

A. Executive Summary

This is a proposal for funding of projects that the seven Gulf of Mexico National Estuary Programs (NEPs) and the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Restoration Program (LPBRP) would implement to protect and restore habitat and water quality consistent with established comprehensive management plans. The study areas for these programs cover approximately forty percent of the Gulf of Mexico coast (Figure 1 & 2, NEP Map & LPBRP Map, Page 3). NEP Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plans (CCMPs) and the Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) provide goals and objectives as well as specific actions to restore and protect the estuary based on a stakeholder driven process rooted in strong science and are consistent with the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council's goals. The NEPs and LPBRP are poised to receive RESTORE funds to implement "shovel ready" projects and have a long track record of proven success.

Projects to be undertaken under this proposal will include: implementing nonpoint source best management practices; implementing green infrastructure measures; designing and constructing storm water parks; completing and implementing watershed management plans; protecting critical aquatic, shoreline and upland habitat through easement or purchase; restoring and managing critical aquatic, shoreline and upland habitat through a variety of hydrologic, landscape, vegetation and wildlife management actions; establishing living shoreline habitat; and other water quality and habitat restoration, protection and management techniques.

The National Estuary Program (NEP) was authorized as a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) program under Section 320 of the 1987 Clean Water Act amendments. Each of the 28 NEPs is governed by a diverse stakeholder Management Conference made up of an inter-jurisdictional body of local elected officials and federal and state agency representatives, as well as scientists, citizens, business and industry as well as non-governmental organization representatives. NEP governing boards act on recommendations from citizens, scientists, businesses, industries and other resource user stakeholders, and implement local solutions to address complex water quality and habitat restoration and protection needs in their estuarine watersheds.

The CCMPs adopted by each Gulf of Mexico NEP include goals consistent with the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council's Comprehensive Plan. These CCMPs were developed over a multiyear period during which data characterizing the condition of each NEP watershed were collected and assessed by teams of scientists. NEP Management Conference members then used the characterizations to develop the goals, objectives, and actions that make up each CCMP. The CCMPs were approved by each NEP Management Conference and the EPA Administrator.

In 1995, LPBRP developed a Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) in collaboration with the U.S Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and numerous other federal, state, and local agencies, elected officials, area universities, sporting and recreational organizations, citizens groups, commercial fishing organizations, and representatives from the agricultural and business communities. The CMP cataloged threats to the Basin from sewage, agricultural and urban runoff, saltwater intrusion, and wetlands loss. It has served as the roadmap for LPBRP programs and projects. In 2002, LPBRP created a Comprehensive Habitat Management Plan that provides goals, strategies and methods designed for Basin sustainability.

Projects proposed by the NEPs and LPBRP include planning, design, pre- and post-monitoring, and implementation work. Restoration efforts would typically be carried out via public-private partnerships and would address key funding or other programmatic gaps. Projects address multiple objectives using an ecosystem based management approach. This proposal will allow NEPs and LPBRP to implement additional priority actions identified by their broad constituency to address the RESTORE Council's goals of restoring and conserving habitat and restoring water quality. The projects undertaken will build upon previous efforts and will provide the foundation for future projects and success.

The NEPs and LPBRP possess powerful resources to implement effective water quality and habitat restoration projects. Their science-based, consensus-driven partnerships provide local scientific and technical expertise, leveraged funding, citizen and elected official support, project monitoring, and public outreach expertise. Base funding for each NEP is provided by an annual Congressional appropriation, with partners providing a 1-for-1 match. Each dollar from new sources provided to the NEPs and LPBRP (including this RESTORE funding) would directly support implementation of projects in the field.

The watersheds of the seven Gulf NEPs cover a broad geographic area and offer a diverse set of community, habitat, and restoration opportunities. From west to east, the estuaries are: Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program; Galveston Bay Estuary Program; Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program; Mobile Bay National Estuary Program; Tampa Bay Estuary Program; Sarasota Bay Estuary Program; and the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program.

These seven programs anticipate that high-priority Gulf Habitat and Water Quality Restoration projects could be initiated within 6-9 months after proposal funding is approved by the RESTORE Council. The projects and associated budgets would be included in each NEP's annual work plan, which is approved by the NEP Management Conference and EPA. Projects typically would use local workers and are expected to benefit geographically- or socially-vulnerable communities. The NEPs have the built-in capacity to receive funds and contract, permit, and implement projects to produce results quickly.

An annual report on progress made implementing the previous year's work plan is a required component of each of the Gulf NEP Annual Work Plans. The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) also requires each NEP to report annually on the number of acres of habitat restored and protected. Thus, the NEPs are already well-positioned to provide regular updates on progress made toward achieving the Council's Habitat goal. In 2014, for example, the seven Gulf NEPs collectively restored 53,437 acres of habitat (*NEPORT*, *NEPmap*).

The NEPs and LPBRP also monitor their finances and project status very closely. Each program has financial tracking systems that are able to track multiple projects and expenditures. The programs are audited regularly to ensure appropriate oversight, management, and expenditure of funds.

Due to the long history of success and the strong partnerships on which these programs are based, there is a very low risk that RESTORE Council-funded efforts would fail to meet RESTORE Council and NEP CCMP goals.

B. Proposal Narrative

1. Introduction and Background

This proposal provides funding for the seven Gulf of Mexico National Estuary Programs (NEPs) and Lake Pontchartrain Basin Restoration Program to implement habitat and water quality restoration efforts consistent with their established Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plans (CCMPs). The study areas for these programs cover approximately forty percent of the Gulf of Mexico coast (Figure 1 & 2).



Figure 1, NEP Map



Figure 2, LPBRP Map

The programs incorporate goals and objectives as well as specific actions for restoration and protection of each estuary based on a collaborative, stakeholder-driven process rooted in strong science. This proposal is foundational; it proposes that \$2m per program be provided for a 5-year performance period to implement priority habitat and water quality restoration projects that are consistent with both an NEP's Management Plan and the goals of the RESTORE Council. The NEPs and LPBRP are fully capable of accepting and implementing projects costing

more than \$2m per program; this proposal describes how the NEPs and LPBRP would be able to effectively manage RESTORE Act funding that exceeds \$2m per program.

Efforts undertaken through this proposal are expected to include: implementing nonpoint source best management practices; implementing green infrastructure measures; designing and constructing storm water parks; completing and implementing watershed management plans; protecting critical aquatic, shoreline and upland habitat through easement or purchase; restoring and managing critical aquatic, shoreline and upland habitat through a variety of hydrologic, landscape, vegetation and wildlife management actions; establishing living shoreline habitat; and other water quality and habitat restoration, protection and management techniques. The actual projects would be selected and approved by each NEP Management Conference consistent with the goals and objectives of the CCMP and would be included in annual work plans submitted to EPA for approval and funding.

The National Estuary Program (NEP) was authorized as a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) program under Section 320 of the 1987 Clean Water Act amendments. Each of the 28 NEPs is governed by a diverse stakeholder Management Conference made up of an inter-jurisdictional body of local elected officials and federal and state agency representatives, as well as scientists, citizens, business and industry as well as non-governmental organization representatives. NEP governing boards act on recommendations from citizens, scientists, businesses, industries and other resource user stakeholders, and implement local solutions to address complex water quality and habitat restoration and protection needs in their estuarine watersheds. Schneider et al. (2003) found that the networks in the NEP areas span more levels of government, integrate more experts into policy discussions, nurture stronger interpersonal ties between stakeholders, and create greater faith in the procedural fairness of local policy than do other networks in comparable estuaries.

The Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation (LPBF) was established in response to environmental concerns voiced throughout the Basin. Issues related to the Basin were recognized in the mid- 1970s but there was no common approach taken to restore the Basin. In the spring of 1989, a report called "To Restore Lake Pontchartrain", written by professors at Tulane University and the University of New Orleans, called for the establishment of an entity whose sole focus would be a healthy Lake and Basin. That report became the rallying point for a citizen-led effort that resulted in the formation of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation that same year.

As its first action, LPBF began the SAVE OUR LAKE campaign, which called for efforts to restore Lake Pontchartrain so that it would serve as a healthy economic and recreational resource for the general public. In 1995, LPBF developed a Comprehensive Management Plan jointly with the U.S Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and numerous other federal, state, and local agencies, elected officials, area universities, sporting and recreational organizations, citizens groups, commercial fishing organizations, and representatives from the agricultural community and the business community. Its contributors exhaustively cataloged the threats to the Basin from sewage, agricultural and urban runoff, saltwater intrusion, and wetlands loss. It has served as the roadmap for LPBF programs and projects. Successful in this campaign by 2002, LPBF created a Comprehensive Habitat Management Plan (CHMP). The CHMP provides goals, strategies and methods designed for Basin sustainability.

Each Gulf NEP and the LPBF is eligible under RESTORE to receive funds as a single Program. Each NEP and the LPBF would act within its own study area to solicit, evaluate, select, and carry out approved projects that directly address the RESTORE Council's Comprehensive Goals and Objectives. For more than 20 years, the NEPs have been implementing projects and actions that address their CCMPs (and the Council's Comprehensive Goals and Objectives) in seven study areas comprising ~40% of the US Gulf Coast. Similarly, the LPBF has operated for 25 years to restore water quality and habitat in its watershed in northeast Louisiana. Results of NEP and LPBF efforts include the significant expansion of seagrass beds, marshes, and mangroves. Based on status and trends report data, water quality has also measurably improved in the program areas. Although much remains to be done within these watersheds and estuaries, the programs have proven they have the community involvement, management structure, administrative capacity, and scientific knowledge to continue their successful restoration trajectories.

Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plans adopted by each Gulf of Mexico NEP and the LPBF Comprehensive Management Plan are consistent with the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council's Comprehensive Plan--CCMPs focus on restoring and conserving habitat; restoring water quality; replenishing and protecting living coastal and marine resources; enhancing community resilience; and restoring and revitalizing the Gulf economy. These CCMPs were developed over a multiyear period during which data characterizing the condition of each NEP watershed were collected and assessed by teams of scientists. NEP Management Conference members then used the characterizations to develop the goals, objectives, and actions that make up each CCMP. The CCMPs were approved by each NEP Management Conference and the EPA Administrator.

Projects proposed by the NEPs and LPBF include planning, design, pre- and post-monitoring, and implementation work. Restoration efforts would typically be carried out via public-private partnerships and would address key funding or other programmatic gaps. Projects address multiple objectives using an ecosystem based management approach. This proposal will allow NEPs and LPBRP to implement additional priority actions identified by their broad constituency to address the RESTORE Council's goals of restoring and conserving habitat and restoring water quality. The projects undertaken will build upon previous efforts and will provide the foundation for future projects and success.

The NEPs and LPBF possess powerful resources to implement effective water quality and habitat restoration projects. Their science-based, consensus-driven partnerships provide local scientific and technical expertise, leveraged funding, citizen and elected official support, project monitoring, and public outreach expertise. Base funding for each NEP is provided by an annual Congressional appropriation, with partners providing a 1-for-1 match. Therefore, each dollar from new sources (including this RESTORE funding) would directly support implementation of projects in the field.

Funding for the LPBRP has varied over the years. A line item appropriation was made available for many years, but Congress started a competitive grant program for the Great Water Bodies and geographic initiatives that LPBRP now receives from the University of New Orleans.

The watersheds of the eight programs provide an expansive geographic scope and range of communities, habitats and restoration opportunities. From West to East, the estuaries are: Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program (CBBEP); Galveston Bay Estuary Program (GBEP);

Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP); Lake Pontchartrain Basin Restoration Program (LPBRP); Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP); Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP); Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP); Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program (CHNEP).

2. Implementation methodology

Upon notification of proposal selection for funding by the Council, the Gulf National Estuary Programs (NEPs) and LPBRP would immediately engage their Management Conferences in evaluating Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan goals, objectives and action plans to identify priority water quality and habitat restoration and protection projects. Input would be obtained from the scientific community and the public consistent with individual Management Conference processes. Plans would be developed and approved by the Management Conference to design (if needed) and implement selected projects. Coordination among federal, state and local partners for permitting and approvals would be immediately initiated, as needed. The programs anticipate that high priority Gulf Habitat and Water Quality Restoration projects could be initiated within 6-9 months of receiving RESTORE funds and completed within the 5 year performance period.

The projects and associated budgets would be included in each NEP's annual work plan, which is approved by the NEP Management Conference and EPA. Projects typically would use local workers and are expected to benefit geographically- or socially-vulnerable communities. The NEPs have the built-in capacity to receive funds and contract, permit, and implement projects to produce results quickly.

3. Monitoring and adaptive management

Projects undertaken by these programs will include a baseline and post implementation monitoring component. Such monitoring will provide the basis for determining the effectiveness of the project in meeting the project goals and objectives. The design of the monitoring will be reviewed by the science component of the Management Conference as part of the project plan approval process. This monitoring will also be used to identify any additional measures that need to be taken through an adaptive management process. All monitoring results will be reviewed by the Management Conference for scientific and technical acceptability and as a basis for feedback from the stakeholders.

4. Measures of Success

An annual report on progress made implementing the previous year's work plan is a required component of each of the Gulf NEP Annual Work Plans. The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) also requires each NEP to report annually on the number of acres of habitat restored and protected. Thus, the NEPs are already well-positioned to provide regular updates on progress made toward achieving the Council's Habitat goal. In 2014, for example, the seven Gulf NEPs collectively restored 53,437 acres of habitat (*NEPORT, NEPmap*). In addition, the NEPs regularly report on condition status and trends every 2-3 years, and on progress made toward achieving their habitat and water quality restoration and protection goals (*see NEP and LPBF websites*).

LPBRP is dedicated to restoring and preserving the water quality, coast, and habitats of the entire Pontchartrain Basin. Through coordination of restoration activities, education, advocacy, monitoring of the regulatory process, applied scientific research, and citizen action, LPBRP works in partnership with all segments of the community to reclaim the Basin for this

and future generations. For additional information on monitoring reports and activities, see <http://www.saveourlake.org/index.php>.

5. Risks and uncertainties

Due to the long history of success and the strong partnerships on which these programs are based, there is a very low risk that RESTORE Council-funded efforts would fail to meet RESTORE Council and NEP CCMP goals. For example, the NEPs have a proven track record of effectively partnering with their State agencies and Federal resource agencies like the USACE, NOAA, NRCS, USFWS, and USGS, which reduces the risk of failure. The eight programs also have withstood the impacts of hurricanes, oil spills, changes in governing structure and administration, and fluctuation in funding sources and levels over their 20-25 year history while remaining effective agents of estuary protection and restoration. By demonstrating their capacity to effectively implement projects and programs in the face of those challenges, the NEPs and LPBF have earned the support and trust of local, state, and federal agencies, media, and general public

6. Outreach and education opportunities

The Gulf NEPs and LPBRP each have highly developed and effective public education and outreach programs to ensure community involvement and understanding. Dedicated staff and Management Conference procedures result in sophisticated and significant efforts that highlight the value of the resource, raise awareness and support for actions needed to protect and their watersheds and waterbodies, and celebrate success. Some programs utilize social marketing programs to elicit change and increase stewardship and knowledge of citizens so that they become stakeholders. Each project implemented through this proposal will have an outreach and education component. Examples of the outreach/education efforts include the following:

Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program (CBBEP): An education program at the Nueces Delta Preserve, near Corpus Christi, Texas. administers education based field trips to grades K-12. The CBBEP Educators have developed a curriculum that meets and exceeds all state standards. On average the program provides a field trip free of charge to over 10,000 students per year from schools within the 12 county Coastal Bend region. CBBEP educators also provide teacher workshops and continuing education classes to help teachers with their continuing education requirements.

Galveston Bay Estuary Program (GBEP): “Back the Bay” is GBEP’s public awareness campaign designed to engage citizens in the Houston-Galveston region to improve water quality, conserve water, and protect fish and wildlife habitat. The campaign was created through a stakeholder-driven process and offers a fun and interactive way for residents to learn about the benefits of, and their connection to, the region’s most valuable natural resource. The campaign features tips for residents to help preserve the Bay and surrounding waterways and includes surveys taken before and after the campaign seasons to assess effectiveness of the campaign messaging.

Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP): BTNEP sponsors teacher workshops each year including: “From H2O”, which provides water quality and sampling kit training as part of the “Bayouside Classroom” sampling network; “WETSHOP”, which provides wetland habitat training; and “Tools for Teachers”, which provides wetlands curriculum training. BTNEP annual student events include: the Gulf Coast Wide “Youth Wetland Summit”

involves student leaders for coastal issues; the “Jr Master Naturalist Program” trains young volunteers in natural resource awareness; the “Bayou French Tent” teaches about wetlands and culture; and the “Jean Lafitte Historical Park and Preserve Wetlands Summer Camps” provides wetland education. BTNEP’s educational programs for adults include: the “Eagle Expo;” the “Annual Bayou Lafourche Cleanup” of the regions drinking water supply; and the “BTNEP Recycling Project.”

Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP): After two years of compiling input from over 1,000 citizens and 30 scientists, MBNEP published the current CCMP that addresses community values and captures consensus among stakeholders about the estuary’s most critical management needs. The plan is based on protecting the six things that citizens value most about coastal quality of life: Access (to water and open spaces), Beaches and Shorelines, Fish, Heritage/Culture, Resiliency, and Water Quality. A central component of the current CCMP is “Create a Clean Water Future,” a public service campaign to help Alabamians learn more about stormwater runoff and its impacts; increase demand for stormwater management programs; and provide tools that empower Alabama residents to reduce polluted runoff in our waterways. The campaign has separate components targeting homeowners, businesses, and elected officials with specific ways to reduce stormwater pollution. Since its inception, four municipalities have adopted the campaign.

Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP): TBEP has developed a social marketing campaign to educate and encourage homeowners to change their behavior when caring for their Florida residential landscape, resulting in reduced nutrient loading to streams, rivers and estuaries. Called “Be Floridian”, the campaign supports local ordinances restricting the use of nutrient fertilizer in the summer rainy season in a fun and engaging way. Surveys taken before and after the campaign indicate significant change in increased residential awareness of the link between residential runoff and water quality, and how they can help to reduce the potential impacts from their backyards.

Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP): The SBEP has a multifaceted social marketing campaign facilitated annually through a Citizen Action Plan focusing on stewardship and the SBEP Website (www.sarasotabay.org). Key components of the CCMP include: Marketing and Communication, Community Involvement, Education, Sea Level Rise, Publications, Economic Valuation and more recently Restore Act – 53,000 children have received hands-on education since 2004. SBEP curriculum is State certified and supported with teacher training, field tech kits and contractor support. Outreach programs include: Bay Partners mini grants, weekend volunteer restoration efforts (6 annually) and multiple publications (Bay Roamer’s Guide, Bay Repair Kit, Living on the Water’s Edge, Rain Gardens and Bioswales, and Gulf Coast Heritage Trail in 2013-4). A study recommended by our citizens has set the economic value of Sarasota Bay to our local residents at \$11.8 billion; with a regional value of \$57.9 billion. The study estimates 21,400 jobs are created by the Bay and Gulf of Mexico.

Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program (CHNEP): In 2012, CHNEP adopted a Strategic Communications Plan. The plan builds on a number of successful initiatives. One CHNEP initiative provides a children’s book to every child at one grade level throughout the seven school districts and to home-school and other groups. For many kids, this is the first book of their very own. The book presents the stories of four animals offered in short segments. The book also introduces many local natural resource topics to kids. The Strategic Communications

Plan includes an on-line Citizens Academy, videos, events and audiences such as law enforcement. Plan components are being implemented.

7. Leveraging of resources and partnerships

Leveraging of resources and partnerships is the heart of the National Estuary Program. Each NEP project proposed for funding under this proposal will work with federal, state, local, NGO and other stakeholders to identify opportunities for leveraging additional resources to ensure attainment of the project's goals and objectives. Each Management Conference is designed to create and nurture partnerships to reach common goals and objectives as outlined in the consensus developed Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan. NEP annual workplans incorporate input and leveraged resources from a wide variety of study area stakeholders.

Leveraging of resources is a measured component of each annual NEP report through the EPA managed National Estuary Program On-Line Reporting Tool (NEPORT). On average, the National Estuary Programs (NEPs) have historically raised approximately \$15 for every \$1 provided by EPA (NEPORT database maintained by the national program manager). The NEPs successfully leverage federal seed money by: developing finance plans, building strategic alliances, demonstrating environmental results, and providing seed money or staff to initiate and develop new funding sources such as stormwater utilities.

Over the 2003-2013 period the NEPs leveraged \$4.2 billion from \$230 million in EPA grants (NEPORT). This additional funding came from a variety of federal, state, local and private sources through such mechanisms as annual membership appeals, license plate revenues, fines and penalties, State appropriations, local appropriations and intergovernmental agreements.

8. Proposal project/program benefits

The primary goals and expected benefits of this proposal are to Restore Water Quality and Restore and Conserve Habitat. Secondary goals and expected benefits addressed by this proposal include Replenishing and Protecting Living Coastal and Marine Resources, Enhancing Community Resilience, and Restoring and Revitalizing the Gulf Economy. As projects are implemented to address the primary goal, it is anticipated that they will also address the secondary goals and provide associated benefits.

C. Location Information

The seven Gulf NEPs and LPBRP are located throughout the US Gulf Coast, as shown on figures 1 and 2 on page 3. These estuaries represent the some of the most valuable resources of the Gulf of Mexico and of the United States. These seven estuaries have been designated as estuaries of national significance. The Gulf estuaries provide a suite of resources, benefits, and services. Some of these can be measured in dollars and cents, others cannot. Estuaries provide places for recreational activities, scientific study, and aesthetic enjoyment. Estuaries are an irreplaceable natural resource that should be protected, and where necessary, restored for the mutual benefit of all who enjoy and depend on them. Each NEP focuses it work within a particular place or boundary called a study area which includes the estuary, and surrounding watershed. Additional details regarding the program study areas, estuarine resources and stressors on these estuaries may be found on the NEP and LPBF websites.

D. High-Level Budget Narrative

The budget request is for \$2,000,000 for each Gulf NEP and the LPBF for a 5 year performance period to implement the goals and objectives of the Council's Comprehensive Plan and of each of the NEP CCMPs and the LPBF CMP. Base funding of NEPs is provided through an annual appropriation authorized by Section 320 of the Clean Water Act (CWA). Proposed RESTORE funds would be awarded through Clean Water Act Section 104(b)3, and potentially Section 320, authorities and would go directly toward funding implementation actions and project completion. The Clean Water Act (CWA) 104(b)(3) allows EPA "to make grants to State water pollution control agencies, interstate agencies, other public or nonprofit private agencies, institutions, organizations, and individuals" for the following purposes, which are listed in CWA 104(a)(1): research, investigations, experiments, training, demonstrations, surveys, and studies relating to the causes, effects, extent, prevention, reduction, and elimination of pollution. CWA 104(b)3 authorized funds do not require match. A 50 percent match is required for Section 320 authorized funds. NEPs have indicated availability of funds for match where necessary.

These eight programs anticipate that high-priority Gulf Habitat and Water Quality Restoration projects could be initiated within 6-9 months after proposal funding is approved by the RESTORE Council. The projects and associated budgets would be included in each NEP's annual work plan, which is approved by the NEP Management Conference and EPA. Projects typically would use local workers and are expected to benefit geographically- or socially-vulnerable communities. The NEPs have the built-in capacity to receive funds and contract, permit, and implement projects to produce results quickly.

In addition to EPA CWA 320 funds provided by Congress each year, the NEPs obtain significant leveraging from grants, funding partners and private sector sources. Some of these external funds may be available to leverage RESTORE funds for additional projects should CWA 320 be found to provide a superior vehicle for some or all RESTORE funds. Any proposed leveraging will be identified in annual workplans.

5% (\$800,000) is proposed for EPA administrative and technical management related to the grant (appendix 1). These funds will be used for grant management, financial management, technical support and travel. The total proposal request is \$16,800,000. Should administrative and technical management costs be lower than anticipated, remaining funds would be made available to the NEPs and LPBF for implementing projects.

It should be noted that the proposal is foundational and should the RESTORE Council choose to dedicate more than the requested \$2m to each NEP and the LBPF, the programs have the capacity and ability to manage and assure success for significant additional funding. NEPs and LBPF have the capability to immediately accept \$5M per year utilizing existing programs and Management Conferences. NEPs and LBPF could accept even greater funding levels upon notice should the Council desire. The proposed funding level is designed to provide an attractive proposal and to demonstrate the effectiveness of this program for the current and for future potential funding.

E. Environmental Compliance Checklist

The environmental compliance checklist is not applicable to the program proposal (appendix 2). Each project proposed for funding under this program will be required to prepare an individual environmental compliance checklist for review prior to initiation of project implementation. It is anticipated that the majority of funds under this proposal will go to

implementing projects that have, or nearly have, completed design and permitting. EPA would not fund construction through annual workplan funding for projects that have not completed all environmental compliance requirements and submitted an environmental compliance checklist.

F. Data/Information Sharing Plan

Each program utilizes a data and information sharing program. The following describes those programs.

CBBEP: CBBEP works with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality on water quality related projects addressing Total Maximum Daily Loads for various parameters. CBBEP follows a Quality Assurance Project Plan to ensure data is collected and stored appropriately. Data are uploaded to the state's Surface Water Quality Information System and are available to other interested parties.

GBEP: Tracked and reported environmental progress through annual updates of its Status and Trends project.

BTNEP: The BTNEP "Citizen Water Quality Monitoring Program" increases the knowledge of the general public and address water quality issues through data collection and data sharing.

LPBRP: The Lake Pontchartrain Basin Restoration Program carries out intensive water quality monitoring at ten recreational sites on a weekly basis and another ten sites on a monthly basis. Water quality parameters, including fecal coliform bacteria levels, are tested.

MBNEP: Data is shared with educators, marine operators, government and elected officials, local businesses, and tourism interests, public health, commercial, recreational, scientific/research and media interests. Data is entered into portals such as GCOOS, NOAA NCDDC, and the COPRI Living Shorelines Database

TBEP: The Tampa Bay monitoring plan features monthly water quality at 80 stations throughout the bay (conducted by three counties); baywide benthic monitoring at 40 stations (collected annually during the late summer high stress period); seagrass extent monitoring every two years (photointerpretation of aerial photographs, conducted by a water management district); seagrass condition monitoring at 30 fixed transects on a yearly basis (multiple partners); flow data (USGS); and other types of data collected by our partners.

SBEP: The Sarasota Bay monitoring plan features monthly water quality samples at 22 stations throughout the Bay. The system focuses on nutrients, light and light related parameters. No benthic monitoring is conducted. Seagrasses are evaluated every other year supported by 10 fixed station transects. Strict QA/QC procedures are implemented on all data. Data is shared through the University of South Florida Water Atlas and Florida STORET system.

CHNEP: CHNEP ensures easy access to a wide variety of partner and its own data through its on-line water atlas (<http://www.chnep.wateratlas.usf.edu/new/>).

G. RESTORE Act and Comprehensive Plan Priority Criteria.

Projects implemented by the seven Gulf NEPs and the LPBRP collectively will address all four of the criteria. Examples of ongoing and proposed projects and benefits for each Criterion include the following:

1. Projects that make the greatest contribution to restoring and protecting the natural resources of the Gulf Coast region, without regard to geographic location. Examples include:

CBBEP: CBBEP targets large tracts of important habitat within the Coastal Bend of Texas for acquisition for perpetual conservation or for conservation easements. CBBEP owns around 6,000 acres in the Coastal Bend and is working on acquiring another 9,000 acres. Additional funds would help the CBBEP protect the most at-risk habitats.

GBEP: The number one priority is the protection of existing coastal habitats in the Lower Galveston Bay Watershed. GBEP and partners have developed the Conservation Assistance Program to protect habitat and water quality for a diversity of birds, fish and wildlife, reduce flood and storm damage, provide recreational opportunities for residents in the area, and to preserve the region's unique natural heritage by placing priority coastal habitat in the Galveston Bay area in permanent conservation. Additional funding will be used to identify important coastal habitats in the Galveston Bay watershed for long term conservation, with particular attention to those at risk of loss to land conversion, erosion, or immediate threats.

BTNEP: BTNEP is partnering with the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ) and the Department of Health and Hospitals to provide grants to low-income residents in need of sewerage system repairs and upgrades to their individual wastewater treatment systems. The impaired waterbodies and improperly functioning systems were identified through a scientific data collection effort on the part of the LDEQ and Nicholls State University over the past 10 years. Additional funds would be used to dramatically increase the water quality in Bayou Lafourche by reducing the raw sewage input from septic/sewerage systems.

LPBRP: The Lake Pontchartrain Basin Restoration Program offers free education, technical assistance, and assistance with permits to the owner/operators of wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs) in the Lake Pontchartrain Basin. The LPBRP, in partnership with LDEQ and the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (LDHH), also provides technical training sessions for WWTP plant operators to assist with their continuing education.

MBNEP: The MBNEP has been developing and implementing watershed management plans for the Mobile Bay tributaries. Plans have been developed for the D'Olive Creek watershed, the Three Mile Creek watershed, and the Eight Mile Creek watershed. Planning is being initiated in several other tributary watersheds. Corrective actions have been taken in the D'Olive Creek watershed and are planned for the Three Mile Creek and Fowl River watershed. Additional funds would be used to implement these plans.

TBEP: TBEP partners have developed a Tampa Bay Habitat Masterplan which focuses on restoring a mosaic of estuarine habitats to support the suite of estuarine-dependent fauna inhabiting the bay (Cicchetti and Greening 2013). To date, partners have completed restoration of about 5,000 acres of estuarine habitat, but are about 2,000 acres short of adopted goals. Additional funds would assist in meeting long-term estuarine habitat restoration goals by implementing additional restoration projects to restore the historic balance of estuarine habitats in Tampa Bay.

SBEP: SBEP partners are currently implementing a Five Year Habitat Restoration Plan with a goal of restoring at least 18 acres of critical juvenile fish habitat annually. The concept is to reclaim publicly owned lands altered by massive dredge and fill through a series of projects in the pipeline: planning, design and construction. The SBEP is also constructing reefs (oysters and artificial) specifically designed to create juvenile fish habitat in the Bay. Additional funds would assist in implementation of remaining projects identified in the Five Year Plan.

CHNEP: CHNEP Partners adopted a land acquisition and restoration vision resulting in increases of conservation lands from under 275,000 acres to over 460,000 acres. The restoration component of the vision includes significant hydrologic restoration, which results in more natural freshwater flows to the estuaries and the Gulf of Mexico. Additional funds would be used to help implement this vision.

2. Large-scale projects and programs that are projected to substantially contribute to restoring and protecting the natural resources of the Gulf Coast ecosystem. Examples include:

CBBEP: Planning and designing a breakwater structure is underway to protect 15,000 acres of wetlands located in the Nueces River Delta located near Corpus Christi, Texas. The Nueces River Delta is eroding approximately 10 acres of marsh per year including emergent intertidal and sub-tidal marsh habitat. Additional funds would be used to address erosion of this critical habitat.

GBEP: A Conservation Assistance Program (CAP) supports coordination, identifies priority habitat areas, builds funding, works with willing sellers, and carries-out legal and title transaction support. Additional funding would be used to secure important coastal habitats for long term conservation.

BTNEP: BTNEP has established native woody species beneficial to Neotropical migratory birds on a created maritime ridge beneficially utilizing saline sediments in Fourchon, LA for over 10 years, in partnership with Port Fourchon. Findings from these experiments will provide BMPs for future maritime ridge-forest projects. This project has resulted in outreach to 785 volunteers planting over 62,000 plants in the last 5 years.

MBNEP: A major goal of the new CCMP is to “Improve trends in water quality in priority watersheds...” Watersheds in Alabama’s two coastal counties were assessed based upon the presence of critical habitats, sources of stress, tidal exchange, and other factors. Additional funding will support implementation of comprehensive watershed management planning and on the ground management measures for improving water quality.

SBEP, TBEP and CHNEP: The three Florida NEPs and many partners are currently developing a Southwest Florida Tidal Tributaries Action Plan, with a goal of defining water quality criteria necessary to support flora and fauna dependent on these unique systems. Additional funds would implement the Action Plan which will include specific actions to support attainment of necessary water quality criteria, including restoration of streambanks and low salinity wetlands (Krebs et al. 2014).

SBEP: SBEP is supporting development (and construction) of large scale infrastructure projects throughout the region to reduce nitrogen loading by: upgrading wastewater treatment plants, reclaiming wastewater (eliminate discharge) and providing sewer service to priority areas listed in the CCMP. Additional funds would help support the continuing central sewer infrastructure projects.

CHNEP: CHNEP works in partnership with the Corps of Engineers, water management districts, state, counties and cities to develop large-scale and significant hydrologic restoration. Additional funds would facilitate this work. CHNEP has managed pre- and post-restoration monitoring of two large hydrologic restoration projects during the course of the past year.

3. Projects contained in existing Gulf Coast State comprehensive plans for the restoration and protection of natural resources of the Gulf Coast region. Each of the 7 NEPs and the LPBRP have a science-based comprehensive management plan, approved by local

elected officials and community leaders, and the US EPA Regional Administrator. The plans include measurable goals for restoring and protecting water quality and habitat. Annual Work Plans, approved by the elected officials and agency leads serving on each of the NEPs' policy or executive committees, include specific projects which implement actions to help attain the habitat and water quality goals identified by the community. Annual Work Plans are required to include detailed reporting of accomplishments of the previous year, providing assurance of rigorous and regular assessment of progress and/or identification of problem areas.

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 DH oil spill. Past and proposed examples include:

CBBEP: The Nueces Estuary Ecosystem Management Initiative (Montagna et al. 2011), was a planning effort over a three year period with local community leaders and natural resource experts to assess the habitat needs of the Nueces Bay and Corpus Christi Bay region waterbirds. Additional funding would be used to create new rookery islands and restore existing islands in this region to restore long-term resiliency of the habitat and resident species.

GBEP: Coastal wetlands in Texas are highly productive and serve as nursery grounds for more than 95% of the recreational and commercial fish species found in the Gulf of Mexico., The Galveston Bay system lost a net of nearly 35,000 acres (20%) of its wetlands and 1,800 acres (70%) of its seagrass between 1950s and 1985, much of this occurring in West Galveston Bay. Additional funding would be used to identify and restore/enhance important coastal habitat projects in the Lower Galveston Bay Watershed.

TBEP: Restoring critical estuarine habitat in Tampa Bay can assist in improving resiliency of the gulf-wide stock of valuable species. TBEP is undertaking an assessment of potential changes in estuarine habitats due to climate change (Sherwood and Greening 2013), which will include an Action Plan for vulnerable habitats. Additional funds would assist in implementing the Action Plan.

SBEP: The SBEP assisted the local emergency management officials and the Coast Guard by forging a series of community workshops in preparation for the arrival of oil in the Bay and on area beaches. The heavily attended meetings created a calming effect. Gulf Grouper, snapper and other fish species spend a portion of their life in Sarasota Bay prior to migrating offshore. Additional funds would assist in restoring and protecting estuarine habitat Bay.

CHNEP: CHNEP and the other Florida NEPs provided reservoirs for many of the natural resources affected by the BP oil spill.

H. Comprehensive Plan Commitments:

The NEP and LPBRP programs are committed to the Council's Comprehensive Plan through the following mechanisms:

a. The structure of the NEPs ensures strong **Science-based Decision Making**. Each NEP has a standing Technical/Science Advisory Committee which provides extensive vetting of all science and technical reports and management recommendations. TAC members include academics, resource managers and agency technical staff. The TAC provides technical recommendations to a Management Committee/Board, consisting of agency and local government resource management department leads. The Management Committee/Board/Project Implementation Committee in turn considers the scientific merit and management feasibility in their deliberations and recommendations to the Policy Board. The

Policy Board/Executive Committee, which includes elected officials and agency leads, makes final decisions based on recommendations of the Management Board. Examples of science-based decision making from the NEPs include:

CBBEP: CBBEP established a real-time salinity monitoring program in 2009 to monitor changes in salinity throughout a 20,000 acre marsh complex known as the Nueces Delta (Lloyd 2014). Salinity stations were located along the old river channel to support management decisions on how much water the pipeline should pump and when to pump.

GBEP: GBEP addresses non-point source pollution through development and implementation of watershed protection plans and total maximum daily load implementation plans (TMDL I-Plans). 80 percent of impaired water bodies in the Galveston Bay area are managed under a watershed protection plan.

BTNEP: BTNEP responded to a natural disaster by incorporating the best available science during the Marsh Dieback/Brown Marsh event of 2000. BTNEP convened university and government scientists who worked cooperatively and developed a plan of action. The investigators concluded that extreme drought, high salinities, sulfide accumulation/oxidation, heat and evaporation, combined with extremely low Mississippi and Atchafalaya River discharges the stress.

MBNEP: Over 30 scientists and ecologists rated 1,820 combinations of habitats, stressors, and services. Three habitat types - freshwater wetlands; streams, rivers and riparian buffers; and intertidal marshes and flats - were identified as most stressed. This work resulted in strategies included in the current CCMP. Additional funds would implement the strategies.

TBEP: The TBEP adopted a Residential Fertilizer Model Ordinance (TBEP 2009), based on model-based estimates of nutrient runoff from residential lawns, local rainfall patterns, urbanization extent and projected cost-benefit. Local municipalities and counties have adopted versions of the Model Ordinance.

SBEP: The SBEP established local policy (and completed a conceptual master plan) to eliminate direct wastewater discharge to the Bay by reclaiming the effluent for alternative supply. Nitrogen loading in the wastewater media to Sarasota Bay has been reduced 95% as a result. Plans are in place to eliminate discharge with 65% of the product reclaimed for alternative supply.

CHNEP: CHNEP hosted several forums to address highly controversial issues. Flows to the lower Peace River and the Area-wide Environmental Impact Statement for the Central Florida Phosphate were addressed. By focusing on science, consensus recommendations were issued and accepted.

b. As watershed-based programs, the programs are fully engaged in **Regional Ecosystem-Based Approaches to Restoration**. Examples include:

CBBEP: In 2012, CBBEP partners completed a comprehensive review of water and sediment quality of the entire Texas Coastal Bend (Montagna et al. 2012). Water and sediment quality status and trends for all parameters were compiled to create a complete look at where problems or concerns might be within each of the 3 major bay systems. Additional funds could support addressing concerns.

GBEP: Implements the West Bay Water Quality and Wetland Protection Initiative which addresses a highly biologically productive area, featuring extensive tidal and brackish marshes, coastal prairies pockmarked with freshwater depressional wetlands created by ancient stream

meanders, and forested wetland areas. Additional funding would be used to protect important coastal habitats in the West Bay watershed for conservation.

BTNEP: The NEP has restored a chenier ridge and adjacent wetlands at Fourchon, LA. BTNEP planted hundreds of trees and thousands of grasses in south LA wetlands, installed thousands of feet of sand fencing on barrier islands and shorelines, and removed invasive species. Additional funds would expand the capacity to continue this work.

MBNEP: MBNEP efforts for watershed planning in coastal Alabama have resulted in expanded watershed efforts to reach up into the State and larger Mobile Bay Watershed. Additional funding will allow support for efforts to address issues affecting Mobile Bay.

TBEP: In 2014, TBEP partners finalized a Tampa Bay Watershed Freshwater Wetland Masterplan whose results show that herbaceous wetlands have been lost in larger proportion than forested wetlands in all 10 drainage basins within the Tampa Bay watershed. Additional funds could assist in restoring herbaceous wetlands to help achieve adopted goals.

SBEP: Water quality targets have been established based on seagrass targets set at 1950 conditions or the average of 2004-6, whichever was higher. Additional funds would increase fishery productivity (including Gulf species) by increasing seagrass; and wetland and reef habitat.

CHNEP: CHNEP partners have identified declines in mangrove forests as a result of hydrologic alterations including sea level rise. Additional funds would support restoration.

LPBRP: In 2002, LPBRP created a Comprehensive Habitat Management Plan (CHMP) that provides goals, strategies and methods designed for Basin sustainability.

c. The structure of the Management Conference ensures **engagement, inclusion and transparency** in every decision and assessment. The consensus based nature of the estuary programs includes NGOs, local communities, state agencies, federal agencies and other key stakeholders. The true value of these programs is in their ability to bring all parties together toward common agreed upon goals through networking, scientific assessment, project development and issues vetting.

d. The Gulf NEPs incorporate significant **Leveraging of Resources and Partnerships**. The NEPs are required to provide an annual report to EPA (as part of federal GPRA requirements) of funds and partnerships leveraged, thus ensuring the RESTORE Council that an annual accounting will be available. As an example, for the FY year 2013-2014, each Gulf NEPs leveraged EPA's contribution of \$512,000 with the following:

CBBEP: \$334,000 from other federal agencies; \$1,016,000 from the State; \$318,000 from local government; and \$205,000 from private foundations for a total of \$1,873,000 leveraged funds.

BTNEP: \$81,192,321.00 from Federal funds; \$62,979,831.00 from State funds; \$44,828.00 from local funds; and \$152,101.00 from private sector funds for a total of \$144,369,081.00.

MBNEP: \$176,000 from other federal sources, \$215,638 from the State, \$92,058 from local sources, and \$8,636,091 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for a total of \$9,119,787

TBEP: \$480,000 from the State; \$1,400,000 from local government sources; and \$8,500 from private sector funds for a total of \$1,939,000 leveraged funds.

SBEP \$303,513 from the State; \$20,979,651 from local government sources; and \$12,150 from the private sector for a total of \$21,807,314.

CHNEP: \$6,340,876 from the State, \$74,909,477 from local government partners, and \$14,586,930 from private sector partners for a total of \$95,837,283.

e. The programs have established monitoring programs and report results on a regular basis, thus ensuring that **Delivering Results and Measuring Impacts** have been accomplished and will continue to be reported on a regular basis. Examples of how each program measures impacts and reports results include the following:

CBBEP: Initiated a Seagrass Monitoring Workgroup in 2003 which established a Seagrass Monitoring Plan in 2011. All of the data and reports are available on CBBEP's website.

GBEP: Galveston Bay Status and Trends database, a coordinated effort to bring together the existing datasets collected by the local, state and federal agencies. An update of the Galveston Bay Status and Trends database is currently underway.

BTNEP: BTNEP monitors impacts associated with species of concern, such as, the Piping, Wilson's Plover, Red Knot, and Snowy Plover. These surveys evaluate how successive habitat changes after construction impact the number of wintering species utilize the restored habitat. This data is being shared with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries, and researchers across the country.

MBNEP: Conducts the monitoring of ecosystem service provision at three completed projects in Mobile County: habitat creation/shoreline stabilization at Mon Louis Island, restored salt marsh at Helen Woods Park, and shoreline stabilization and habitat enhancement at Dog River Park. Efforts to monitor restoration efforts are reported to the community.

TBEP: TBEP provides annual assessments of attainment of water quality and seagrass goals (Sherwood 2014) in a short report to the community, as well as more in-depth community Progress Reports every two years.

SBEP: The SBEP and its partners have established statistically significant relationships between water quality parameters and seagrass response; and have developed numeric nutrient criteria for protection.

CHNEP: CHNEP identified nine priority indicators of watershed health. Status, trends and quality were assessed and communicated in a graphic way to the public.

I. Science

The foundation for actions taken by each Gulf NEP and the LPBRP is a Science-based Management Plan. Science is key to all of NEP and LPBRP actions. All monitoring, analyses and proposed actions are vetted through science advisory mechanisms to ensure high-quality, science-based results. Examples of peer-reviewed science that drives the programs are described above and listed in references below.

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Appendix 1

Administrative and Technical Support Cost Analysis

Estimated costs for grant administration, technical administration and travel.

Grant Administration:

Workload: 20 workdays = 160 hours per grant

of grants: 8 (NEPs + LPBF)

Loaded rate (GS12): \$60 per hour

Total cost: $160 \times \$60 \times 8 = \$76,800$

Technical Administration

Workload: 25 workdays = 200 hours per grant per year

of grants: 8 (NEPs + LPBF)

of years: 5

Loaded rate (GS13): \$80 per hour

Total cost: $200 \times 8 \times 5 \times \$80 = \$640,000$

Travel

of trips per year per grant: 4

of grants: 8 (NEPs + LPBF)

of years: 5

Cost per trip: \$500

Total cost: $4 \times 8 \times 5 \times \$500 = \$80,000$

Combined Total: \$796,800 or approximately 5%

Appendix 2

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

KATHY CASTOR
14TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND COMMERCE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH

*SUBCOMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND POWER*

*SUBCOMMITTEE ON
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS*

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REGIONAL WHIP



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0914

WASHINGTON OFFICE
205 CANNON BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-3378

DISTRICT OFFICE
4144 NORTH ARMENIA AVENUE
SUITE 300
TAMPA, FL 33607
(813) 871-2817

www.castor.house.gov

October 31, 2014

The Honorable Kenneth Kopocis
Deputy Assistant Administrator
Office of Water (4101M)
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

RE: Request to Include Gulf National Estuary Programs in Draft Funded Priorities List

Dear Mr. Kopocis:

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) has one of the most important roles in this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to restore the health of the Gulf of Mexico and this first round of projects will be instrumental going forward. The Council, created in the wake of the 2010 BP oil disaster as part of the RESTORE Act, was charged with developing a Comprehensive Plan to restore, protect, and revitalize the Gulf Coast. As you know, the Council developed the Initial Comprehensive Plan last year and to carry it out, it will develop a draft Funded Priorities List (draft FPL) that identifies projects that it will fund. I strongly urge you to include the Gulf National Estuary Programs (NEPs) in your recommendations to the Council. Estuaries are some of the most productive environments on earth and are home to thousands of species of birds, mammals, fish and other wildlife. Additionally, they provide valuable commercial resources. Florida estuaries provide 80-90% of Florida's commercially valuable fish and shellfish species, most of the recreational boating, and much of the state's commerce and shipping. Estuaries are also essential for clean water and their wetlands protect infrastructure on land by serving as buffers against storms. In the Gulf where many of the coastal areas are flat or low-lying, it is estimated that for every 3.4 miles of healthy coastal wetlands a storm surge must travel over, the surge is diminished by one foot.

The Gulf NEPs are ideal to begin restoration and protection efforts given the criteria for this first round of projects on water quality and habitat restoration, ability to leverage resources and benefits to local communities. In the 1990s and 2000s, each Gulf NEP adopted plans that include the same goals as the Council's Initial Comprehensive Plan developed in 2013. The Gulf NEPs have the infrastructure in place to implement restoration projects quickly and effectively. They have many local and state partners to leverage funds, little to no need for overhead costs, experienced staff, mechanisms to ensure accountability and ready-to-go projects. Local communities are critical partners in Gulf NEP projects. For example, in the Tampa Bay, citizen volunteers have transplanted seagrass, removed invasive plants and replanted native plants and countless have been educated on ways to protect the environment.

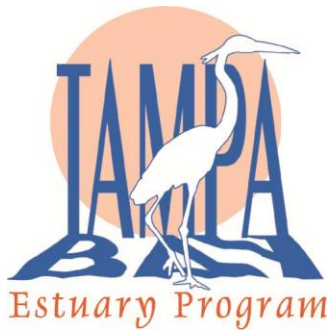
With a limited amount of funds available at the moment, proposing and selecting the right projects is critical. I urge you to set a great foundation for the Council's restoration efforts by including the Gulf NEPs in your recommendations for the draft FPL.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or my Legislative Assistant, Javier Gamboa at (202) 225-3376 or javier.gamboa@mail.house.gov. I look forward to with you on this and other issues of importance to the Gulf of Mexico.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathy Castor".

Kathy Castor
U.S. Representative
Florida-District 14



November 17, 2014

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council

RE: Support for the EPA Gulf NEP proposal

Dear members of the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council:

The Tampa Bay Estuary Program strongly supports the EPA RESTORE proposal entitled “GULF NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM (NEP) and LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN BASIN RESTORATION PROGRAM (LPBRP) COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM”. The Gulf NEPs are strongly positioned to immediately identify and implement high priority science-based water quality and habitat restoration projects, fully vetted by our regional communities. This proposal, if funded, would result in measurable water quality and habitat environmental benefits within our estuaries.

We look forward to working with the Council in meeting RESTORE goals for the recovery of our Gulf estuaries, contributing watersheds, and nearshore waters.

Sincerely,

Holly Greening
Executive Director
Tampa Bay Estuary Program



Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program, Inc.

1305 N. Shoreline, Suite 205, Corpus Christi, Texas 78401-1500 • 361-885-6202 • 361-881-5168 (fax)

November 17, 2014

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
c/o Mr. Justin Ehrenwerth (via email)

RE: Support for the EPA Gulf NEP Proposal

Dear Members of the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council:

The Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program (CBBEP), one of the seven NEP's located around the Gulf of Mexico, strongly supports the EPA RESTORE proposal entitled "GULF NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM (NEP) and LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN BASIN RESTORATION PROGRAM (LPBRP) COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM".

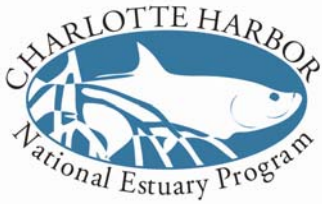
The Gulf NEPs are strongly positioned to immediately identify and implement high priority science-based water quality and habitat restoration projects, fully vetted by our regional communities. CBBEP, like the other Gulf NEP's, is well established, highly respected, and has a successful track record of managing and completing major projects. This proposal, if funded, will result in measurable water quality and habitat environmental benefits within our estuaries.

We look forward to working with the Council in meeting RESTORE goals for the recovery of our Gulf estuaries, contributing watersheds, and nearshore waters.

Sincerely,

Ray Allen

Ray Allen
Executive Director



CHARLOTTE HARBOR NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM
326 West Marion Ave, Punta Gorda FL 33950-4416
941/575-5090, Toll-free 866/835-5785
www.CHNEP.org

November 17, 2014

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council

RE: Support for the EPA Gulf NEP proposal

Dear members of the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council:

The Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program strongly supports the EPA RESTORE proposal entitled "GULF NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM (NEP) and LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN BASIN RESTORATION PROGRAM (LPBRP) COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM."

Each NEP possesses powerful resources to implement effective water quality, habitat and living resource restoration. Our science-based and consensus-driven partnerships have access to local expertise, leveraged funding, citizen and elected official support and past significant investment in restoration, monitoring and public outreach. Basic operational funding of NEPs is provided annually from Congress and other partners. Each dollar from new sources goes directly into the field, resulting in measurable water quality and habitat benefits.

We look forward to working with the Council in meeting RESTORE goals for the recovery of our Gulf estuaries, contributing watersheds, and nearshore waters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Beever". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized.

Lisa Beever, AICP, PhD
Director



ELIGIBILITY REVIEW

Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

PROPOSAL TITLE

Gulf National Estuary Program (NEP) and Lake Pontchartrain Basin Restoration Program (LPBRP) Comprehensive Plan Implementation Program

PROPOSAL NUMBER

EPA-2

LOCATION

Study areas of Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program, Galveston Bay Estuary Program, Barataria-Terrebonne NEP; Lake Pontchartrain Basin Restoration Program, Mobile Bay NEP, Tampa Bay Estuary Program, Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, Charlotte Harbor NEP

SPONSOR(S)

Environmental Protection Agency

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

Technical Assistance and Implementation

REVIEWED BY:

Bethany Carl Kraft

DATE:

November 18, 2014

1. Does the project aim to restore and/or protect natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitat, beaches, coastal wetlands and economy of the Gulf Coast Region?

YES NO

Notes:

This proposal seeks to fund projects that the 7 Gulf of Mexico NEPs and the LPBRF would implement to protect and restore habitat and water quality consistent with established comprehensive management plans.

2. Is the proposal a project?

YES NO

If yes, is the proposed activity a discrete project or group of projects where the full scope of the restoration or protection activity has been defined?

YES NO

Notes:

3. Is the proposal a program?

YES NO

If yes, does the proposed activity establish 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?

YES NO

Notes:

4. Is the project within the Gulf Coast Region of the respective Gulf States?

YES NO

If no, do project benefits accrue in the Gulf Coast Region?

YES NO

Notes:



Eligibility Determination

ELIGIBLE

Additional Information

[Empty box for additional information]

Proposal Submission Requirements

1. Is the project submission overall layout complete? *Check if included and formatted correctly.*

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| A. Summary sheet | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | F. Environmental compliance checklist | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| B. Executive summary | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | G. Data/Information sharing plan | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| C. Proposal narrative | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | H. Reference list | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| D. Location information | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | I. Other | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| E. High level budget narrative | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |

If any items are NOT included - please list and provide details

[Empty box for details of missing items]

2. Are all proposal components presented within the specified page limits (if applicable)?

YES NO

Notes: