Council Member Proposal Submission Guidelines

For Comprehensive Plan Funded Priorities List of Projects and Programs

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration (RESTORE) Council (33 U.S.C. § 1321(t)(2)

Introduction

One of the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council's (Council) primary responsibilities is to develop a Comprehensive Plan (Plan) to restore the ecosystem and economy of the Gulf Coast region. The Council approved an Initial Comprehensive Plan in August 2013 that outlines overarching goals and objectives for restoration, and that must include a list of projects and programs to be prioritized for funding. This list is known as the Funded Priorities List, or FPL. In order to facilitate selection and funding of restoration projects and programs, the Council developed a rigorous proposal submission and evaluation process that:

1. Ensures that projects and programs funded meet both statutory requirements and commitments the Council made in the Comprehensive Plan.
2. Provides for external scientific review of proposals to maintain objectivity and ensure that statutory requirements for use of best available science are met.
3. Defines a project/program focus area of Habitat and Water Quality for the first addendum to the Plan to allow Council members to submit for consideration projects and programs that address common ecosystem priorities and to find synergies among projects and across jurisdictional boundaries.
4. Promotes proposal submissions that emphasize:
    a. How a project/program is foundational in the sense that it forms the initial core steps in addressing a significant ecosystem issue and that future projects can be tiered to substantially increase the benefits;
    b. How a project/program will be sustainable over time;
    c. Why a project/program is likely to succeed; and
    d. How a project/program benefits the human community.
5. Ensures that all applicable environmental compliance requirements are addressed.

The following submission guidelines are intended to help members draft project proposals that address all five of the items listed above. **The Council members are the only entities eligible to submit proposals.**

Use of Focus and Emphasis Areas

The Council decided to use Focus Areas and Emphasis Areas to help ensure that the Funded Priorities List (FPL) represents a focused, integrated, and efficient use of currently available funds. In addition to the information called for in the attached submission guidelines, Council members should succinctly describe how the proposed activity addresses the following Focus Areas and Emphasis Areas.

Focus Areas: Proposals for inclusion in the FPL should discuss how the proposed activity is designed primarily to address habitat or water quality. The Council recognizes that projects and programs submitted for inclusion in the FPL may address multiple goals and objectives. In such cases, applicants should identify whether the primary goal of the proposal pertains to habitat or

water quality.

Emphasis Areas: Submissions should describe how the proposed project or program addresses the following four considerations:

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

(2) How the proposed activity will be sustainable over time;

(3) Why the proposed activity is likely to succeed; and

(4) How the proposed activity benefits the human community. Examples of community 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.

This guidance is applicable to the FPL currently under consideration. The Council intends to use adaptive planning to evaluate the extent to which the vetting process for the Council-Selected Restoration Component results in an array of projects and programs which effectively meet the requirements of the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourism Opportunities and Revived Economy Act (RESTORE Act). These Focus Areas and Emphasis Areas may be modified for subsequent amendments to the FPL, along with other aspects of the proposal submission and evaluation process.

Background

Enacted in July 2012, the RESTORE Act dedicates 80 percent of certain Clean Water Act administrative and civil penalties related to the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill to a Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund (RTF) and outlines a structure by which the funds can be utilized to restore and protect the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, coastal wetlands, and economy of the Gulf Coast region.

In order to carry out certain functions of the RESTORE Act, Congress established a Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council), which is comprised of governors from the five affected Gulf States, the Secretaries from the U.S. Departments of the Interior, Commerce, Agriculture, and Homeland Security as well as the Secretary of the Army and the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The Gulf States recommended, and the President

appointed, the Secretary of Commerce as the Council's Chair. Specifically, the Council is tasked with publishing a Comprehensive Plan through which the Council will select and fund projects and programs to restore and protect the natural resources, ecosystems, water quality, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast region (collectively the Restoration Component of the RESTORE Act).

The Council approved an Initial Comprehensive Plan (Plan) in August of 2013. The Council, using the Plan's guidance for decision-making related to the evaluation, approval, funding, and implementation of projects and programs under the Restoration Component of the RESTORE Act will develop the Funded Priorities List (FPL). Council members will submit proposals detailing projects and programs that are proposed for inclusion on the FPL. Submitted proposals will be independently reviewed based on specific criteria; the results of this review will be provided to the Council and posted online. The Council will then develop and publish one or more FPLs based on the amount and timing of funds available in the RESTORE Trust Fund.

The Council will periodically request proposals from its eleven state and federal members. **The Council members are the only entities eligible to submit proposals.**

Eligible Activities

Eligible proposals can include both projects and programs. For projects, the proposed activity is a discrete project or group of projects where the full scope of the restoration or protection activity has been defined at the time the Council considers the proposal. For programs, the proposed activity is the establishment of a program where the program manager will solicit, evaluate, select, and carry out discrete projects that best meet the program's restoration objectives and evaluation criteria. The Council will review the merits of the proposed program's evaluation criteria and objectives when making funding decisions.

Projects and programs are eligible to be funded under any or all of the three phases described below:

Planning – Proposed activities may include: development of ecosystem restoration projects and programs; cost estimates; the scientific foundation for a proposal; and public engagement.

Technical Assistance – Proposed activities may include: feasibility analysis; design; environmental review and compliance; evaluation and establishment of monitoring requirements and methods to report outcomes and impacts; and permitting.

Implementation – Proposed activities may include: construction; public outreach and education; and measurement, evaluation, and reporting of outcomes and impacts of restoration activities.

Section A. Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Pursuant to the Initial Comprehensive Plan of the RESTORE Council and RESTORE Act, all proposals must include elements of the six subsections below. Failure to submit all required elements will result in the proposal being returned without review.

(1). Comprehensive Plan Goals:

Proposals must identify which goals the proposal will address. A proposal sponsor must select a **single** primary goal. Multiple secondary goals are encouraged to be identified.

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

(2). Comprehensive Plan Objectives:

Proposals must clearly identify which objectives the proposal will address. A proposal sponsor must select a **single** primary objective. Multiple secondary objectives are encouraged to be identified.

1. Restore, Enhance, and Protect Habitats.
2. Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources.
3. Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources.
4. Restore and Enhance Natural Processes and Shorelines.
5. Promote Community Resilience.
6. Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education.
7. Improve Science-Based Decision-Making Processes.

(3). 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. Projects that are projected to make the greatest contribution to restoring and protecting the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast region, without regard to geographic location within the Gulf Coast region.

2. Large-scale projects and programs that are projected to substantially contribute to restoring and protecting the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast ecosystem.
3. Projects contained in existing Gulf Coast State comprehensive plans for the restoration and protection of natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast region.
4. Projects that restore long-term resiliency of the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands most impacted by the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill.

(4). 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:

1. Science-based Decision-Making
2. Regional Ecosystem-based Approach to Restoration
3. Engagement, Inclusion, and Transparency
4. Leveraging Resources and Partnerships
5. Delivering Results and Measuring Impacts

The following will be considered under the evaluation criteria during the selection process and must be addressed in the proposal submission: how the proposal will meet and achieve these commitments, **and a plan for tracking and measuring progress.**

(5). Science:
All proposals must demonstrate that best available science has been taken into consideration and must clearly articulate how it meets each part of the definition of best available science provided by the RESTORE Act. Best available science is defined in the RESTORE Act as science that (A) maximizes the quality, objectivity, and integrity of information, including statistical information; (B) uses peer-reviewed and publicly available data; and (C) clearly documents and communicates risks and uncertainties in the scientific basis for such projects.

(6). Environmental Compliance:
All proposed projects and programs must list, using the attached checklist (Appendix B), all applicable environmental compliance requirements with the associated proposal, as well as the status of those compliance requirements.

Section B. Proposal Package

The proposal must be complete to be considered eligible for funding. Failure to submit all required elements will result in the proposal being considered ineligible, and returned without

review. The proposal package **must** contain the following information to be considered complete:

(1). Overall Layout

1. Summary sheet: applicant and proposal information (completed summary sheet – Appendix A)
2. Executive summary
3. Proposal narrative
4. Location information
5. High level budget narrative
6. Environmental compliance checklist (Appendix B)
7. Data/Information sharing plan
8. Reference list of literature cited in the proposal
9. Other

If an element (1-9) is not applicable to the proposal please indicate "not applicable" rather than leaving the item blank or not including it. If the element is not applicable, please provide justification for your answer.

(2). Executive Summary (2 page limit, 12pt font)

1. General information about the project or program pursuant to Comprehensive Plan Goals and Objectives
2. Implementation information including time line and, if applicable, methods associated with project or program implementation
3. Monitoring and measures of success of the project or program (if applicable); and
4. Uncertainties and risks associated with the project or program

(3). Proposal Narrative (15 page limit, 12 pt font)

The proposal narrative must clearly and efficiently address each of the proposal evaluation criteria identified in Section A.

Consider addressing the following items in the proposal narrative in order to assist in demonstrating that best available science has been taken into consideration:

- Cite peer-reviewed and / or publicly available information when applicable
- Literature not directly related to the Gulf of Mexico needs to demonstrate applicability
- A complete and accurately cited bibliography

- Consideration of all the risks and uncertainties associated with the proposal, including short and long-term sustainability and impacts associated with implementation
- Adaptive management plan (if applicable)

The following are examples of information that may be included in the proposal narrative, when and if applicable to the proposal.

1. Proposal introduction and background

The narrative may include a description of project or program goals and objectives and document how the project or program specifically addresses the priorities and commitments of the Plan. The narrative may also include information such as the lifespan of the project or program and effectiveness over time, and how the project or program addresses comprehensive Gulf-wide ecosystem restoration.

2. Implementation methodology

The narrative may state the proposed method to be used in the project or program and the reasons that proposed method was selected. Examples such as science, cost-effectiveness, or other reasons to justify the use of one method over another could be used.

3. Monitoring and adaptive management of the project or program (if applicable)

If applicable, the narrative may state the type of monitoring that will be undertaken. Monitoring types could include monitoring for compliance, construction, support research, adaptive management, post-storm surveys, etc., if applicable. The description may specify the duration, timing, and type of data to be collected under each monitoring type. The narrative could describe the amount and type of pre-project monitoring, during construction monitoring, and post-construction monitoring.

4. Measures of success for the proposed project or program

The narrative may describe objective metrics for project or program success and how the project or program's success will be evaluated over time.

5. Risks and uncertainties of the proposed activities

The narrative may include, as applicable, a discussion of the potential risks (e.g., success, budget growth, etc.) associated with the proposed activities. Risks may be associated with construction, implementation, data collection, changing physical conditions such as hurricanes, subsidence or sea level rise, injury to non-targeted species, etc. To the extent that risks exist, a risk mitigation plan may be included. The narrative may also discuss, as applicable, uncertainties that could hinder the success of the proposal. The narrative may identify and address, as applicable, any unintended impacts that could result from proposal implementation.

6. Outreach and education opportunities

The narrative may describe any education and outreach opportunities associated with the proposal.

7. Leveraging of resources and partnerships

The narrative may include a description of resources (e.g., in-kind or cash cost-share, use of equipment, donation of property, use of labor, time, intellectual capacity, etc.) that are leveraged with this proposal. It may describe partnerships and collaborations occurring within, and as a result of the proposed project or program. It may identify collaborators and their expertise. It may include letters of support as needed.

8. Proposal project/program benefits

The narrative may also include a description of any other benefit, qualitative or quantitative, associated with the primary and secondary goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan that the proposal addresses.

(4). Location Information (no page limit)

Maps, sketches, aerial photographs, video links, or other graphics are encouraged. Please provide detailed descriptions associated with each graphic with proposal submission. Please provide latitude/longitude coordinates (decimal degrees) with sites, sampling sites (if applicable), and impact areas.

(5). High-Level Budget Narrative (no page limit)

General Budget Outline: This narrative should include a budget summarizing the major categories of effort and must include costs associated with construction, implementation, monitoring (if applicable), adaptive management (if applicable), planning (if applicable), environmental compliance (if applicable), engineering and design (if applicable), operations, maintenance, and adaptation (including what will happen when project is deauthorized/decommissioned), overhead/indirect costs, contingency, and data management. The budget should differentiate project cost being requested and in-kind or leveraged cost (i.e., project cost not being requested and the identity of the other funding source[s]). If project requires ongoing management or maintenance, please specify whether that cost is included in the project submission.

(6). Environmental Compliance Checklist (Appendix B) (no page limit)

Complete the environmental compliance checklist and include any documentation of environmental compliance that has already been obtained for the associated proposal.

(7). Data / Information sharing plan (2 page max)

The data/information sharing plan should include descriptions of the following:

a. Descriptions of the types of environmental data and information that will be created during the course of the project (if applicable);
b. Standards to be used for data/metadata format and content;
c. Policies addressing data stewardship and preservation; and
d. Procedures for providing access, sharing, and security.

(8). Reference list of literature cited in the proposal (no page limit)

Please include all citations and literature used in the proposal narrative. Citations should be accurate, complete, and clear.

(9). Other (no page limit)

Other documents that could be contained within the proposal submission could include:

- Letters of support.
- Pledges of in-kind cost sharing.
- Opportunities for leveraging past, present, or future restoration projects and monitoring efforts.
- Public engagement activities and results.

Appendix A: Council Member Applicant and Proposal Information Summary Sheet

Council Member:	Point of Contact: Phone: Email:

Project Identification

Project Title:	Project
State(s):	County/City/Region:

General Location: *Projects must be located within the Gulf Coast Region as defined in RESTORE Act. (attach map or photos, if applicable)*

Project Description

RESTORE Goals: *Identify all RESTORE Act goals this project supports. Place a **P** for Primary Goal, and **S** for secondary goals.*

___ Restore and Conserve Habitat
___ Restore Water Quality
___ Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy
___ Replenish and Protect Living Coastal and Marine Resources
___ Enhance Community Resilience

RESTORE Objectives: *Identify all RESTORE Act objectives this project supports. Place a **P** for Primary Objective, and **S** for secondary objectives.*

___ 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

RESTORE Priorities: *Identify all RESTORE Act priorities that this project supports.*

___Priority 1: Projects that are projected to make the greatest contribution
___ Priority 2: Large-scale projects and programs that are projected to substantially contribute to restoring
___ Priority 3: Projects contained in existing Gulf Coast State comprehensive plans for the restoration ....
___ Priority 4: Projects that restore long-term resiliency of the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries ...

RESTORE Commitments: *Identify all RESTORE Comprehensive Plan commitments that this project supports.*

___ Commitment to Science-based Decision Making
___ Commitment to Regional Ecosystem-based Approach to Restoration
___ Commitment to Engagement, Inclusion, and Transparency
___ Commitment to Leverage Resources and Partnerships
___ Commitment to Delivering Results and Measuring Impacts

RESTORE Proposal Type and Phases: *Please identify which type and phase best suits this proposal.*

___ Project ____ Planning ___ Technical Assistance ____ Implementation ___ Program

Project Cost and Duration

Project Cost Estimate: **Total :**	$_____	**Project Timing Estimate:** Date Anticipated to Start: _____/_____ Time to Completion: _____ months / years Anticipated Project Lifespan: _____ years

Appendix B

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
Environmental Compliance Checklist

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

Environmental Compliance Type	**Yes**	**No**	**Applied For**	**N/A**
Federal				
National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA)				
Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA)				
Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act				
Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA)				
NEPA – Categorical Exclusion				
NEPA – Environmental Assessment				
NEPA – Environmental Impact Statement				
Clean Water Act – 404 – Individual Permit (USACOE)				
Clean Water Act – 404 – General Permit(USACOE)				
Clean Water Act – 404 – Letters of Permission(USACOE)				
Clean Water Act – 401 – WQ certification				
Clean Water Act – 402 – NPDES				
Rivers and Harbors Act – Section 10 (USACOE)				
Endangered Species Act – Section 7 – Informal and Formal Consultation (NMFS, USFWS)				
Endangered Species Act – Section 7 - Biological Assessment (BOEM,USACOE)				
Endangered Species Act – Section 7 – Biological Opinion (NMFS, USFWS)				
Endangered Species Act – Section 7 – Permit for Take (NMFS, USFWS)				
Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) – Consultation (NMFS)				
Marine Mammal Protection Act – Incidental Take Permit (106) (NMFS, USFWS)				
Migratory Bird Treaty Act (USFWS)				
Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act – Consultation and Planning (USFWS)				
Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act – Section 103 permit (NMFS)				
BOEM Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act – Section 8 OCS Lands Sand permit				
NHPA Section 106 – Consultation and Planning ACHP, SHPO(s), and/or THPO(s)				
NHPA Section 106 – Memorandum of Agreement/Programmatic Agreement				
Tribal Consultation (Government to Government)				
Coastal Barriers Resource Act – CBRS (Consultation)				
State				
As Applicable per State				