Priority & Commitment To Plan Evaluation

Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

PROPOSAL TITLE

Matagorda Bay System Priority Landscape Conservation

PROPORAL NUMBER

TX-2

LOCATION

Within 15 miles of the San Antonio, Espiritu Santo, Matagorda or East Matagorda Bays and associated estuaries, Texas

SPONSOR(S)

Texas

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

Implementation

REVIEWED BY:

Ebonye T. Allen

DATE:

4 February 2015

A. Comprehensive Plan Goals

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

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

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, Texas state and federal fish and wildlife agencies, working with private sector coastal partners, have identified three tracts of land for fee simple acquisition totaling 17,000 acres at a cost of $36.6 million as strategic conservation priorities. A fourth tract targeted for acquisition of a conservation easement is 10,000 acres valued at $8 million. The fee simple acquisitions are available from willing sellers at appraised value and include some 28 miles of frontage on the Matagorda Bay System and the Gulf of Mexico. They protect habitat for endangered whooping cranes, piping plovers and sea turtles, as well as a variety of coastal habitats including beaches, dunes, coastal prairie, pothole

B. Comprehensive Plan Objectives

Proposals must clearly identify which objectives the proposal will address

1. Restore, Enhance, and Protect Habitats

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

2. Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources

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

3. Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources

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

4. Restore and Enhance Natural Processes and Shorelines

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

Notes:

Please see notes in Section A.

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

Check one:

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

C. RESTORE Act and Comprehensive Plan Priority Criteria

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

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

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

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

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

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

( ) YES (●) NO

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

(●) YES ( ) NO

5. Promote Community Resilience

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

6. Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education

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

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, strategic acquisitions within the Matagorda Bay system will yield habitat and water quality benefits into the foreseeable future. The targeted acquisitions will protect many miles of tidal shoreline and littoral zone, which in turn protects adjacent oyster and seagrass beds from the detrimental effects that inevitably follow shoreline development. In addition, the targeted acquisitions include healthy mosaics of lagoons, coves, washover channels, emergent marshes, tidal and algal flats, and salt meadows, increasing their value and productivity as nurseries for a host of invertebrates and vertebrates, including species critical to the food chain and species that are recreationally and commercially important in Texas and across the Gulf, such as white shrimp, flounder, spotted sea trout and red drum

D. Comprehensive Plan Commitments

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

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

1. Science-based Decision-Making

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, the federal and state fish and wildlife agencies within Texas, working closely with conservation partners along the coast, and for more than 40 years, have monitored shellfish, finfish, bird and turtle populations along the 367 miles of Texas Gulf shoreline and within the seven major bay systems. These partnerships have also monitored changing demographics, land uses, freshwater inflows, chemistry, nutrient loading and sediment regimes, in an effect to understand short and long-term changes to the Gulf and its estuaries. This body of information has informed science-based conservation and restoration efforts in Texas for decades. As indicated, Texas's conservation initiatives that are the critical for restoring health to the Gulf, that achieve the greatest net long-term conservation of diversity and

2. Regional Ecosystem-based Approach to Restoration

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As indicated in the proposal, acquisition and conservation management of these lands would contribute to several goals and objectives articulated by the RESTORE Council as found in the Comprehensive Plan. The primary goal of the project is to Restore and Conserve Habitat, but will also directly contribute to the protection of water quality and replenishment of living coastal and marine resources. The project's primary objective is to Restore, Enhance and Protect Habitats. In addition, protection of water resources, protection and restoration of living coastal and marine resources, and restoration and enhancement of natural processes and shorelines will also be accomplished. This project is proposed to address

3. Engagement, Inclusion, and Transparency

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, the coastal conservation partnership in Texas is committed to accomplishing large-scale, long-term conservation, as is demonstrated by the number of partners, and by the commitment of private funds that have been brought to this project. The proposal notes that the project area and specific acquisition targets within the area have been developed through consensus among USFWS, TPWD, The Nature Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, Trust for Public Land, Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation (TPWF), the Knobloch Family Trust and local entities. For the Powderhorn Ranch acquisition, TPWF committed $15 million to leverage National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)

4. Leveraging Resources and Partnerships

◉ YES ◯ NO ◯ Not articulated

Notes:

See Section D.3 of this form.

As stated in the proposal, the Knobloch Family Trust has committed leverage funding. Their letter, attached to the proposal, states in part that "...the Knobloch Family Foundation is prepared to provide financial support in these focal areas to leverage awards made to Texas by the RESTORE Council for land conservation in Texas. The resources of the Foundation are such that we anticipate awarding several million dollars to ensure that our partners are positioned, with your assistance, to acquire the best and most strategic coastal lands for conservation."

5. Delivering Results and Measuring Impacts

◉ YES ◯ NO

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, survey and inventory data will be collected on land and adjacent tidal waters. Aquatic survey will include seagrass beds, oyster reefs, shrimp and game/non-game finfish (Martinez-Andrade, F. and M. Fisher. 2012). Finfish surveys include bag seine and gill net surveys. Decades of historical survey data from the TPWD Coastal Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program from each of these bays and sub-bays, will be supplemented by regular surveys following acquisition and conservation of adjacent land tracts. This "before and after" survey information can be compared to before and after survey data at locations where adjacent lands have been developed, helping to quantify the biological

E. Meeting Commitments and Tracking and Measuring Progress

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

◉ YES ◯ NO ◯ Not articulated

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

◉ YES ◯ NO

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, the measure of success for this project is acres of high-quality habitat and miles of shoreline protected from future degradation, and the net contribution of these lands to the health, diversity and productivity of the Texas Coast and the Gulf of Mexico. With the acquisition of either fee simple ownership or conservation easements on high quality conservation lands, protection of significant coastal habitats, direct water quality benefits, and social benefits such as recreation and prevention of development in zones subject to storm surges and coastal flooding will be realized. Although the simplest measure is number of acres, a regular regimen of surveys, both onshore and nearshore, will inform the true net conservation value of the project. Over time, the value of these protected lands to migratory songbirds

F. Proposal Emphasis Areas

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

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

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, this project is ideally suited to address RESTORE goals and objectives because of the opportunity to conserve entire tidal systems and their associated transitional and upland habitats on a scale that is necessary to address complete life-cycles of species, to support entire plant/animals communities, and to sustain natural processes such as fire. Each acquisition would add to and/or complement existing conservation projects such as the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Matagorda Island Wildlife Management Area and the Powderhorn Ranch. Because of the scale and location, this project is proposed as foundational to sustainable restoration of the Matagorda Bay system.

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

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the submission, the targeted acquisitions would protect many miles of tidal shoreline and littoral zone, which in turn protects adjacent oyster and seagrass beds from the detrimental effects that often follow shoreline development. Over the long term, such as decades or even centuries, relative sea level rise may affect all coastal habitats (IPCC, 2013), therefore acquiring lands of sufficient scale, slope and topography can accommodate sea level rise. The sponsor notes that the Matagorda Bay Complex project area is ideal in this respect. The high point on the recently-acquired Powderhorn Ranch, for example, is 16 feet above mean sea level (MSL). The high point on Galveston Island, 100 miles

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

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, within the Matagorda Bay System, Texas' coastal partnership has identified three tracts of land for fee simple acquisition totaling 17,000 acres valued at $37 million and a fourth tract of land for acquisition of a conservation easement covering 10,000 acres valued at $8 million, as strategic conservation priorities. The fee simple acquisitions are available from willing sellers at appraised value and include some 28 miles of frontage on the Matagorda Bay System and the Gulf of Mexico. In addition, a number of partners are engaged and the acquisitions complement existing conservation projects such as the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Matagorda Island Wildlife Management Area and the Powderhorn Ranch

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

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

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, this project is focused on acquisition of high-value high-priority landscape-scale conservation lands, and because specific tracts involved are dependent on funding and timing, no funds are specifically requested for the establishment or programming of outreach and education opportunities. However, ownership of any of these tracts by TPWD or USFWS will create or add to an existing wildlife refuge(s), wildlife management area(s) or state park(s), which means there will be opportunities for public access, recreation, outreach, interpretation and education. Part of the recently-acquired 17,351-acre Powderhorn Ranch is to be developed as a new state park, with a visitor and interpretive center devoted to helping visitors understand and appreciate the value and importance of coastal habitats. There is also