a lot of paperwork that Representative Jackson saved that has dust on them and have good projects on them. We simply hope that you would move from [?].

And in closing, because I am a preacher, Jesus makes it very clear that your words should be with your lips but your hearts are far away from it. We hope that this Council will move from lip service to heart service and that people's lives are really restored.

MARK ALDERSON: I'm executive director of the National Estuary Program in Sarasota, FL and I'm here to present a letter to you today, which will be in the box. The letter is basically to advise you that the National Estuary Programs, they include Charlotte Harbor, Tampa Bay and Sarasota Bay, are preparing a master plan for restoration. We've been working with our elected officials throughout this entire region on this Comprehensive Restoration Plan. Two hundred and forty projects have been submitted to our boards. We are in the process of ranking those projects at the present time, using the selection criteria in the Act itself and those that were in the President's Task Force Strategy. The plan is to cover the area from Levy County all the way down to Collier County. It comprises about 20 percent of the Gulf Coast of the United States. A lot of effort is going into this plan at the present time. We expect to have the plan and ranking to you all by May, 2013 for your consideration.

The National Estuary Programs in South West Florida have had large successes in improving water quality and habitats. We recently developed the first numeric nutrient criteria in the United States for application in South West Florida. We believe there's a lot of effort, these efforts can be transferred to other parts of the nation. Again, we've done large-scale habitat restoration. We've also shown large seagrass recovery throughout that part of the United States. And now we hope that you accept this plan and take it into consideration and thank you very much for my two and a half minutes.

RALPH MCCULLERS: Good afternoon, my name is Ralph McCullers. I am the EPA Director for the Poarch Band of Creek Indians in South West Alabama. Council members, I would like to encourage all of you to carefully consider the example that has been set by the US EPA with their policy on contemplation

of Indian tribes. Throughout each of the talks and comments that have been made today, we did not hear a mention of the existence of tribes a single time.

In the impact area that we're considering this restoration plan, there are eleven federally recognized sovereign nations within the boundaries of the United States. As you proceed with this work, I urge you, I encourage you, I respectfully request that you initiate consultation and interaction with these tribes. As Mr. Hankinson mentioned in his comments, there is an amazing amount of TEK, Tribal Environmental Knowledge that is crucial in the development of an effective plan. Aside from the environmental knowledge there's the historical and cultural preservation piece that should be addressed as this moves forward. We have some great examples of success in this consultative process and again, I urge you for the last time, to please engage in meaningful consultation with the native sovereign nations in the impact area. Thank you.

MARK BERTE: Dr. Blank and Council members, I'm the Executive Director of the Alabama Coastal Foundation, which is based right here in Mobile. On behalf of the ACF Board, members, volunteers and the staff welcome you here to Alabama. I also do appreciate you having your first inaugural public meeting here in our great state.

The mission of the Alabama Coastal Foundation is to improve and protect Alabama's coastal environment through cooperation, education and participation. We take that cooperation piece very seriously. We work with individuals, other non-profit groups, governmental agencies- local, state and federal-as well as the private sector. I think that's the way to move forward. We believe in inclusive environmental stewardship as well as the importance of basing all decisions, especially comprehensive ones, on good science and facts. I ask, and I'm glad to hear comments from the Council members, that all of your decisions that go into creating the plan will be based in science. Ultimately, I urge you to continue your public involvement and input, which is imperative for making wise decisions that will ultimately have a positive impact on our way of life, as well as protect the treasures that the Gulf brings to the entire country.

If there's anything that ACF can do to help towards that end, I hope that you will let us know. Thank you.

TIM GOEDERS: Hello I'm Tim Goeders of Hybrid Air Transport, Louisiana native. I appreciate very much the comments that have been made here today. I'm encouraged by the holistic approach to include the federal, state and local governments, NGOs, also the private industry and academia to apply the best science and the best management practices. The thing that is most encouraging to me is I hear the comment about adaptive management as it's a change environment, climate situation and a challenging global economy and national economy. We have to be most efficient with those resources that we have to work with and apply our human capital as best we can to these processes.

I just wanted to say that this is encouraging for me to be here to hear these comments because I know that there are people all across the country, and from a national approach we have access to international groups that have been working on similar projects on their own area. One of the things I did want to mention is that the holistic approach to the coastal and Gulf of Mexico restoration, that emphasis be included to peer review and new and emerging technologies that come along as they're available, that those be applied. Also, on the watershed management issues, those watersheds that feed into the Gulf of Mexico, there might be some holistic approach to controlling those nutrients, as they affect the Gulf itself.

DONALD WATERS: Good afternoon, thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. I'm a commercial fisherman. I've been fishing the waters of the Gulf of Mexico for four decades, thirty-six years prior to the oil spill.

I wanted to bring up, I've seen a lot of coastal restoration, and I've only heard of one or two blue water restorations. I also want to bring up, I do sit on stock assessment advisory panels with NOAA, have worked with NOAA, have been active with NOAA since 1988 in Council processes. We have not had any post-water, post-spill daily to enter into a stock assessment in the fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico to this day.

I want to encourage this Council to err on the side of the population of the wildlife in the fisheries and take into consideration that it takes five years of data staff to go into a stock assessment, so there's no post-oil spill daily err on the side of the population of fish to be prepared for anything else. Do not move forward thinking things are good because we've got stock assessments that come out this year. Know that a year or so from now, because the data post-oil spill are not included in those stock assessments. And any offshore ideas or blue water restoration I think would be very important to consider. Thank you very much.

DAVID WALKER: Good afternoon, my name is David Walker. I'm from here, Alabama, Andalusia. Like Donny, I've done a lot of commercial fishing down in the Gulf too. I want to start by thinking, as a child I used to come down here, my parents would bring me down here to the beach, to the Gulf Coast. We used to go out and have fresh seafood, we enjoyed the resource. I can remember I was always up to fish, my momma didn't fish and my sister didn't fish but they could go to these restaurants and enjoy it, the resources. You know there's 97 percent of this country, doesn't recreationally fish, they enjoy their access to the fishery. Commercial fishermen, we help support that.

Leading back is that coastal communities depend on this resource. You know, people in other parts of the country, we come down here and enjoy it too. The beach, you know, everyone doesn't come to fish, people come to the beach, they lay out on the beach, they go shopping, they're spending money. They enjoy it, you know, they're supporting the local economy. Commercial fishing, I think back to 2006, when fishing was slow, it wasn't very good. Fishermen got together, handful of us got together, we got a better management plan, just like you're working on a plan to help develop for us. That plan was, you know it took us a while to get it, but it was working before the oil spill. It was implemented in 2007. In 2010 we got a 28 percent increase in our fishery management that says a lot for it. And then the oil spill came along, you know we've seen some things out on the Gulf. I was a little concerned; you know everything is not perfect. You know, like I heard Donny say before, you ever leave your house and you go back and something just doesn't seem right?

You know, work with the science, he's right on the science. I think that if we got a plan, we'd like to help again. Ours is out on the federal waters but it all supports the coastal community and the rest of the nation. Thank you.

RUSSELL UNDERWOOD: Thank you. I'm Russell Underwood, from Panama City, Florida. I've been a commercial fisherman for about forty years. Well I had ten years of recreational business, running party boats for Captain Anderson in Panama City. I've got a lot of experience on the Gulf. You know, we have rebuilt the Red Snapper fishery since 1990 and the Red Snapper has really come back in the Gulf. What I

would like to say today is how important Red Snapper fishery is to both commercial and recreational. It's a fifty one, forty nine split. All these charter boats in Panama City that I grew up and worked around, commercial boats off Louisiana-I have a little small fleet of boats off Louisiana that we do fish, that I still fish and operate.

The most important thing about this oil spill has been, my concerns, is the deepwater recovery. I've heard a lot of things about recovery in the marsh. I've been in Louisiana, like I said, for thirty years. I know [unintelligible Track 19, 1:05], basically ground zero. And I have survived all the hurricanes that have impacted Louisiana.

My main concern right now is the deepwater recovery. The snapper, the grouper, the King Mackerel. All that needs to be looked at. I heard a lot about the inland recovery. We still need to look, and I haven't heard any answers yet, what about the deepwater, the blue water recovery? How are we going to rebuild the fish? I have talked to NRDA personally and gave them a few of my recommendations. Things like maybe do a deepwater... have more reeds in the deepwater to help...it's all about habitat. The most important thing is this fishing industry has been great to me and my family. I love fishing, I love recreational, I love commercial, I've had a great career. But I'm not through with trying to rebuild the resource and it is about people.

But right now, it's about resource. Everybody, the charter boats, we've got Red Snappers off Key West now. The bottom line is we need to continue, we cannot wait five years to do something. We need to do it now for deepwater recovery. Thank you. I appreciate what you all have done.

PJ HAHN: Hi, my name is PJ Hahn, I'm the Director for Coastal Zone Management for Plaquemines Parish. Ms. Jackson, I'd like to give a shout-out from my two daughters, Paula and Kaelie, graduates of Dominican Veritas. I'm delivering a speech from Billy Nungesser today. I hope I can get through it. Unfortunately it's not going to be as entertaining as Billy gave it, actually as passionate as Billy could give it. And as many of you all know, Plaquemines Parish was ground zero for the *Deepwater Horizon* disaster. Nearly three years later, oil is still being uncovered along our coast. We still have 212 miles of oil shoreline in Louisiana. Currently, nearly 100 percent of the shoreline classified as heavily or moderately oiled are Louisiana shorelines. This year alone, over two million pounds of oily material has been removed from our coast and cleanup teams are still finding and removing tarmacs from the BP disaster that have been uncovered since Hurricane Isaac. The folks in my parish and across Louisiana are still reeling from the impacts of the BP oil spill.

The entire Gulf Coast suffered as a result of BP, but in Louisiana we have actually felt the impacts of this spill through our communities and coasts. We need these funds as quickly as possible and we need to get them to help those in the areas in the areas that were impacted the most.

Point to United States Coast Guard estimates, over 1,100 miles of shoreline were oiled across the Gulf Coast as a result of the BP *Deepwater Horizon* disaster and over 660 of those miles were in Louisiana. While that statistic is striking, it doesn't tell the whole story. We got the brunt of the spill and when you're talking about impacts, we're taking into account the character of the oil. There's a big difference between the oil that washed up on Louisiana and the light sheen that was seen in other places across the Gulf. Let me tell you, in Louisiana, it was some thick, gooey stuff that showed up. It coated the shoreline

and the grass and turned into a hard crust, like asphalt, all along our shores. It killed the vegetation and then our shorelines washed away. We're still finding this oil and we're still cleaning it up.

These kinds of details need to be taken into account when this Council and the Treasury Department are dividing up the CWA monies across the Gulf Coast. The kind of oiling should be factored when determining the formula for dividing up the pot that will go to the states based on impacts. In addition, this Council should take into account, when determining what projects should be included in the Comprehensive Plan. Just a minute. I see his hand going up, Louisiana got the most oil, we should have a couple more minutes too.

Congress passed the Restoration Act and intent to direct the funds to Louisiana coasts as quickly as possible to aid the recovery of the Gulf Coast for the BP disaster. I understand the Treasury is in the process of drafting regulations that will determine the process for distributing RESTORE Act funds. It is critical that once the amount of Clean Water Act penalties are resolved, that those funds get sent down to the states and parishes as quickly as possible.

Finally, BP has responsibility under federal law to make it right. They spent millions of dollars on flashy ads and PR stunts to make themselves look good after the worst environmental disaster in US history. BP is obligated to fully and completely restore the damage they did to our environment through the NRDA process and they are liable for Clean Water penalties. The state and the federal government have an obligation to make sure our resources are restored and to protect the public interests.

As much as I want restoration to begin as quickly as possible, we cannot shortchange our citizens by taking less than what will make the coast whole. We need to hold BP's feet to the fire and we need to make sure that we fully restore the Gulf Coast and Louisiana from the terrible tragedy that BP inflicted upon us. Thank you very much.

ROBERTA SWANN: Mr. Hahn, Mr. Hahn. If you would please-Milly would you raise your hand-could you please see the woman in the back and give her your email address? Thank you.

MIKE PINZONE: Thank you. My name is Mike Pinzone with the Pensacola Beach Pier. I'm not a scientist but I do have the opportunity to talk with thousands of fishermen over the last couple years. Basically, we've seen a drop-off that's been catastrophic compared to what we were doing the previous year in '09. Our fish, basically we have probably 8 to 10 thousand families that fish on the fishing pier, it's not as recreational as we want it to be and it hasn't been in the past to subsidize their grocery bills. Probably anywhere from \$50 to \$80 a week. Our fish has dropped off so bad-we do have records of the Cobia or Ling fishing- so we have records from data gathered that we did ourselves from, anywhere from Destin to Gulf shores. So we know it's in the teens, in '09 we were catching 12, 13, 14 Cobia a day, where we could catch that many in the last two seasons.

So we know there's ecological damage, we know there's a lot going on. We're not scientists, I'm just a small business man but I do have to stand up here for Pensacola beach and our fisheries and the people that really has suffered. Last year, or this year, just to get people back interested in fishing, we took a fishing tournament from \$500 up to \$5,000 just to try to get some excitement going to try and get people back here fishing. It was a disaster.

Fishermen are loyal to fish. They might exaggerate on the size that they catch but they don't exaggerate on how many they catch. So we're suffering. I don't think there's anything out there to help us specifically. We were hoping for some reefs or something to bring back Baitfish. This year in August, we had a species of, we had almost thirty Sailfish, I don't know if anybody knows what those are but we don't usually catch them off the piers but we've caught over twelve. We've had also dolphin fish coming in, twenty and thirty at a time, and they're just chasing Baitfish so we know ecologically, everything's messed up. So, we'd like some help.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you. Sir, would you please also see the woman in the back-Milly-and give her your information? Just to be clear, this is just people from Group A right now, we have another Group B, then we'll take comments from the crowd.

DAVID WHITE: Secretary Blank, members of the Council, thank you for providing the opportunity to present these comments. My name is David White. I'm the Director of the Gulf of Mexico Restoration Campaign for the National Wildlife Federation since February of this year. It's great to be here with you today.

The National Wildlife Federation, as you probably know, is one of the nation's largest conservation organizations with four million members and supporters, including 1.4 million members and supporters of our state affiliates in forty eight states. We have state affiliates in each one of the five Gulf States. All of our members and supporters came together. We brought together 200,000 sportsmen activists, who came and helped to pass the RESTORE Act. So we have skin in this game and we just want to let you know that we stand here ready to support the work that you do and to help restore the Gulf of Mexico.

I could probably save us a little time and just sum up my comments in four words-what Administrator Jack said-then sit down. But, since I came all the way from St. Petersburg, I have a couple general comments. First, we appreciate the time and the effort that the Gulf Coast Restoration Task Force put into establishing the framework of the strategic plan and we believe that it's an extremely important step in Gulf restoration. We particularly commend that Task Force for identifying the overarching goals and a framework for restoration. This framework will guide the direction of restoration based on priority restoration needs and project evaluation criteria that will provide the greatest economic, environmental and social benefits to the Gulf Coast region.

By way of general comments, I would like to offer three guiding principles that we think should be given priority consideration by the council. The first one is, think big. This is an opportunity to provide ecosystem scale solutions to ecosystem scale problems like restoring the coastal marshes in Louisiana, protecting the barrier islands and other coastal habitats that make our communities more resilient to storms and sea level rise. This is critically important to protecting our investments and our homes, our businesses and our public infrastructure as demonstrated by the recent tragic losses in the Northeast United States, from Hurricane Sandy.

Second, prioritize restoration in special places like our national estuaries, our national estuary research reserves, national wildlife refuges, national parks, state parks, wildlife management areas. We've already made large investments in all these areas because they are recognized as the best of the best. The RESTORE Act provides a tremendous opportunity for them to fulfill their promise as a legacy for future generations. Plus it represents perhaps one of our best shots as educating the public about our coastal and

marine and coastal resources, both because the staff at these facilities are experts in education but also because these special places get an enormous amount of visitation, especially from schools and youth groups.

Finally, get the water running in our estuaries. I know it's a mantra in Florida. We're restoring the Florida Everglades. It's good for people, it's good for the economy, improving fish populations and seafood production and restoring wildlife habitats. Getting the water right in estuaries means addressing water quality, quantity, timing and distribution in order to allow oysters, seagrass, and other important habitats to recover, establishing the correct salinity levels to restore and protect fish and shellfish nurseries.

This may mean restoring historic water flows in the estuaries in Charlotte Harbor and Florida Bay by funding restoration projects in the everglades and it could mean by buying water rights for freshwater inflows in the coastal estuaries in Texas.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you very much, sir.

DAVID WHITE: Thank you.

CASEY CALLOWAY: Hi, I'm Casey Calloway, I'm the Director or Mobile Bay Keeper, based here in Mobile, Alabama. We are a 4,500 member organization, a state-wide organization. And first, I do want to thank all of you for being here, for being committed to the protection and restoration of the Gulf of Mexico. I want to start also by reiterating and underlining Governor Bentley's opening salvo, we need to work together. We need to work together to address, to accomplish, this massive task of addressing the issues and the impacts that started with the oil disaster of 2010.

Impacts to our environment and our economy are intrinsically linked. Our community, all that has happened, has been one upon the other upon the other. Impacting our environment meant so much to our economy and then to our community. We all know and saw infinitely more clearly that the environment and our economy are intrinsically linked and I don't think it could be more evident than on Alabama's fifty three miles of beach front.

Alabama has beaches that, just the piece that faces the Gulf of Mexico, impacts our economy at about 30 percent. We lost nearly \$2 billion. What we know though is that it was an oil disaster that caused that problem. We need to address both the economy and the environment and we need to address them as one.

The issues I want to bring out today too are issues that you've heard from us through the Gulf of Mexico Restoration Task Force. We've presented it to the Natural Resource Damage Assessment Trustees. And Bay Keeper alone has not done this. We've done this in coalition and by working together with a vast majority of this community from Texas to Florida.

We want to ask that public participation be your primary focus. That you create processes that enable us to allow every community member to review every project that is put forward and to constantly comment on those projects. We ask also that projects be selected on some type of matrix, a decision-making priority tool. We have made these comments through the Gulf Ecosystem Restoration Task Force. While I would reiterate what David said, which is what Lisa Jackson said, I do think that those priorities are just so important. We have made a lot of these comments before. Y'all are starting at a process and you're ahead of the game.

The other thing that I think Administrator Jackson said that is so important is the CAC. So many of us worked on creation citizen advisory council, we worked to make sure lots of folks understood it, saw it, and could participate in it. It is imperative that you have some version of that moving forward as well.

And in closing, we encourage you to remove the barriers between or among the pots of funding. Some are saying this pot is for the environment and this pot is for the economy. What we want to see happen, what we want you to know, is that every environmental will have a significant impact on our economy. Let's make sure no project has a negative impact on our environment. We ask that you set up a process that ensures that when we look back all the money that is spent, we feel good, we feel powerful, we know made a huge difference in our community. And we have a Gulf Coast that can handle the next natural or manmade disaster.

ROBERTA SWANN: Group B. If Group B would like to come to the microphone please. Go ahead.

DAN DUMONT: Hello, my name is Dan Dumont, I'm Director for the Alabama Forest and Resources Center based here in Mobile. A state-wide land trust.

I'm here today to represent our organization. I'm also a Forrest Legacy Coordinator for the USDA Forest Legacy Program, which has been very successful.

I'm also here to represent the partnership for the Gulf Coast Land Conservation. When the BP spill hit, the land trust along the Gulf Coast came together and formed a partnership for Gulf Coast conservation. This is a network of existing non-profits all along the coast. We know how to conserve land.

I just want to say briefly that you know, no use in re-inventing the wheel, these groups represent some thirty local, regional, and national land trusts across the country and I would urge you to call on us. Thank you.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you.

JACKIE HANTELIN: Good morning, my name is Jackie Hantelin, from Mobile Alabama with Operation Homecare.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Administrator Jackson for all the work they have done on the Gulf Coast. It has been an inspiration to hardworking NGOs, non-profit, grassroots organizations, who I believe are the reason that we are here today. NGOs are the front-runner and foremost invested in making the RESTORE Act have a major impact on the Gulf Coast. We are formally and respectfully requesting that this Council does not start to recreate the wheel. All the work that Administrator Jackson has done, and has had vetted, is critical that it be implemented and implemented as soon as possible.

We need the work to start now. We need...we're requesting that your Council incorporate local hire. If the hiring eligibility requirement cannot be met locally, we're requesting that training be met locally. We're requesting that innovative training criteria are developed because in several of our NEGs, we've been told that we have a problem reaching the hard-to-serve.

Well, grassroots organizations, we reach the hard-to-serve, we work with the hard-to-serve. We can fill that gap. We want you to incorporate innovation. We also are requesting that again, from the Task Force

work, that the community or citizens advisory council can implement it as soon as possible and be made of the planning process so we'll have full transparency and early notice of these public meetings so our input can be included. We'd also like to have offshore and marine work considered and incorporated into issues. We also would like to have socio-economic issues that have historically plagued the minority community, the native community.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you. Mam, could you please see Milly? Could you please see the woman at the back to sign?

DR. HORNING: I'm Dr. Gloria Horning with Citizens against Toxic Exposure out of Pensacola, Florida. I go on the words that Administrator Jackson just mentioned about Katrina and how we know it's not a matter of if, it's when, another storm is going to hit the Gulf Coast. Now what we have is if, it's not if, it's when another oil spill is going to come.

What is the EPA along with the Department of Environment, I mean Interior, doing with the mineral department to assure that quality control is done on those offshore rigs.

ROBERTA SWANN: Mam, I'm just going to say this one more time. If you haven't signed up to speak, you don't have to get out of line, but please see Milly in the back to sign your name and give us your email.

JJ MCCOOL: I'm JJ McCool, I'm a wildlife biologist forester and I'm a private contractor from this area. I own a company called Wildlife Solutions Incorporated and we specialize in habitat management. We also do habitat restoration. We do upland and we also do marine as well as freshwater.

One thing I may...this is the way down the distillation process for this...but at some point, the lifeblood for contractors like me are RFP's and bid requests that we do for states and federal government. And my request to the Council is this: we've been doing this for years before the *Deepwater Horizon* ever came along, we were planting trees and planting marsh grass. Once the \$20 billion figure got thrown out there, my competition increased a lot. And not only from professional biologists but a lot of it was from everything from lawn care services to construction companies. I'm a hardcore conservative capitalist, I'm all for competition. But, my request is this: because there's been some inconsistency with bids over time is that there is some sort of a mandate for technical expertise.

When you're managing, especially estuaries, the contractor, the guy that's out there in the hipboots actually putting in the plants or other structures, they have to have a very good knowledge of how the ecosystem functions and what would be the long term effects. By the time the bid process is over and the retainage is let on the contract, you can't measure the success. Typically it's years, even decades before you can tell what the success of a particular process is. And therefore, I just ask you that there's some sort of baseline mandate for technical expertise when the bids are finally let.

JOHNNY GREEN: Good afternoon, Council members. My name is Johnny Green, I'm from Gaffney, Alabama I owe and operate a charter boat, *Intimidator*, out of Orange Beach, Alabama. I'm also a Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council member and I just wanted to bring you up to date on a few things.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council was established in 1976, it's made up of seventeen voting members. We have formed an ad hoc restoration committee and have done a lot of work already to

this point trying to see what types of projects that we feel relevant, should move on. At our last council meeting we talked in October, 2012, we submitted a letter to the NOAA Trustees for consideration including six different topics that we felt were pertinent such as increased frequency of number of stock assessments, enhanced fishery independent surveys both federal and state, work with them to decrease two week waves for higher profile species such as Red Snapper as you just heard about, develop more robust observer programs, fund development of data collection programs, enhance oyster restoration programs.

The council has already done a lot of work. We get a lot of input from the public. We meet five or six different times a year in each of the five Gulf States from Key West all the way to Brownsville, Texas. We have socio-economic panels. We have science and statistical committees that meet with us. We have access to the general public. We take public testimony over our four or five day meetings for four or five hours. So, I somewhat sympathize with all you sitting out there, to that remark.

So, I encourage you to reach out to that council. Maybe you have a liaison to go back and forth, bounce ideas off and that may be a good way for you to tie in blue water restoration and go that route with it. I thank you for your time and look forward to working with you.

AVERY BATES: I'm Vice President of Organized Seafood Association of Alabama.

ROBERTA SWANN: Your name?

AVERY BATES: My name is Avery Bates and I've been a commercial fisherman most of my life. Five, six generations of Bate was here even before this was a nation, we have produced seafood for this country and my family. It's our trade, it's our business. Everything, piece of property we own, comes from the water. And everybody that enjoys good, healthy Gulf seafood, we're the ones that put it on your table. We're the ones that harvest it.

A lot of these people today you hear, scientific communities, voice their opinions. What I call good scientists, sustainability, putting your reeds where they'll produce something. We just come from Bays and Bayous. I heard this professor get up and say "we had twenty four reefs put out there," I saw them go out there. You know how many oysters we received out of those twenty four reefs? I call production, progress. I see the fifty shops that we used to have, down to thirty, maybe just a little above. We harvest oysters from our bays but we process, we are number one in the state of Alabama, we process more oysters than any other place. Why? Because the local mom and pap people open the oysters from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, we put them on your table. Some of the fishermen that went to the meeting with NRDA, 87 percent of the [unintelligible, Track 24, 3:07] for income from Gulf Shores, Orange Beach, comes from the water.

People come from all over the world to eat our good Gulf seafood. We harvest them. Many of these professors says, "We want to build oyster rigs but we don't want commercial." Let me tell you, if you don't have commercial, you don't have seafood.

Without us working, without producing from the reeves that we inherited from our forefathers and some of our forefathers was half Indian and all Indian, married into our families. We just took over their jobs, made it our trade. But it's your commerce, it is my commerce. It goes through this country. Without us, you don't eat good Gulf Coast seafood. EPA, move your out fall lines and greater delusionaries. Don't

put them in our bays like Dauphin Island Bay. We've lost half of Dauphin Island Bay since the 80's when the Clean Water Act was here in 1976. Except once an area designates you a fish harbor, it must be maintained. It hasn't been maintained in Dauphin Island Bay. Move that out fall line outward, the delusion factor is great but the EPA can do that.

So much more to say and he's done raised his hand. But listen, if I want to pass my industry on to my family, this RESTORE Act had done a lot of my family in. We've seen them. Delaine and Bruce, twenty five years, their shops shut down. No product. This fellow said [unintelligible, Track 24, 4:35]. He was getting a lot of his oysters from Louisiana, couldn't get them out. Lost his whole shop, brand new shop, what happened? They're teaching him how to whale now. Think that's sad?

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you, Avery.

JEFF COLLIER: Administrator Jackson and Secretary Blank and the rest of the commission, thank y'all for giving us the opportunity to be here today. My name is Jeff Collier, I am the mayor of the town of Dauphin Island. I think I'm in a minority here today, that I'm probably the only mayor in the house that's the mayor of an island, in fact it's a barrier island. That's really what I want to focus on today. You probably remember me speaking to you the last time I was here.

I certainly concur with Administrator Jackson and her mother for what they've surmised as being important in our area. Certainly being the barrier islands should be one of the primary things that we focus on with our efforts because let's face it, those are the front lines. Whether it's an oil spill, whether it's a hurricane, it's those barrier islands and the shorelines that border this coastline on the Gulf of Mexico that take it on the chin. They're the front line that protects those areas that are behind it, both physically, to Avery's point as far as the oysters go, barrier islands have a role to play, they have numerous roles to play. Mother Nature put them there for a reason. One of the reasons is that they protect everything that is behind them. They protect the estuaries, the oyster beds, the salt marshes. All of those things, we've heard a lot of talk about the seafood industry, we have to stop and think and remember that it's those barrier islands that are protecting those habitats that are behind the barrier islands that fill the need of the juvenile fish, shrimp, crab, oysters. That's where they grow then they go back out to the Gulf.

So we have to understand, it's sort of like fixing your house. Before you do the redecorating and painting inside you better fix the leaky roof. And so, when we look at the holistic approach, which I think is something we certainly need to do, let's certainly keep first and foremost, as they are the front line of defense, keep those high on the list as needing some help themselves. While we're doing that, let's also remember that there's already things in place that can help with that.

The better utilization of dredge materials is something that we, you know we're always going to have to be dredging, we've got ship channels, we've got the port of Mobile. They're moving sand to keep the ships flowing that feeds the economy, we understand that. We can do better by taking that material, building new marshes, putting sand on the beaches and killing the proverbial two birds with one stone. We can do better at that, there's no question in my mind. It's just a matter of taking it from lip service, as a previous speaker said, to putting it to practice and I believe fully we can do that.

I also want to raise a bit of a concern. We also have to know that the RESTORE Act is only as good as the funding it has available to it. We have had some concerns in the past month or so that within the

settlement process, the negotiation process, some of those monies that ultimately may go to RESTORE Act might be siphoned off to go into other areas. We've all got to stand together to make sure that does not happen so that the RESTORE Act can do the things its intended to do, all the good things that we talked about today. Ladies and gentlemen we have the opportunity, we have the ability and it is the right thing to do. Thank you.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you, Jeff.

WALTER ERNEST: Thank you. My name is Walter Ernest, I'm the Executive Director of the Weeks Bay Foundation. I reside in Fair Hope, Alabama. I also chair the Coastal Resource Advisory Commission, which is a state of Alabama Coastal Advisory Board and I serve on the steering committee for the partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation.

The foundation is an accredited land trust, whose mission is to protect the resources of coastal Alabama, which means most coastal counties, and provide assistance and support to the goal and programs of the Weeks Bay National Estuary Reserve. The Weeks Bay Reserve, as you know, is one of 28 site-based sites where environmental education estuary research and science are conducted. There are five in the Gulf region. I hope you will collaborate on a partnership with the reserve system to do environmental education and scientific research.

I also want to speak about the important of land acquisition that's identified in the goals of the Task Force Comprehensive Plan that was just published. And land acquisition meets all three goals. You have clean water, ensures long-term sustainability, and healthy communities within the Gulf. I hope that you will consider working with willing sellers or donors to pursue conservation easements or fee simple purchasing of properties in the Gulf of Mexico region.

I also want to point out, if you do purchase property, I hope you will set funds aside for long-term stewardship and restoration activities that would occur on these properties. Because it's perpetual. It's not about today, it's about tomorrow. It's about ensuring a healthy community that's here for our children and our grandchildren. Thank you.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you.

DAVID UNDERHILL: My name is David Underhill. I'm a member of the Mobile Bay Sierra Club.

Some years ago, the Mobile Daily Paper published a picture from its archives, a century or more ago. It showed some elegant ladies carrying these picnic baskets along the basehore, you were supposed to notice the fashions of the era. I noticed the water because the picture had been taken from a boat or platform some distance offshore in water several feet deep. And I could see the bottom of the bay. And I had never seen the bottom of the bay, except in water wading deep right along the shoreline.

This change prompts me to ask you whether it's sufficient to restore something that's already been damaged. And I'll offer you the answer that it is not sufficient to restore an energy economy that is prone to accident and catastrophe no matter how much it is regulated or reformed. And besides, we can't afford to restore that energy economy and I don't mean financially, I mean we can't afford its ruin and wreck of the climate, which the fossil fuels we're burning are doing. The presidential candidate used global warming as a laugh line in some his campaign speeches. It's easy to make a joke of this because

doomsday predictions have been the providence apocalyptic cults and cranks throughout history. But now you have to include the Pentagon and the World Bank among the cultists and the cranks because they say it is real and must be addressed. If it not addressed effectively, the edge of the ocean will be in the lobby of this building, where we are meeting.

A recently concluded DOHA Climate Conference failed to address this sufficiently. The Rio Conference before failed. The Copenhagen Conference failed; they have all failed. And their dereliction leaves the rest of us to make gestures in light bulbs and driving habits that are nice but fairly ineffective. But you have the resources and the authority to begin making decisions here and now that will make a difference at the system level, so that we can turn away from stripping and gouging and drilling and pumping nature to yield her buried secrets and instead coaxing her to give us energy from the bounty that she has in wind and waves and sun.

It would take sustained public support to do this. That could only happen if people get jobs from it and renewable energies and if they are reconnected with nature so they will learn again their fierce affection for it and protect it. You can do that by providing alternate energy jobs in your program and land acquisitions. Let people get back to the beach so they can learn and remember what it's about.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you.

BETHANY CRAFT: Good afternoon, my name is Bethany Craft. I am the Director of the Gulf Restoration Program for Ocean Conservancy. Ocean Conservancy is a non-profit organization dedicated to marine conservation across the United States. I'm based in our Gulf Restoration center office in New Orleans, Louisiana, however we also have Gulf offices in Austin and St. Petersburg, Florida.

And I'd just like to start by thanking the Council for the efforts that you've put in to this process up to this point and thank you in advance for what I know will be tireless efforts in the future to see Gulf restoration across the finish line. And I hope that you in turn are encouraged by the presence of so many folks in this room, who stand ready to help you see this through and truly recover the vital ecosystem and economy that the Gulf of Mexico relies on for its success.

It's really encouraging to hear that the work of the Task Force will be folded into the Restoration Council. We think there's a really great foundation there. The goals and priorities the Task Force have identified are the right goals and really set the stage for creating a path forward that will restore our ecosystem in the communities that rely on it.

It's the task at hand now for the Council to put some flesh on those bones. Figure out what specific objectives and projects will really add up to the sum that's greater than the individual projects that will make up restoration across the Gulf of Mexico. Part and parcel of that process will be the recognition that the restoration to truly restore the natural resources that not only our wildlife rely on but the people of the Gulf of Mexico rely on for their livelihoods and their health. We need to look at restoration comprehensively, that means restoration of our vital coastal ecosystems as well as restoration of the Gulf shore blue water environments. And of course it means looking at how to make our coastal communities more resilient so that we're better able to respond to disasters in the future.

I wanted to applaud the initial plans for establishing a science program and the recognition that coordination and additional investments in science and monitoring are critical to this process. We all learned in the days and months following the *Deepwater Horizon* explosion how much we have left to learn about this ecosystem and how it functions. And science is a cornerstone, not only to understanding this ecosystem better but will also inform what projects we should implement that will really achieve our ecosystem restoration goals and help us determine whether or not those projects are successful.

Finally, a strong and resilient ecosystem supports a strong and resilient coastal economy. Recognizing its inherent link between the ecosystem and the economy, we believe it's the role of the Restoration Council to develop a Comprehensive Plan that's dedicated to ecosystem restoration and that the 30 percent allocated to the Council should be spent in accordance with that plan. We know that the devil's in the details but at the end of the day this is about creating a legacy for the people from the Gulf of Mexico and we look forward to helping y'all achieve and realize that legacy. Thank you.

TROY FRADY: Good afternoon, my name is Troy Frady. I'm a charter boat in Orange Beach, Alabama. I'm probably the only guy you've ever seen that walked out on a perfectly good job at a Fortune 500 company come home one day tell your wife you bought a boat. She runs outside to look for it and she says, "Where is the boat?" And you say it won't fit on the trailer.

So, I'm standing before you here today because I spent twenty years in corporate America and I returned in 2001 to the Gulf Coast to find a very troubled environment. Our fisheries had been overfished to the point where they were fragile. Our ecosystem had changed from what I remember as a kid, growing up fishing Galveston Bay, Texas then Dauphin Island and around Orange Beach, Alabama. So things had changed when I returned.

Now, when I started my charter fishing company I wanted to be a little bit different than everyone else. I wanted to be part of the solution instead of being part of the problem. So I implemented my charter fishing company with the experienced fishing logo. I promote conservation, I promote the experience of fishing. And I knew things were quite abnormal because I want things to be better. I wanted to remember what it was like as a kid. And what I'm doing today is to make sure future generations have the ability to enjoy a resource that was once abundant and having those things again and enjoying those things.

So, I've been involved in the Gulf Council process. I attend regular meetings. And I realized there are some very important things that are going on in the fishery out there. You know we suffered for quite a few years trying to get a fishery management plan, to try to end overfishing, to make sure things started restoring and getting better and stop the suffering for a while. Then all of the sudden, things started getting better each year. Then the oil spill complicated things. The things we had been working toward, having a lot of success with all of the sudden threw us into the world of uncertainties. With uncertainties in the fish stocks, Mr. Waters I believe was the man speaking earlier talked about the data coming up for the new stock assessments, which all fishermen like myself depend upon is lagging behind. So we're afraid that the stock assessment won't fully incorporate the effects of the oil spill. Now, with me, having a healthy ecosystem and having a healthy marine estuary all goes hand-in-hand together. The Gulf out there is dependent upon the inland waters and we're dependent upon offshore. But I think it's important if we have a healthy Gulf and a healthy ecosystem, then the economies will flourish. And that's what I'm working towards is the future of our kids. Thank you very much for your time.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you.

CHESTER MCCONNELL: My name is Chester McConnell, I'm with the Mobile Bay Audubon Society. Wouldn't it be bad after about ten years projects were underway, that we looked around and saw that not much had been accomplished? I don't think that is going to happen. I think that we will make some accomplishments. But I think that if we don't watch carefully we're going to have lots of failures.

What I think that we need to do and it's been alluded to by several people. All of the projects need to be science-based. There's lot of science already available that can be applied to projects and those would be the successful ones. However, there's lots of things that people want to do that has no science at all behind it. We need to find out what the problems are before we come up with a solution. The gentleman that mentioned it a while ago said it a little simpler. He said if the paint is peeling off in your house, before you paint your walls, you probably need to fix your roof. It's a good thought. And that's what I've said. We need science-based projects. Because you can throw millions and billions in this case dollars and you still might not accomplish a whole lot.

The reason I'm concerned about that is that I have seen a number of environmental projects in this area, not connected with the RESTORE Act, but some of them weren't science-based and they turned into disasters without solving the problem. Without naming any specifically, I don't want to embarrass anybody, but these are problems we need to reduce. So, my message is simple: try to have all of the projects with good science behind them before they start. Slow down some. Nothing is wrong with being slow. Thank you.

AARON VILES: Hello, my name is Aaron Viles. I'm the Deputy Director of Gulf Restoration Network. We are an eighteen-year-old environmental advocacy organization with exclusive focus on the Gulf of Mexico. Secretary Blank, Administrator Jackson thank you so much for coming here. Thank you so much for your engagement. I just want to point out that you guys have a great track record of passionately about the Gulf, as mentioned earlier. Before the BP disaster, there was a roadmap for restoration. Since the BP disaster, there have been a number of different reports that have looked very critically at what's going on here in the Gulf and how we can really restore this jewel. I'm going to say something that's obvious to many but not everyone. Your job is to deal with how you get the Gulf to where it was, not of the day of the BP disaster, but well beyond that. So we've got NRDA, not all of you are engaged with but you know, some of you are. And I would want to be a part of that. But it does seem like the billion dollars that was promised isn't terribly close to being realized. But, a billion dollars is a lot of restoration and the NRDA process will likely be more than that ultimately, if the scientists and the lawyers do what I think is necessary. But you have the historic opportunity to go bigger than that. Not just fix what BP broke but fix what had been dying the death of a thousand cuts for the entire history of our organization. We've been around for eighteen years. We weren't founded because the Gulf was in a great state. We have a lot of challenges ahead of us and I was really glad to hear mentioned of nutrients, this is something we have struggled with for a very long time, I believe we might have sued some agencies that are at the table, nothing personal.

But, I know that it's something that, it doesn't necessarily mean you're going to spend the money in one of the five Gulf States. But it's important to the ecosystem. So please folks, as you look at these buckets of money, let's think about what's best to answer the needs of the ecosystem, not what's going to make

my campaign contributors happiest. I don't want to be crass here but we know that politics of pork barrel spending are not some just back in the days of law. This is something that's alive and well. And we need to make sure we are science based, that we're focused on affecting the ecosystem and the communities that rely upon it. And I think as you do that, you very much weigh your projects and processes with what's going to be most effective, what's going to build the most land, in the case of Louisiana certainly or withstand the most of this ecosystem to the [unintelligible, Track 28, 4:10] the stronger storms we're seeing. I'm just going to go ahead and say it, global warming is real, it's happening. You have a chance to put our ecosystem in a place to deal with it far better. I think the Task Force is fantastic, please utilize it. Make sure our communities are protected, our ecosystem is restored and that we don't have to keep meeting in these hotel meeting rooms for another few decades, it's getting a little old. Thanks everyone.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you.

GRACE SCIRE: Good afternoon. My name is Grace Scire and I'm with Boat People SOS. First of all I just want to thank all of you because those of us in the room who have seen the RESTORE Act as a dream from long ago and worked so many hours, we're really, really happy to see this here today.

Boat People SOS is a Vietnamese organization. We have twelve offices throughout the United States and I'm the Gulf Coast Regional Director so that means I cover our offices in Bayou La Batre, Alabama, Biloxi, Mississippi and the West Bank of New Orleans. There are approximately 40,000 Southeast Asian individuals, one third of all shrimpers are Vietnamese and I want you just to keep in mind that there are a lot of vulnerable populations out there. I want to thank you today also because you have interpreters here. There are not a lot of Vietnamese people here but there are a lot of interpreters.

That doesn't mean they're not interested. A lot of people don't think that they should be here because they feel that they will not be listened to. We do bring your message to those populations but we want to keep them on your radar, not just the Vietnamese, the Ocean Cambodian and Thai but a lot of the other vulnerable populations across the Gulf Coast, whose well-being and economic well-being but also they rely on the Gulf for their livelihood. The reason they live there is because of the Gulf and a healthy Gulf obviously results in healthy families.

The rest of my speech has been said by everyone else: Casey and Jackie and everyone. I'm going to stop for a minute because I don't know if you all know, and I'm going to just throw away all fancy words. I don't know how many of you know how many of us are on how many coalitions that mean how many hours of how many weeks to get to the point that we're at right now. But we are on so many, many, many, many coalitions to try to get to the point where we're at right now.

So, we're here, use us. We're on the ground. We can give you whatever information you need. We're in touch with the people. And, the CAC, thank you very much for keeping that on there, we've been praying for that for a long time. And, I just want to say, Trudy Fisher, the Gulf Coast 2020, wonderful.

So, use us, we're here. All the community-based organizations we thank you from the bottom of our hearts and we beg you to keep going the way you are. Thank you very much.

TEREZ COLLINS: Hi, my name is Terez Collins. I live in the landmass between Louisiana and Alabama. It's also called Mississippi. Thank you very much for allowing us to be here, we appreciate the

Council and your hard work. As a private business owner, I can tell you that it's not an easy thing to be in business today. As an environmental activist and community activist, it's even harder.

We first represented a group called Gulf Island's Conservancy, which was founded to protect the barrier islands of Mississippi as well as all the barrier islands in the Gulf of Mexico. We feel that that's very important. Our islands have been the first line of defense in this oil spill and it still is. There's still oil coming on shore via tar balls via tar patties, whatever. It's still there.

And every storm this stuff is coming up and you cannot tell me whether it's safe or not, it hasn't been proven. In fact more studies are coming out saying it's less safe than what we've been told. So we need to get moving quickly on what's going on in the Gulf. Habitat restoration and resource restoration that should be first and foremost in any plan we do because with those two we will restore our economy. Our economy is damaged because of the BP blowup, which was a well explosion, I mean a gas explosion of an oil well. And that should be understood. That has not stopped yet. You cannot tell me why the BP site is still leaking. We would like those rove documents released today with the GPS coordinates showing us what exactly is leaking at that site. We would also like to know why the directional drill rigs are out there now and what they're looking for when we were told rovers were going out there last Sunday to look at the weakness in the process now. Having flown with on Wings of Care and Dr. Bonny Schumacher over the past two years, I can tell you, the Gulf is not safe. There are leaks everywhere and we need to know why. So if we're going to restore the Gulf, we've got to stop restoring the problems we have.

Public engagement is very important. Ms. Fisher we can't thank you enough for trying to get people involved. But the truth is, the Go Coast community is made up of corporate representatives, which is fine, and a few token environmentalists. So we need, if you want to engage the public, you need to get the public engaged.

I see my two minute gong coming up so I'm sorry. I'm going to be gonged off to the bench but if you want the public involved, you need to put us first, not after you come up with the plan. Having worked with the state and the city, I can tell you, we do have a brain and we have the ability to be part of this process. The barrier islands, West Harrison County, Hancock County are still being impacted. [Turtle and Dolphin [unintelligible Track 30, :41] which has still not been answered and still goes on. The RCAC is very important. Having gone to Washington twice to fight for the RESTORE Act, I know what these funds are for and how they should be used. We're an intelligent bunch of people. We love the Gulf Coast, we love our state, we want to be part of the process but you've got to allow us to be a part of that. Any of you may reach out to me at any time. I own my own business and there's no one that can fire me. Thank you.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you.

KIM SWEET: Good afternoon, I'm Kim Sweet. I'm President of Dog River Clearwater Revival here in Mobile, Alabama, where I don't know if you guys have heard this quote or not, the navy ship said: "Damn the torpedoes, full steam ahead." That's a little comic relief for you. That's what we need to do, move forward. We believe that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Here in this fairly large Southeastern urban watershed, we have ninety five square miles of beautiful, beautiful creeks and streams. It doesn't look anything like what it looked like twenty years ago, fifty years

ago and certainly not like it looked 100 years ago. This is an old city, we understand infrastructure is old, our country is getting old. We have older infrastructures across the board.

So we have a few different programs like Keep It Clean, which a lot of people here locally have seen in the news. We had a litter trap installed and we know that's just...this is really just a pilot litter trap to see what we can do with that but the reality is it's moving forward, we're learning as we go. And hopefully, we'll develop better technologies for this. I personally feel that we need to get some sort of legislation or some sort of plan for storm water management and best management practices. It's got to be updated, it's way out of date.

There are technologies out there. You can look at different places like the Portland Green Streets program, you can find it online. It's a brilliant program that they designed. Yes, they had learning curves. They had to spend money they didn't really have. But now, they're making money on that. In fact, we just had the National River Rally out there this past May and it was brilliant. You know, they have tours; they can make a lot of money off that. People go specifically to their city to look at the green infrastructure. And I encourage you to consider preventive measures, like perhaps, in the Gulf States region, where it's one of the largest economies of the world, you know, why not look at on a national and federal level providing funds from maybe this act and the transportation funding to reduce our use and need of oil because our population centers are getting larger and larger and larger. And so, we need to provide transportation for these people because that's what moves this country. Because I'm also in the transportation industry.

I am president of this group as a labor of love and a labor of madness. I would like to say Dog River Clearwater Revival began as a grassroots movement. We are 100 percent volunteer organization. We have been extremely negatively impacted by this oil spill, in part because of the people that are in it, but the location, the first settlement of Mobile, Alabama is on Dog River at the mouth of Dog River, under the bridge. There's plenty of archaeological information about that. The property right next to it is actually part of [unintelligible, Track 30, 4:10] and I want to say that we can't really do anything with that currently because oil is still sitting on the land and it is privately held. Thank you, thank you for your time.

GROVER ROBINSON: Hi, Grover Robinson, Escambia County, Florida. Also, first Vice President of Florida Association of Counties, I'm the one who bothers Mimi. Thank y'all; again it's good to see all of you. Since we've been involved with the EPA, I was on the local government task force, and certainly appreciate serving there.

We're back at it again, I think it's exciting now that RESTORE has been passed that we actually have an opportunity to do something. Along that line, I think in Florida we are trying to find ways to bring local government and state government together to work together in this way to bring projects forward. I was, I guess still kind of curious in what is happening here with the projects from this group. Look, I heard, I guess it's said that the answers aren't going to come from Washington. They're going to come from the Gulf. And clearly in Florida, we're trying to work as to what those answers are and we're hopeful that when we come forward with those answers, we'll be able to help move forward on things that will help the Eastern Gulf and thereby the entire Gulf along those lines. And certainly hoping that within our states and within those local governments can work together. I'm very optimistic about what we're going to be

able to get done in Florida although I'm very aware of the challenges of working both sides together but again, hopefully allowing those good ideas to bubble up from the local groups through states to the projects that would work here.

The other big issue that I hope to address here is in the area of planning because clearly we're all trying to get plans done together. However, there is no sort of advance money for planning, it kind of puts in you in this, how do you make it all happen? So, we're trying to work forward in Florida what our plan will be. We're trying to address that. It's an interesting part, you're required to create a plan and execute plan but the plan itself, you can't spend money on it until money comes from the settlement. So it's clearly one of those things, chicken or the egg. We're trying to move that forward and continue to move that forward in Florida. But clearly, we're trying to see what we can do with these plans, again, how do you make these plans happen? But I think the best way we can do it is all of us NGOs, every project is going to be a part of a local jurisdiction. Local jurisdictions are within states, states then are within the federal government. The ability for us to create partnerships that work and link arm-in-arm like that will allow us to be much more successful.

And I hope again, I'll take you up on what you've always said, the best answers don't come out of DC, they don't come out of Tallahassee, they don't always come out of a county seat in Pensacola but they do come out of somewhere along there in the Gulf Coast. If we can be attune to those local solutions, I think we can find a solution for our problems. Thank you.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you. At this time, Secretary Blank, a few of our Council members need to leave. Thank you very much for joining us. And they'll be joined by their senior staff.

JILL MASTROTOTARO: Good afternoon. I'm Jill Mastrototaro, Gulf Coast Campaign Director with the Sierra Club based in New Orleans, Louisiana. And I wanted to congratulate the Council on this significant step forward of having your first public meeting. Many of our 100,000 members and supporters throughout the Gulf region, who couldn't be here today, thought that this was an unprecedented opportunity and certainly an unprecedented windfall that we're expecting for our region in terms of setting forth a legacy for future generations to undo the many wrongs of the past. As some of the previous speakers have referred to, those being everything that happened before the BP oil disaster, April 21, 2010.

And I just wanted to share a couple thoughts from our recent letter to the president, which was also delivered to Administrator Jackson, Department of Interior, NOAA, Department of Justice regarding our sense of urgency built from the recent criminal settlement that occurred. Throughout the recovery restoration process, many of our members and supporters throughout the region and across the country have been very concerned about the accountability and transparency issues relating to the recovery efforts. But I did want to mention that recognizing dollars are critical to the Council's success. We are pushing for no less than \$10 billion to execute the restoration strategy that is your task ahead. And, we are also pushing for \$500 million of that dedicated to long-term science and monitoring because we believe as was described here today, credible long-term science is going to be critical to ensuring the success of this legacy that we're all talking about to create.

We're also requesting the maximum civil and criminal penalties in the outstanding case ahead, particularly as it relates to the NRDA process. But we really underscore the sense of urgency regarding

public engagement and public participation in this Council process, the NRDA process and many of the other efforts afoot. And so, we appreciate Administrator Jackson's references to a CAC, we feel strongly that that is something that can be created immediately. There is a tremendous groundswell of support from NGOs throughout the region and coalitions, calls, meetings that happen on a weekly basis that provide a great platform for kicking that off. And we would also like to see a regional citizens' advisory council at the broader level for pushing the long-term restoration and recovery of the region but also oversight of industry, oversight of regulators to make sure they're enforcing the regulations in place.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you.

KAITLIN TRUONG: Good afternoon Council members. Thank you for the opportunity today. My name is Kaitlin Truong. I'm with Asian Americans for Change. Standing here in front of you, I'm also a fisherman's daughter, a fisherman's sister and also many other family members and friends who are in the fishing industry.

Over two years ago I saw the depression, the anxiety and the urgency, emergency among our community members who are in the seafood industry. We took the front line and pulled together resources, information, also getting assistance and help from everybody, who saw the devastation of the oil spill. So having been a resident of Mississippi, I have experienced and witnessed multiple disasters. And up until today, I still see a huge need for assistance and help. So with the upcoming plan that you as members will put together, some of the goals that I would like to see to be implemented to help the people of our community, or the people who have suffered through the BP oil spill. So I just want to echo the important of community engagement and follow up on the recommendation of Administrator Jackson with regards to creating the Citizen Advisory Council. It's really important because we live here, we know what's going on here and we want to be able to provide that information to better assist you in the restoration process.

I hope that the Council makes decisions based on the part on community needs, evaluate possible projects' impact on the ability of people to continue living in their coastal communities and using ecosystem service natural resources to support their livelihoods and their culture. I urge that the Council also evaluate impact on the particular risk of socially and economically vulnerable populations and to work to build their resiliency. I also urge the Council to identify ways to address growing poverties with ecosystem jobs and training, give preference to entities or organizations that are pretty much headquartered or located locally and to take steps to hire workers from the Gulf and also develop partnerships with work force development to assist with training and hiring of local workers including workers from the disadvantaged and underserved and resource constrained communities. Those are a few of my recommendations that help you to get a step further with your plan and I congratulate you and commend you in the upcoming efforts.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you.

SUSAN FEATHERS: I too thank you all very much for the work that you're doing. I'm Susan Feathers and I'm from the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at University of West Florida. UWF is a regional public university that serves sixteen counties in Northwest Florida.

As you all begin your planning, one of the things that I resonated with, that our university has though very deeply about, is how do you use the money that we have to establish something that will last. What the Sierra Club representative talked about in terms of making sure we have long term mechanisms in place that will continue to monitor and to study things like psychological impacts, economic impacts. And so one of those was establishing endowments in critical places, where there are centers already in place. I'm not sure how you all will do this, that's why I think the challenge is so great. And where our input is going to be very important, for example University of West Florida has a Center for Environmental Diagnostics and Bioremediation, which works with NOAA now and EPA and others. But because we're a regional public university, we can't draw on the funding that big R1 universities can draw. But a Council like this can look strategically and say, "Who's been monitoring? Who has that data?" Then also I think another role for all the universities, is that in those faculties you have people that know how to manage large data sets. And NSF right now is funding, projects like this would be perfect for NSF partner projects, where they fund experts in working with large data mining sets. And that will be important for sending in their long-term strategies. And the last thing I want is a question. Could you clarify for me the 2.5 percent Centers of Excellence? Will those be one per state or will there be many Centers of Excellence in states along the Gulf Coast where competitive grants, you know, will establish them? We've got both messages. Thank you so much and good luck.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you. We will respond to that question but we can't do it right but there will be a response. Nope, we will answer that question right now. Oh, maybe we won't. Okay.

DR. SANDIFER: It's my understanding that the five states are working through their internal processes now to develop their Centers of Excellence. In some cases it appears likely there will be a single Center of Excellence in a given state. In other states it appears the centers will be consortia of academic institutions. So I think the question should be really answered at the state level. You'll get a lot more information that way. That's the last I've heard. And it's still a moving target. I don't think every state has finally decided how it's going to be had.

DAVID MUTH: Thank you very much. My name is David Muth. I'm with the National Wildlife Federation. I'm the Program Director for the Mississippi River Delta Restoration Campaign. I'm going to expand a little on the remarks of my colleague David White.

We are engaged with our partners in promoting the restoration of what is clearly the most important physical and biological driver of the Northern Gulf, which is the Mississippi River and its delta. And in case Mr. Graves has neglected to mention the importance of the Mississippi River Delta to you, I thought I would bring that up today.

Also, to the bigger task ahead of you, you've heard today that there is a huge amount of work to be done on the entire Gulf Coast. Socioeconomically, with communities and obviously with an ecosystem that was in decline long before the BP Maconda oil spill. Luckily, the way the legislation is written, you have an opportunity to begin looking at that much bigger question. We'd like to encourage you to see the pot of money that you control to be the ecosystem restoration pot. That's what that 30 percent is for. Your Comprehensive Plan should be about ecosystem restoration but you as a RESTORE Council, as we go forward, need to take a larger look, beyond just what is funded by the Comprehensive Plan at all the efforts that are taking place throughout the Gulf Coast for ecosystem restoration.

You need to work with individual states and with the federal agencies to make sure we continue to pull together to get this job done. All of the agencies on the federal level and the state agencies need to be working together from whatever source of funds are available to accomplish the tasks that congress has entrusted in you. So again, thank you very much and good luck.

BARBARA ALBRECHT: I'm Barbara Albrecht. Today I'm going to represent the Bream Fisherman Association. We are a group, that's a volunteer group, that's been around for fifty two years in Northwest Florida doing water quality monitoring.

ROBERTA SWANN: Can you speak up?

BARBARA ALBRECHT: Can you hear me? The Bream Fisherman Association has been around for fifty two years as a volunteer organization doing water quality monitoring. Our group was instrumental in getting the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to the Pensacola region back in the 70's, back then it was known as DER, Department of Environmental Regulation, DNR, Department of Natural Resources. Anyway, we have been concerned for years about the intersection of land use and water quality. Our group was active back when we had fish gills that were measured in the acres and the miles and they have been diligently working with the county, with the state, with the EP to do water quality monitoring on their own nickel so that we could have this valuable of trend data.

I have taken because our group is in their seventies, eighties and nineties. They remember the days when we had grass-feds in our bays, they remember when they could throw a cast net and feed their family. They remember these days and they're worried about what will happen when our coastal areas grow because that seems to be what drives our economies in Northwest Florida. All of our watersheds are interstate watersheds. They start in Alabama and the end in Florida. In our area we have the Perdido Bay and the Pensacola Bay system. We have beautiful rivers that are unfortunately being destroyed by sedimentation.

These are all things that I've been trying to work with the University of West Florida through volunteer effort to develop a watershed center so that we could do restoration in a low impact method. So that we could actually restore our creeks that feed our estuaries that ultimately empty into the basin that we're worried about. I really appreciate your time and just wanted to bring that to your attention.

DAVID GAUTHE: Thank you. My name is David Gauthe with Bayou Interfaith Shared Community Organizing known as BISCO. Really, two reasons I'm up here today. The first one was to tell Ms. Lisa Jackson I said hi, but she up and left on us so pass the message on. The second one is a serious one, is jobs. It's local hiring.

You have an awesome responsibility. You have a power, just with the stroke of a pen to make sure this happens. We've enacted legislation in several states to try and help this effort to make sure local people are hired by making the contractors [unintelligible, Track 34, 4:30] the bids. Visit with the workforce connection and people after they get the bid. Wouldn't it be nice if it was a requirement that they have to visit with them before so that the workforce can [unintelligible, Track 34, 4:45] an idea of what kind of jobs are available and prepare training for it? Please, keep local jobs, local people. We work with people on the coast. They need that help. There's a lot of things going on that affects them and you have the power to change that. Thank you very much.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you.

KAREN GAUTREAUX: Good afternoon. My name is Karen Gautreaux, I'm the Director of Government Relations for the Nature Conservancy. Along with Louisiana chapter, I'm joined today by many of our Gulf chapter offices. We want to umber one congratulate you on being here, this is a great opportunity. Many of you we've worked with in efforts leading the conservation effort in the Gulf prior to the RESTORE Act. We hope to continue doing that into the future. We have about forty years of experience in the Gulf, much of it science and consensus-based. We want to make sure we offer all of our resources to you as you go forward.

One of the, I've submitted written comments, but I'll just try to touch on the top three things very quickly. Number one, we hope the primacy of the ecosystem restoration initiative is at the heart of what the Council is doing. Particularly, we urge you, with Pot two funds, to restore the natural resources and ecosystem functions of the Gulf. We believe that by doing that, we contribute to the economy and communities who are made more resilient and they have a more sustainable base going into the future.

The second thing we'd like to encourage you to do, is to, and we've been very pleased to hear the emphasis on science and the design of projects. We've been pleased at the initial comments that long-term monitoring and adaptive management is going to be key. We need to base our projects, as we start out, on the best science. We need to be able to adaptively manage when we get more information, learn from what we've done, and be better able to make sure we're investing our limited resources as wisely as possible.

The third thing we'd like to encourage you to do is, wherever possible, pot three we believe provides some opportunities, and while that is not part of your plan necessarily, we would appreciate recommendations that lead to leveraging of local, state or federal funds that mesh restoration economy with opportunities at that level. And related to that, we encourage stakeholder engagement so on behalf of the over a million member Nature Conservancy people out there, we congratulate you and again, stand ready to assist you as we can.

ROBERTA SWANN: Thank you.

COURTNEY TAYLOR: Good afternoon. My name is Courtney Taylor and I'm the Policy Director of Land, Water and Wildlife at the Environmental Defense Fund. And my comments echo a lot of the other comments we've heard today. The Environmental Defense Fund urges you to maintain your focus and the Comprehensive Plan and the 30 percent Council allocation solely on ecosystem restoration as directed by the statute. And we're really encouraged to hear you all view the Task Force Strategy as the foundation for the Comprehensive Plan. We believe that the Task Force did a great job. In particular, we really think that the Council's plan needs to focus on restoration for the Mississippi River Delta.

We believe, as others have said today, if the Council maintains its focus on restoring the Gulf Coast ecosystem, it will begin to restore the Gulf Coast economy. Thank you for today, for your time.

BRIAN MOORE: Hi my name is Brian Moore. I work for the National Audubon Society. First of all, I want to thank y'all for all your work over the last several years, it's been important and it's been really impressive. Audubon has been a landowner and a steward of land in the Gulf Region for over a hundred

years now. And as we worked on this RESTORE legislation, with you folks, really one of the things that we think is important is what my colleagues just said, which is the pot of money and the plan y'all are putting together be exclusive and comprehensive on the ecosystem and the restoration of this whole entire ecosystem. Through that, we think there are a lot of economic benefits but we would hope that the plan you put together is really comprehensive and takes in all the needs of this ecosystem and the other things will follow after that, so thank you.

SHARON GAUTHE: Hello, I'm Sharon Gauthe. I'm Director of BISCO, which is Bayou Interfaith Shared Community Organizing and the parishes in Louisiana La Fouche, Terrebonne and lower part of Jefferson and Grand Isle. We represent the communities there as community organizers. You'll recognize that term as President Obama was a community organizer at one time and we value his input and what he has done in the nation with his knowledge of community organizing. I think part of why community is so important now is part of his push to say community has to be involved. We represent our communities. We are a faith-based organization and a community-based organization. We don't believe that you can do this without us.