

Activity: GOMA Coordination

Unique Identifier: AL_RESTORE_002_001_Cat1

Location: Gulf-wide

Type of Activity: Planning

FPL Category: 1 – Funding Approved

Cost Estimate: \$375,000

Responsible Council Member: Department of Commerce

Partnering Council Member(s): This project represents a direct partnering between the Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA), the State of Alabama, the Department of Commerce (DOC) (represented by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration- NOAA), and the Department of Interior (DOI) (represented by the U.S. Geological Survey-USGS). Further, GOMA's committee structure has representation and support from all 5 Gulf States, as well as the DOC/NOAA, DOI/USGS, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, US Department of Agriculture, as well as other agency and non-governmental organization partners.

Originally submitted by: The State of Alabama as a component within the proposal "Gulf of Mexico Alliance Gulf-wide Restoration Coordination and Support"

Executive Summary: The Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA) will further develop a Monitoring Community of Practice using expertise from existing GOMA Priority Issue Teams. This Community of Practice is the next logical step to a process established through a series of workshops conducted by GOMA from 2011 through 2014. This Monitoring Community of Practice will focus on providing feedback and input to the establishment of minimum monitoring standards and protocols developed by the RESTORE Council's Monitoring and Assessment Work Group in support of the Council Monitoring & Assessment Program Development activity by DOI/USGS and DOC/NOAA.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Specific Actions/Activities: GOMA will conduct five Community of Practice workshops in support of the Council Monitoring & Assessment Program Development activity. During these workshops, GOMA will coordinate and facilitate members of the Community of Practice to:

- Provide feedback on minimum monitoring standards developed by Council Monitoring and Assessment Workgroup (CMAWG) (please also see the Category 1 project with Unique Identifier DOC_RESTORE_002_001_Cat1);
- Provide feedback on gap analysis/inventory prepared by USGS and NOAA;
- Help to identify monitoring needs and indicators;
- Review baseline data and assessments; and
- Distribute CMAWG products through various channels for review.

Deliverables: Deliverables for the development of a Monitoring Community of Practice will be workshop reports detailing agenda items and outcomes on the specific focus areas of each workshop.

Ecological Benefits/Outcomes and Metrics: The goal of the Monitoring Community of Practice will be to establish standardized monitoring practices and protocols through consensus from the broad base of expertise in the region. The ecological benefits of having standardized monitoring practices and protocols are: (1) baseline conditions and trends can be identified, allowing resource managers to understand ecosystem functions and responses to disturbances; (2) once ecosystem functions are understood, forecast models and predictive tools for restoration planning are much more accurate; and (3) restoration plans can be developed and implemented using the best available science to successfully manage ecological resources.

Leveraging and Co-Funding:

- **Adjoining:** Approximately \$2,500,000 is proposed for USGS and NOAA and an additional \$500K in existing NOAA funds are in place in this FPL to administer a Council Monitoring and Assessment Work Group (CMAWG), establish a Monitoring Coordination Committee, develop minimum monitoring standards and protocols, conduct an inventory and gap analysis, establish baseline conditions, and create a data visualization, application and management system. GOMA's Monitoring Community of Practice is an adjacent project that will provide feedback and input to the above-mentioned products developed by USGS and NOAA.
- **Building on prior or other investments:** Recognizing the need for cooperation and coordination among the various and disparate monitoring programs in the Gulf of Mexico, GOMA hosted a series of workshops from 2011 through 2014; at first only for water quality monitoring, and later broadening to include all types of monitoring. Partners from state and federal agencies, academia, non-governmental/non-profit organizations and businesses formed an "ad hoc" Monitoring Community of Practice, collaborating to develop a master vision and method for a coordinated, integrated monitoring system across the Gulf. In 2014, the effort resulted in the Gulf-wide Water Quality Monitoring Network plan and a recommendation to develop similar plans for other monitoring sectors. In 2015, this effort continues through the formation of a new Data and Monitoring Priority Issue Team that is poised to continue the development of a coordinated approach to monitoring in the Gulf of Mexico. Since 2011, approximately \$92,500 has been invested by GOMA to develop the ad hoc Monitoring Community of Practice, hosting and facilitating workshops, including: \$67,500 from grants from NOAA Regional Ocean Partnership program for Gulf-wide Monitoring Network plan development; \$15,000 from GOMA reserves and participant registration fees for Gulf of Mexico Observations & Monitoring Workshops; and \$10,000 value of in-kind services from GOMA staff to coordinate and facilitate Gulf-wide Monitoring Network plan and workshops.

Duration of Activity: 36 Months.

Life of Activity: Once the minimum monitoring standards and protocols are established for habitat and water quality monitoring, they would be accurate and appropriate indefinitely.

RESPONSE TO SCIENCE REVIEWS: All three external science reviews were found to be generally favorable.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE:

Council approval of funding for this activity will not involve or lead directly to ground-disturbing activities that may have significant effects on the environment individually or cumulatively, nor does it commit the Council to a particular course of action affecting the environment. The Council has considered potential extraordinary circumstances, including potential negative effects to threatened and endangered species, essential fish habitat, Tribal interests and/or historic properties, where applicable, and has determined that no such circumstances apply. Accordingly, the Council has determined that this activity is covered by the Council's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Categorical Exclusion (CE) for planning, research or design activities (Section 4(d)(3) of the Council's NEPA Procedures). The Council's NEPA Procedures and the signed CE form for this activity can be found [here](#).