

Funded Priorities List Planning Framework

Priority Approach: Protect and conserve coastal, estuarine, and riparian habitats

Planning Framework Overview

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) has released the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council Planning Framework draft for public review and comment, as the Council continues to advance its *2016 Comprehensive Plan Update: Restoring the Gulf Coast's Ecosystem and Economy*.

Funded Priorities List (FPL) is a list of the final Gulf Coast restoration projects and programs that the RESTORE Council has approved for funding. Thus far, the Council has approved two FPLs. This Planning Framework describes the Council's current focus for development of the next Funded Priorities List (FPL 3). The complexities associated with Gulf ecosystem restoration necessitate some flexibility in decision-making. Therefore, the Council may choose to fund projects that do not align with this Planning Framework draft. The Planning Framework is intended to serve as a bridge, strategically linking the RESTORE Council's past and future funding decisions to its overarching goals and objectives. To that end, the Council will consider how future investments may build upon those in the Initial FPL as well as activities funded by other restoration efforts in the Gulf of Mexico region.

The Planning Framework draft is organized by priority restoration approaches and techniques, and the geographic areas where these approaches and techniques could be carried out. Approaches refine the options for how to achieve restoration goals and objectives. Techniques are methods used to carry out an approach. Together, they signal the resources, habitats, and locations that the RESTORE Council may consider when selecting projects and programs for FPL 3 funding.

Approach: Protect and conserve coastal, estuarine, and riparian habitats

This priority approach supports the following Comprehensive Plan goal and objective:

Primary goal

- Restore and conserve habitat

Primary objective

- Restore, enhance, and protect habitats

Protecting and conserving habitat not only reduces habitat loss and degradation, it is also critical to sustain fish, shellfish, bird, and mammal populations. Through habitat protection and management, water quality is protected and improved, and flood damage to communities can be reduced. This approach further provides opportunities to deliver on the RESTORE Council's objective to promote natural resource stewardship and environmental education through cooperative partnerships with landowners.

Don't miss your chance to have your voice heard!

We want to hear from you!

Please contact us at: RestoreCouncil@restorethegulf.gov

Or visit us on the web at: www.restorethegulf.gov

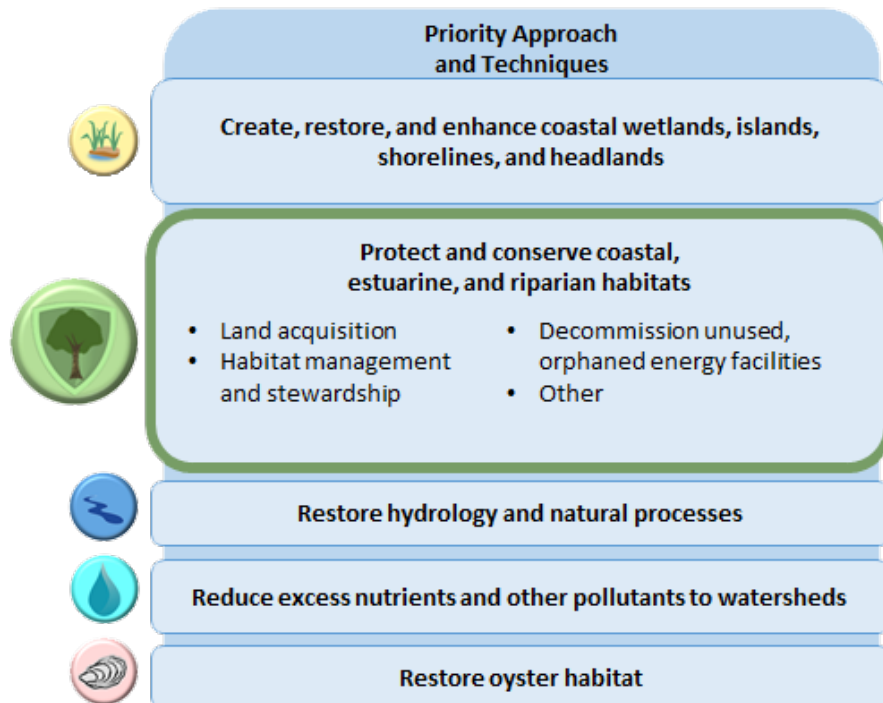
Spring 2019 Public Meeting Schedule

Date	Cities *	Time
04/30/19	Spanish Fort, AL	6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
05/06/19	New Orleans, LA	6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
05/07/19	Tallahassee, FL	6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
05/22/19	Long Beach, MS	6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
05/30/19	Corpus Christi, TX	6:00 pm - 8:00 pm

*meeting venues available at www.restorethegulf.gov

Potential Restoration Techniques

The RESTORE Council is considering the following types of habitat protection, conservation, and management techniques in geographic areas where habitat loss and degradation represents a primary ecosystem stressor.



Land acquisition

Land acquisition can include a traditional land purchase agreement, which transfers full ownership to the appropriate state or federal natural resource agency, conservation organization, or land trust. Another option could be to purchase conservation easements. This allows the seller to retain ownership of the property with the agreement that the land is used for conservation purposes only.

Both types of land acquisition can effectively help:

- Preserve native biodiversity
- Protect ecosystem functions
- Minimize future development in high risk areas, thereby reducing economic losses associated with storm surge, flooding, and water damage to coastal residents and businesses.

Habitat management and stewardship

Habitat management and stewardship actions can be carried out on existing public lands, lands acquired and protected through purchase of conservation easements, and on privately owned lands through other forms of voluntary agreements. Examples of habitat management actions could include but are not limited to:

- Increasing landowner stewardship
- Invasive species control
- Native vegetation plantings
- Forest and coastal prairie management
- Conservation and enhancement of riparian buffers
- Removal of debris
- Use of best practices on agricultural lands
- Prescribed burns
- Hydrologic restoration
- Development of habitat management plans for conservation areas or private lands

Decommission unused, orphaned energy facilities

Successfully removing abandoned, orphaned oil and gas wells and sites can decrease the potential for additional petroleum pollution that may affect offshore living resources and coastal habitats. Depending upon where it enters the ecosystem, petroleum pollution can also impact groundwater, springs and seeps, and surface water, posing a threat to the birds, animals and habitats that rely on these waters for survival. Plugging orphaned wells and removing orphaned pipelines and other man-made structures could reduce potential for petroleum contamination, resulting in the protection of water quality in adjacent waterways, protection of habitat for dependent wildlife, including endangered and migratory species; and improved visitor safety.

Why is it important to protect and conserve our coastal, estuarine and riparian habitats?

- Due to a variety of circumstances, Gulf Coast habitats have experienced significant declines in acreage and function, including urban expansion and associated residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural development.
- Petroleum pollution could have a negative impact on fish and wildlife species, as well as wetlands, islands, shorelines, and headlands.
- Habitat protection and conservation is critical to sustaining fish, shellfish, birds, and mammals that depend on a healthy habitat for survival.
- Through habitat protection and management, water quality is protected and improved, and flood damage to area communities can be reduced.
- In the coming decades or even centuries, relative sea level rise is expected to affect coastal habitats. Strategic habitat acquisition and management can protect land for conservation purposes and create opportunities for habitat and species migration in response to changing environmental conditions.