Science Evaluation

Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

PROPOSAL TITLE

Matagorda Bay System Priority Lanscape Conservation Project

LOCATION

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

SPONSOR(S)

Commissioner Toby Baker, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

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

Project & Implementation

REVIEWED BY:

DATE:

January 6, 2015

Best Available Science:

These 6 factors/elements help frame the reviewers answers to A, B and C found in next section:

1. Have the proposal objectives, including methods used, been justified using peer reviewed and/or publicly available information?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

Objectives are very simple given that this is an acquisition project.

However, I think that there could have been a few additional citations provided to strengthen the connection between the project and ecosystem benefits (e.g., benefits to water quality). While most of this information is widely accepted and factual, cited references could only strengthen the argument that these lands will have multiple direct benefits to habitats and species.

2. If information supporting the proposal does not directly pertain to the Gulf Coast region, are applicant's methods reasonably supported and adaptable to that geographic area?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

3. Are the literature sources used to support the proposal accurately and completely cited?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

4. Are the literature sources represented in a fair and unbiased manner?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

5. Does the proposal evaluate uncertainties and risks in the scientific basis for the proposal, including any identified by the public and Council members?

- ( ) YES
- (●) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

Not applicable. Uncertainties were addressed related to the willingness of sellers and the costs associated with each parcel, including the potential increase in price due to booming local economies. I would not consider these uncertainties related to the scientific basis for the proposal.

6. Does the proposal evaluate uncertainties and risks in achieving its objectives over time? (e.g., is there an uncertainty or risk that in 5-10 years the project/program will be obsolete or not function as planned given projections of sea level rise?)

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

Uncertainties related to sea level rise were provided, but given the geography and landscape scale of the project, risks are minimal, and in no way would make the project obsolete or non-functional. I did find the >200 year lifespan interesting as listed for the project, and would like to have known how the specific number was determined.

Based on the answers to the previous 6 questions, and giving deference to the sponsor to provide within reason the use of best available science the following three questions can be answered:

A. Has the applicant made a reasonable determination that the proposal is based on science that uses peer-reviewed and publicly available data?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Information Needed:

Yes, though again very minimal given the acquisition nature of this project.

B. Has the applicant made a reasonable determination that the proposal is based on science that maximizes the quality, objectivity, and integrity of information (including, as applicable, statistical information)?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Information Needed:

Yes, in the sense that priority has been given to large-scale, high value parcels of land within the system.

C. Has the applicant made a reasonable determination that the proposal is based on science that clearly documents and communicates risks and uncertainties in the scientific basis for such projects?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Information Needed:

Science Context Evaluation

A. Have other methods been discussed and reasons provided to why the method is being selected (e.g., scientifically sound; cost-effectiveness)?

Specific on-site management and restoration activities are unknown at this time, but examples provided fit within the context of current accepted practices (e.g., controlled burns, invasive species removal).

B. Has your agency/vendor/project manager conducted a project/program like the one proposed?

Not at this scale, but my previous organization did administer federal dollars which were sometimes used for small-scale acquisition as part of larger restoration efforts.

C. Is there a risk mitigation plan in place for project objectives? (captures risk measures as defined under best available science by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

Yes, alternate acquisition parcels exist within the system, and it sounds like they could be pursued if necessary.

D. Does the project/program consider consequences with implementation? (captures risk measures as defined under best available science by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

Not applicable for this acquisition project, though once on-site restoration is determined this should be considered.

E. Does the project/program have clearly defined goals?

Yes.

F. Does the project/program have clearly defined objectives?

Yes, at least as they meet RESTORE objectives. Other than that some specific mentions are made supporting key habitats and species.

G. Does the project/program have measures of success? (captures statistical information requirement as defined by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

Yes. Very clear-cut in terms of acquisition success (both fee simple and conservation easement).

H. Is a monitoring program in place to determine project goals, success and help adaptive management (if applicable)? (captures statistical information requirement as defined by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

No formal monitoring plan exists related to project goals given the acquisition nature of the project, however, monitoring is mentioned that will look at long-term changes over time on the acquired lands in order to gauge future on-the-ground restoration activities. This monitoring, however, is outside of the project funding requested.

I. Does the project/program consider recent and/or relevant information? (captures statistical information requirement as defined by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

Yes.

J. Has the project/program evaluated past successes and failures of similar efforts? (captures the communication of risks and uncertainties in the scientific basis for such projects as defined by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

Yes.

Please summarize any additional information needed below: