Priority & Commitment To Plan Evaluation

Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

PROPOSAL TITLE

Mobile Bay and Beyond – Watershed Implementation to enhance Marsh, Marine, and Estuarine Ecosystems

PROPORAL NUMBER

USDA-4

LOCATION

Southern Mobile, Southern Baldwin Counties, AL

SPONSOR(S)

Department of Agriculture

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

Planning/Technical Assistance/Implementation

REVIEWED BY:

Ebonye T. Allen

DATE:

12 February 2015

A. Comprehensive Plan Goals

Of the goals addressed by the proposal, which is the single primary goal?
Proposals should discuss how the proposed activity is designed to address the primary goal.
Check one:

- ○ Restore and Conserve Habitat – Restore and conserve the health, diversity and resilience of key coastal, estuarine and marine habitats.
- ◉ Restore Water Quality – Restore and protect water quality of the Gulf Coast region's fresh, estuarine and marine waters.
- ○ Replenish and Protect Living Coastal and Marine Resources – Restore and protect healthy, diverse and sustainable living coastal and marine resources.
- ○ Enhance Community Resilience – Build upon and sustain communities with capacity to adapt to short- and long-term changes.
- ○ Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy – Enhance the sustainability and resiliency of the Gulf economy.

Notes:

This proposed project is intended to restore water quality in select watersheds through implementation of conservation practices, primarily on private land. These conservation practices would reduce sediment, pesticides, nutrients, and fecal coliform entering priority watersheds near the Gulf, improving the quality of fresh, estuarine and marine waters. The sponsor anticipates that improved water quality would provide a secondary benefit to habitat.

B. Comprehensive Plan Objectives

Proposals must clearly identify which objectives the proposal will address

1. Restore, Enhance, and Protect Habitats

- [x] YES
- [ ] NO
- [ ] Not articulated
- [ ] N/A

2. Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources

- [x] YES
- [ ] NO
- [ ] Not articulated
- [ ] N/A

3. Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources

- [x] YES
- [ ] NO
- [ ] Not articulated
- [ ] N/A

4. Restore and Enhance Natural Processes and Shorelines

- [x] YES
- [ ] NO
- [ ] Not articulated
- [ ] N/A

Notes:

8. Of these objectives which is the single primary objective the proposal addresses?

Check one:

- ○ Restore, Enhance, and Protect Habitats
- ◉ Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources
- ○ Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources
- ○ Restore and Enhance Natural Processes and Shorelines
- ○ Promote Community Resilience
- ○ Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education
- ○ Improve Science-Based Decision-Making Processes

C. RESTORE Act and Comprehensive Plan Priority Criteria

All proposals must explain if the proposal addresses one or more of the priority criteria as established by the RESTORE Act and Initial Comprehensive Plan and, if so, how.

1. This project is projected to make the greatest contribution to restoring and protecting the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast region, without regard to geographic location within the Gulf Coast region.

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

2. This is a large-scale project/program that is projected to substantially contribute to restoring and protecting the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast ecosystem.

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

3. This project is contained in existing Gulf Coast State comprehensive plans for the restoration and protection of natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast region.

(●) YES ( ) NO

4. This project will restore long-term resiliency of the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands most impacted by the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill.

(●) YES ( ) NO

5. Promote Community Resilience

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

6. Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

Notes:

The proposed project would implement conservation treatment on 15,000 acres to improve hydrologic conditions and water quality. This project would include installing structures for sediment and erosion control; livestock stream exclusion; stream restoration — such as replanting hardwoods and expanding buffers, sod-based rotation on cropland, precision placement of pesticides, nutrient management, cover crops, hydrologic restoration, and innovative urban/rural interface projects. The potential benefits would include improvements in soil health, infiltration, recharge, water quality and hydrologic condition. The project, if funded, would identify critical treatment areas, with a goal of treating at least 90% of such areas. The sponsor has indicated that applying a comprehensive suite of conservation practices on areas in high need of treatment would reduce

D. Comprehensive Plan Commitments

All proposals must demonstrate how the proposal will achieve any or all of the commitments in the Comprehensive Plan. The commitments in the Comprehensive Plan are as follows:

Does the proposal articulate how it will achieve the following commitments in the comprehensive plan?

1. Science-based Decision-Making

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As described in the submission, technical standards and criteria have been established for all conservation practices. These standards and criteria are developed in consultation with universities, research institutions, private firms and individuals.

2. Regional Ecosystem-based Approach to Restoration

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

According to the submission, this proposal would provide comprehensive Gulf-wide ecosystem restoration through a watershed approach, the ability to reach a large number of private landowners, and through partnership efforts to leverage new resources. As noted above, the proposed project would implement conservation treatment on 15,000 acres to improve hydrologic conditions and water quality.

3. Engagement, Inclusion, and Transparency

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The submission describes how the sponsor proposes to ensure public engagement and transparency. Specifically, if funded, this project would include public announcements, field days, outreach meetings, and press releases to notify private landowners of this opportunity. Successfully implemented conservation practices would be showcased during field days for landowners and partners to demonstrate and promote these practices. Where aerial imagery, watershed plans and/or partners have identified critical treatment needs, the Soil & Water Conservation Districts would make personal contacts with landowners to target those areas.

4. Leveraging Resources and Partnerships

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, partners for this effort would include the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Geological Survey of Alabama, and Water Watch Volunteers. Private landowners are expected to provide up to 25% cash or in-kind services to implement conservation measures on their property.

5. Delivering Results and Measuring Impacts

(●) YES ( ) NO

Notes:

The first measure of success for this project would be acres treated, with a goal of 15,000 acres. The installed conservation practices would be digitized into a GIS system, and modeling would be used to assess anticipated water quality improvements. USDA would also calculate sediment loss before and after project implementation. In addition, many partners are already monitoring water quality. Such data could be used to measure success by showing improvements in turbidity, nutrient concentrations, pesticide concentrations, and fecal coliforms.

E. Meeting Commitments and Tracking and Measuring Progress

1. Does the proposal articulate how it will meet and achieve its commitments?

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

2. Does the proposal have a plan for tracking and measuring progress?

(●) YES ( ) NO

Notes:

See notes under delivering results and measuring impacts.

F. Proposal Emphasis Areas

Does the submission describe how the proposed project or program addresses the following four considerations:

1. Is the proposed activity **foundational** in the sense that the project or program forms an initial core step (or steps) in addressing a significant ecosystem issue, and can future activities be tiered to substantially increase the benefits?

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

According to the sponsor, this project would be foundational in several ways, including potentially complementing downstream restoration activities such as oyster reef, coastal marsh, and fishery recovery. In such cases it could contribute to a good return on investment for downstream restoration projects by improving water quality and contributing to their long-term success.

2. Will the proposed activity be **sustainable** over time?

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The conservation practices described in the proposal have a lifespan of 1 to 20 years, depending upon the practice.

3. Is the proposed activity **likely to succeed**?

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

According to the sponsor, this proposed project would follow a watershed and implementation model developed over 50 years of conservation technical assistance, and thus the risks are relatively low. As noted above, the submission also includes information regarding the efficacy of the activities proposed therein.

4. Does the proposed activity **benefit** the human **community**?
(examples of benefits may include, but are not limited to: how a project will utilize local workers, how a project will benefit geographically or socially vulnerable communities, how a project will benefit the natural resources critical to natural-resource dependent industries such as fisheries, tourism, etc.)

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The proposal states that economic benefits to communities would be achieved from the utilization of local workers and local construction supply businesses.