

Comprehensive Plan Commitment and Planning Support Awards Frequently Asked Questions

Question: What is the Council proposing with the Comprehensive Plan Commitment and Planning Support awards?

Answer: The Comprehensive Plan Commitment and Planning and Support (referred to as CPS) awards are to provide the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) members with funding to enhance collaboration, coordination, public engagement and use of best available science needed to make efficient use of Gulf restoration funds resulting from the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. These awards will support the Council's commitment to a coordinated approach to ecosystem restoration, as called for in the [Comprehensive Plan Update 2016: Restoring the Gulf Coast's Ecosystem and Economy](#).

Each Council member could apply for a maximum of \$500,000 per year for the first three years, then a maximum of \$300,000 per year for the following two years, to support planning for large-scale restoration and conservation. Included in the fourth year of this proposal is a recommendation to assess activities outlined in the CPS awards and determine the need to continue to fund such activities beyond the initial five-year period. The Council is seeking public comments on this proposal.

Question: Why can't the Council use existing resources to fund the CPS FPL?

Answer: A major challenge to Gulf-wide ecosystem restoration is coordinating efforts within each state, among Council members, among stakeholders within the Gulf region, and across funding streams. Currently, no designated funding stream exists to support Council member efforts to plan and coordinate restoration activities under the Council-Selected Restoration Component (commonly known as "Bucket 2"). Historically, Council members have had to rely upon general, tax-generated or appropriated funds to support their involvement in Bucket 2, including FPL development and the Comprehensive Plan update. The funds proposed to be approved in this draft FPL would provide Council members with funding from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill settlement. By supporting collaboration and leveraging among these programs, the Council will be able to produce the greatest on-the-ground restoration results possible.

Question: Does spending money on planning instead of actual restoration divert money from ecosystem restoration of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem?

Answer: The Council believes investing a portion of money in planning will yield greater ecosystem benefits in the future. The funds from the resolution of civil claims against BP and other responsible parties will be available in annual installments over the next 15 years. Investing in planning, collaboration and related activities will assist the Council in developing an overarching coordinated strategy for providing resources in support of long-term Gulf

restoration.

Question: Why is this money being used for activities such as collaboration?

Answer: After the Council adopted its initial Funded Priorities List in 2015, it engaged in a thorough review of the process used to create the first FPL. Feedback from the public focused on improving coordination and public engagement efforts. The majority of the responses suggested the Council consider more planning and collaboration with other funding sources, experts, and the public to leverage ideas, resources and expertise (including, but not limited to best available science) in future project and program selection. Awards available for Gulf of Mexico coastal restoration are distributed among multiple programs, each governed by different laws and procedures. A central purpose of the proposed CPS awards is to support collaboration and leveraging among coastal restoration efforts.

Question: Gulf stakeholders need action, not more planning. Why is the Council funding more planning?

Answer: While there has been some Gulf coast restoration planning, there is still more to accomplish across the region. The Council is not seeking to replicate or replace existing coastal restoration plans. The goal is to ensure future funding decisions incorporate existing plans, while including areas that may benefit from this work. The intent is to enhance collaboration and coordination among partners to identify and support ideas emerging from planning efforts. The Council hopes to build upon existing restoration plans and address gaps to meet goals and objectives set forth in the Council's Comprehensive Plan. This proposed CPS award investment represents approximately 1.4% of the total BP settlement funds allocated to Bucket 2, not including the portion of interest that will be accrued and allocated to Bucket 2 over time.

Question: If planning funds are needed, why not use funds from the Direct Component (Bucket 1) and/or the Spill Impact Component (Bucket 3)?

Answer: The RESTORE Act allocates BP settlement funds to five different components, or "Buckets". In accordance with federal appropriations rules and the RESTORE Act, funds in a given Bucket must be used for the requirements of that specific Bucket. Funds available in Buckets 1 and 3 must be used to advance the activities of those respective Buckets. Bucket 2 planning funds must be used on activities directly related to Bucket 2. However, these federal appropriations rules do not prevent recipients of Bucket 2 planning funds from exploring ways to collaborate and coordinate with other funding sources to improve the development and effectiveness of future Funded Priority Lists. Recipients of CPS awards are encouraged to find ways to leverage funds from other sources and coordinate projects, provided they can reasonably demonstrate a direct relationship to the requirements of Bucket 2. In addition, federal members do not have access to Buckets 1 and 3 funds to support their collaboration activities.

Question: Why is the Council developing a Funded Priorities List for the approval of Bucket 2 planning funds? Why not simply disburse these funds to the state and federal members?

Answer: The RESTORE Act requires the Council to develop a Comprehensive Plan and prioritized list of projects and programs to achieve Gulf restoration. The Comprehensive Plan states the Council's commitments to Gulf-wide collaboration and coordination to achieve large-scale restoration. Through this action, the Council makes financial support of its members' collaborative efforts a funding priority, which the Council believes will result in better restoration outcomes.

Funded Priorities Lists (FPLs) are specific projects and activities listed for approval and funding. Pursuant to the RESTORE Act, funds must be approved in an FPL before the Council can award Bucket 2 planning funds to members. The FPL process enables the Council to solicit input from the public prior to making final decisions.

Question: Can these planning funds be used for engineering, design and permitting of specific projects and programs?

Answer: No, engineering, design and permitting for specific projects can only be done after funding is approved by the Council in an FPL. In the FPL process, before Bucket 2 funds can be approved for the detailed planning of a specific project or program, the Council must first review the proposal and consider public input. The proposed Commitment and Planning Support awards will assist Council members in developing projects and programs that could be considered for funding in future FPLs. Investing in CPS awards will result in efficient use of restoration funds to yield greater ecosystem benefits in the future.

Question: Will the limitation on administrative costs apply to individual Commitment and Planning Support awards?

Answer: Commitment and Planning Support awards will be subject to limitations on administrative costs as defined in the RESTORE Act (Act) and the Treasury Rule (31 CFR 34.204(a)). Not more than 3% of the amount received in the grant may be used for the recipient's administrative costs. Administrative costs are defined as those indirect costs for administration allocable to activities under the Act. Administrative costs do not include indirect costs identified specifically with, or readily assignable to, facilities as defined in 2 CFR 200.414 (see 31 CFR 34.2).

Question: How can these funds be used?

Answer: These funds are intended to be used to allow RESTORE Council members to meet the commitments of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan, including:

- Collaboration and coordination
- Application of best available science
- Engagement and transparency

Council members may use these funds to address planning needs for the next Funded Priorities List, by conducting such work as:

- Evaluating the feasibility of using multiple funding streams to fund a single restoration and/or conservation project/program;
- Ensuring that projects and programs within a defined geographic area work together to achieve common goals for that area; and
- Developing project and program concepts that may be pursued for funding in future Funded Priority Lists (including pre-submission environmental compliance review/coordination, and other technical assistance)

These activities may include meetings and workshops between Council members and potential funding partners, technical experts, stakeholders, and the general public (including financial support for outreach activities and materials). This is a summary of activities; for full information on allowable activities, please refer to pages 4-6 in the FPL.

Question: Who can apply for these funds and when can they apply?

Answer: Per the RESTORE Act, only RESTORE Council members may apply for any Council-Selected Restoration Component funds. The Council members include the five Gulf states, and six federal agencies (US Department of Agriculture, US Department of Commerce, US Department of Interior, US Environmental Protection Agency, US Army, and US Coast Guard). Members may begin applying for funds in the fall of 2017.