



2018 Annual Report to Congress

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Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council

Calendar Year 2018

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1. Letter from the Executive Director

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) hereby submits its 2018 Annual Report to Congress. The Council was created by the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act (RESTORE Act) in 2012 as an independent federal agency charged with administering a portion of the civil settlements associated with the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. Consisting of the five Gulf Coast states (States) and six federal agencies, the Council's mission is to implement a comprehensive plan for the ecological and economic recovery of the Gulf Coast.

To date, the Council has awarded approximately 40 ecosystem restoration projects and programs, totaling \$139.6 million to its members through the Initial Funded Priorities List under the Council-Selected Restoration Component to support an array of restoration activities across the Gulf Coast, including investments in habitat conservation, oyster restoration, water quality, planning, science and more. These investments, though substantial, represent only a portion of the total funding available to the Council in the coming years. The Council also approved State Expenditures Plans totaling approximately \$823 million for activities under the Spill Impact Component. Over \$55 million has been awarded by the Council for these activities to date.

Foundational to the Council's success during 2018, funds were provided to its members through the Commitments and Planning Support Funded Priority List (CPS FPL) to enhance collaboration, planning and public engagement in support of future funding decisions under the Council-Selected Restoration Component of the RESTORE Act. In concomitance with the CPS FPL, an internal Council collaboration strategy is being evaluated by the Council as the foundation for the development of the 2020 and subsequent Funded Priority Lists. This developing strategy embodies in what the Council calls its Planning Framework which could serve as a "bridge" from one FPL to the next. It is not intended to describe all of the restoration needs of the Gulf. Rather, the Planning Framework would identify priorities that will strategically link past and future restoration funding decisions. More information on these funding approvals and the related activities is contained in this report.

On behalf of the Council, I am pleased to submit this Annual Report to Congress outlining our progress over the past twelve months. The Council remains committed to maintaining active communication with Congress. Please contact us at any time with your thoughts, suggestions or questions. Thank you for your continued leadership and support in restoring the Gulf Coast region.

Ben Scaggs



Executive Director

2. Mission and Organization

The Council is charged with helping to restore the ecosystem and economy of the Gulf Coast region by developing and overseeing Trust Fund expenditures in implementation of the Comprehensive Plan and approval of State Expenditure Plans (SEPs), and carrying out other responsibilities. Currently, the position of Chair is held by EPA.

The Council includes the Governors of the States of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas, and the Secretaries of the U.S. Departments of the Interior, Army, Commerce, Agriculture, Homeland Security, and the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council Members

Environmental Protection Agency - Chair

Andrew Wheeler
Administrator

State of Alabama

Kay Ivey
Governor

State of Florida

Ron DeSantis
Governor

State of Louisiana

John Bel Edwards
Governor

State of Mississippi

Phil Bryant
Governor

State of Texas

Greg Abbott
Governor

Department of Agriculture

Sonny Perdue
Secretary

Department of the Army

Mark T. Esper
Secretary

Department of Commerce

Wilbur Ross
Secretary

Department of Homeland Security

Kirstjen Nielsen
Secretary

Department of the Interior

David Bernhardt
Secretary, Acting

3. Background on the RESTORE Act

The Gulf Coast environment was significantly injured by the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill as well as by past and ongoing human actions. Restoring an area as large and complex as the Gulf Coast region is a costly, multi-generational undertaking. Gulf habitats are continually degraded and lost due to development, infrastructure, sea-level rise, altered riverine processes, ocean acidification, salinity changes and other human-caused factors. Water quality in the coastal and marine environments is degraded by upstream pollution and hydrologic alterations spanning multiple States and involving the watersheds of large and small rivers alike. Stocks of marine and estuarine species are depleted by over-utilization and conflicting resource use. Some of the region's environmental problems such as wetland loss and hypoxia span areas the size of some U.S. states. This degradation represents a serious risk to the cultural, social and economic benefits derived from the Gulf ecosystem.

Signed into law in July 2012 the RESTORE Act (33 U.S.C §1321(t) and *note*) established the Council and the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund (Trust Fund); the latter receives 80 percent of the civil and administrative penalties assessed under the Clean Water Act (CWA) resulting from the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. The Council is comprised of the Governors of the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas (States), the Secretaries of the U.S. Departments of the Interior, the Army, Commerce, Agriculture and Homeland Security, and the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The Administrator of the EPA currently serves as the Council Chairperson.

In 2015 the Council approved the Initial FPL (FPL 1) for approximately \$156.6 million in restoration activities such as hydrologic restoration, land conservation, and planning for large-scale restoration projects. The funding for the Initial FPL came from the settlement of CWA civil penalties against *Transocean Deepwater* Inc. and related entities. When it approved the Initial FPL, the Council did not know the amount and timing of additional funding that could be obtained from the then-ongoing litigation with British Petroleum (BP).

In 2016 the United States entered into a Consent Decree with BP for the resolution of civil claims for entities held responsible for the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill totaling more than \$20 billion, the largest civil penalties ever awarded under any environmental statute and the largest recovery of damages for injuries to natural resources of the United States. Of these penalties, the RESTORE Act will provide \$5.33 billion (80 percent of \$6.659 billion, plus interest) to the Trust Fund, consisting of 80 percent of the following: \$1 billion (plus interest) in civil penalties from *Transocean Deepwater* Inc. and related entities for violating the CWA in relation to their conduct in the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill; \$159.5 million from a civil fine paid by *Anadarko Petroleum Corporation*; and \$5.5 billion (plus interest) from *BP Exploration and Production, Inc.* (BP) for a CWA civil penalty under the April 4, 2016, consent decree (Consent Decree), payable over a fifteen-year period at approximately \$91 million per year through 2031 (Figure 1).

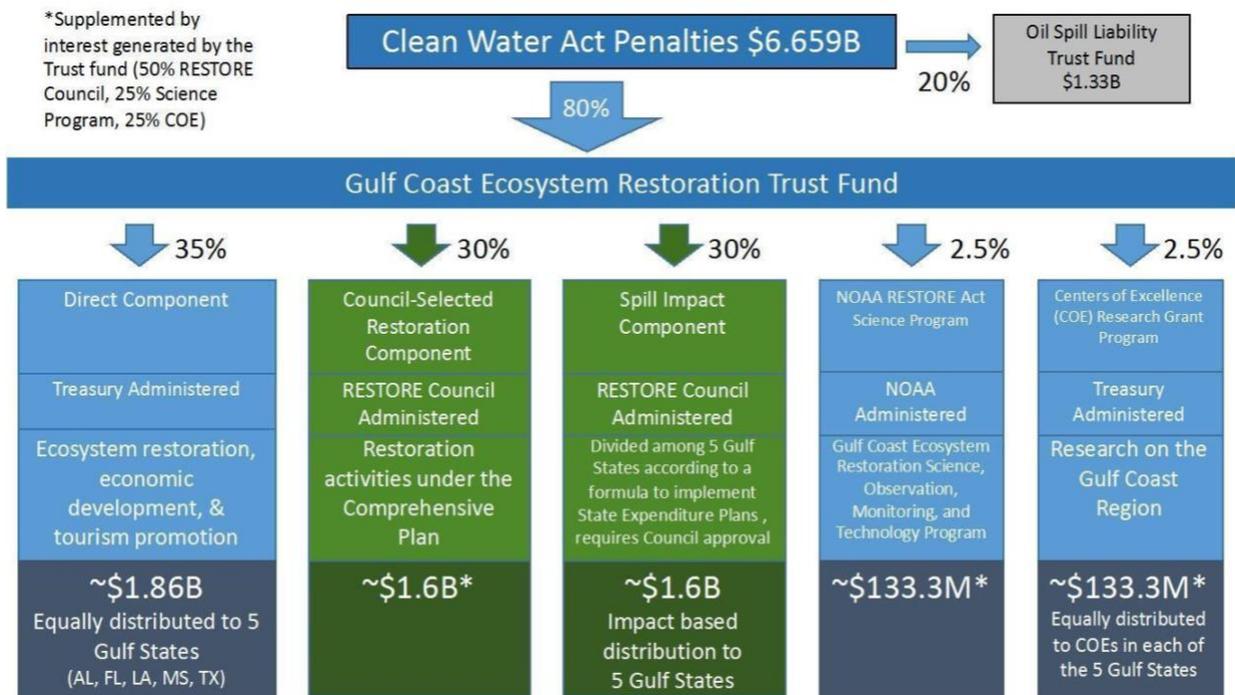


Figure 1. Allocation of the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund based on settlements with BP, Transocean and Anadarko; RESTORE Council oversight components are highlighted in green.

The Council has oversight of the expenditure of 60 percent of the Trust Fund (green highlighted areas, Figure 1). Under the Council-Selected Restoration Component, 30 percent of available funding is administered for Gulf-wide ecosystem restoration and protection, according to the Council’s Comprehensive Plan. Under the Spill Impact Component, 30 percent is allocated to the States. The remaining funds are allocated as follows: 35 percent under the Direct Component, divided equally among the five Gulf States for ecological and economic restoration; 2.5 percent to a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Science Component (plus 25 percent of interest earned) dedicated to the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Science, Observation, Monitoring and Technology Program; and 2.5 percent to a Centers of Excellence Component (plus 25 percent of interest earned) dedicated to the Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program.

The Council updated its Comprehensive Plan in light of this new funding information and lessons learned from the Council’s review of its Initial FPL. Given the 15-year payment schedule, the 2016 Comprehensive Plan update proposes developing FPLs on approximately three-year cycles. Among other benefits, this allows the Council to accumulate the funding needed to support large-scale restoration activities, consistent with the applicable RESTORE Act criteria. The 2016 Comprehensive Plan update emphasizes the importance of coordination and collaboration among the Council members and with other programs in order to leverage resources and maximize the effectiveness of available restoration funding. The Comprehensive Plan update also

commits the Council to enhancing public engagement and the use of best available science (BAS) to support a holistic approach to Gulf restoration.

3.1. RESTORE Act Priority Criteria

In selecting projects and programs under the Council-Selected Restoration Component, the RESTORE Act requires that the Council give the highest priority to activities that address one or more of the following criteria:

1. **Projects that are 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.
2. **Large-scale projects and programs** that are 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.
3. **Projects 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.
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 Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

3.2. Comprehensive Plan Goals and Objectives

The Initial Comprehensive Plan (Initial Plan) provided a framework to implement a coordinated, Gulf Coast region-wide restoration effort in a way that restores, protects, and revitalizes the Gulf Coast. This Plan was the first version of a Plan that continues to evolve. It guided the Council's actions to restore the Gulf Coast ecosystem and economy. The Plan established the Council's Goals for the region and provides a process to fund restoration projects and programs as funds become available. The Council updated its Initial Plan during 2016 with the intention to provide strategic guidance that will help the Council more effectively address complex and critical challenges inherent to ecosystem restoration in the Gulf of Mexico. The Comprehensive Plan Update emphasizes the importance of coordination and collaboration among the Council members and with other programs in order to leverage resources and maximize the effectiveness of available restoration funding. The 2016 Comprehensive Plan update also commits to enhancing public engagement and the use of best available science to support a holistic approach to Gulf restoration. These commitments are intended ensure that future Council investments provide the greatest possible ecological return.

Building on the strong foundation established in the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force¹ Gulf of Mexico Regional Ecosystem Restoration Strategy and other local, regional, state, and federal plans, the Council is taking an integrated and coordinated approach to Gulf Coast restoration. This approach strives to both restore the Gulf Coast region's environment and, at the same time, revitalize the region's economy because the Council recognizes that ecosystem restoration investments may also improve economic prosperity and quality of life. In addition, this approach acknowledges that coordinated action with other partners is crucial to successfully restore and sustain the health of the Gulf Coast region. This coordination is particularly important because diverse funding sources and decision-making bodies are investing in Gulf Coast restoration.

Goals

To provide the overarching framework for an integrated and coordinated approach for region-wide Gulf Coast restoration and to help guide the collective actions at the local, state, tribal, and federal levels, the Council has adopted five goals.

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

The fifth goal focuses on reviving and supporting a sustainable Gulf economy to ensure that those expenditures by the Gulf Coast States authorized in the RESTORE Act under the Direct Component (administered by the Department of the Treasury) and the Spill Impact Component can be considered in the context of comprehensive restoration. To achieve all five goals, the Council will support ecosystem restoration that can enhance local communities by giving people desirable places to live, work, and play, while creating opportunities for new and existing businesses of all sizes, especially those dependent on natural resources. In addition, the Council will support ecosystem restoration that builds local workforce capacity.

¹ The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force was created by President Obama through an Executive Order on October 5, 2010, and was the result of a recommendation made in Secretary Mabus' report on long term recovery following the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. The Task Force was charged with development of a restoration strategy and a Gulf Coast ecosystem restoration agenda.

The Council will work to coordinate restoration activities under the Council-Selected Restoration Component and the Spill Impact Component to further the goals. While the Council does not have direct involvement in the activities undertaken by the States or local governments through the Direct Component, the Council will strive, as appropriate, to coordinate its work with those activities. In addition, the Council will actively coordinate with the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Science Program (administered by NOAA) and the Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program (administered by Treasury).

Objectives

The Council will select and fund projects and programs that restore and protect the natural resources, ecosystems, water quality, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast region. Projects and programs not within the scope of the following Objectives for ecosystem restoration will not be funded under the Council-Selected Restoration Component.

1. **Restore, Enhance, and Protect Habitats** – Restore, enhance and protect the extent, functionality, resiliency, and sustainability of coastal, freshwater, estuarine, wildlife, and marine habitats.
2. **Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources** – Restore, improve, and protect the Gulf Coast region’s fresh, estuarine, and marine water resources by reducing or treating nutrient and pollutant loading; and improving the management of freshwater flows, discharges to and withdrawals from critical systems.
3. **Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources** – Restore and protect healthy, diverse, and sustainable living coastal and marine resources including finfish, shellfish, birds, mammals, reptiles, coral, and deep benthic communities.
4. **Restore and Enhance Natural Processes and Shorelines** – Restore and enhance ecosystem resilience, sustainability, and natural defenses through the restoration of natural coastal, estuarine, and riverine processes, and/or the restoration of natural shorelines.
5. **Promote Community Resilience** – Build and sustain Gulf Coast communities’ capacity to adapt to short- and long-term natural and man-made hazards, particularly increased flood risks associated with sea-level rise and environmental stressors. Promote ecosystem restoration that enhances community resilience through the re-establishment of non-structural, natural buffers against storms and flooding.
6. **Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education** – Promote and enhance natural resource stewardship through environmental education efforts that include formal and informal educational opportunities, professional development and training, communication, and actions for all ages.
7. **Improve Science-Based Decision-Making Processes** – Improve science-based decision-making processes used by the Council.

3.3. Significant Council Actions

To ensure that Council investments provide the greatest possible ecological return, the Council and its staff have worked diligently since the inception to substantially improve processes, policies and practices. The RESTORE Act (33 U.S.C. § 1321(t) and *note*) requires Council votes on the following types of actions (referred to as “Significant Actions”) (33 U.S.C § 1321(t)(2)(C)(vi)):

1. Approval of the Comprehensive Plan and revisions and updates thereto;
2. Approval of State Expenditure Plans (SEPs) and revisions and updates thereto;
3. Approval of reports to Congress required by the Act;
4. Approval of transfers pursuant to 33 U.S.C. § 1321(t)(2)(E)(ii)(II); and
5. Other Significant Actions as determined by the Council (e.g., approval of the Council regulation establishing the formula required under 33 U.S.C. § 1321(t)(3)).

All Significant Actions of the Council, except approval of SEPs, require the affirmative vote of the Chairperson and three State members to be effective. Approval of a SEP or a revision requires only the affirmative vote of the Chairperson together with certification by the State member submitting the SEP that the SEP satisfies all applicable requirements of the RESTORE Act.

Following is a list of Council Significant Actions taken in 2018:

1. Approval of Commitment and Planning Support FPL, January 24, 2018
2. FPL Amendment to fund the Robinson Preserve Wetlands Restoration project, January 24, 2018
3. Approval of 2017 Annual Report to Congress, February 21, 2018
4. Approval of Mississippi SEP Amendment, April 16, 2018
5. Approval of Florida Stand-Up SEP, April 23, 2018
6. Approval of Louisiana SEP Amendment, June 18, 2018
7. Approval of Alabama Planning SEP, August 30, 2018
8. Approval of Florida SEP, September 27, 2018

More information on these actions is provided below.

4. Council-Selected Restoration Component Accomplishments

4.1. Background

Pursuant to the RESTORE Act, the Council approved an Initial Comprehensive Plan in 2013, setting forth goals and objectives for advancing comprehensive Gulf restoration. In 2015, the Council approved its first list of restoration projects and programs to be carried out under the Council-Selected Restoration Component. This list, called the Initial Funded Priorities List (or Initial FPL), consisted of \$156.6 million in restoration activities in 10 key watersheds as well as several Gulf-wide programs. After approving the Initial FPL, the Council began disbursing funds to its members to implement the projects and programs listed therein. The Council also conducted a thorough internal and public review of the process it used to select projects and programs in this first round of funding. The goal of this review was to apply lessons learned from the initial selection process to subsequent funding decisions.

The funding for the Initial FPL came from the settlement of CWA civil penalties against Transocean Deepwater Inc. and related entities. When it approved the Initial FPL, the Council did not know the amount and timing of additional funding that could come from the ongoing litigation with BP. In 2016, the entry of the Consent Decree meant that the amount and timing of that funding was now fully known.

4.2. Actions and Results from FPL 1

Progress Summary from FPL 1

The Council made significant progress during 2018 towards funding and implementing the Initial Funded Priority List (Initial FPL). Only four projects selected in FPL 1 are either not yet funded or in the process of being evaluated for funding (Figure 2). Funding actions are identified by Council member in Figure 3.

All projects funded by the Council are required to monitor the performance of the award toward ecosystem restoration. The Council has currently identified 56 performance-level metrics (https://restorethegulf.gov/sites/default/files/GO-Res_metrics_initial_20180510.pdf) for grants to states and Interagency Agreements (IAA) with the federal members funded through the Council-Selected Restoration Component (*aka* "Bucket 2"), and for grants funded under the Spill Impact Component (*aka* "Bucket 3") of the RESTORE Act. These metrics are used to monitor and evaluate the efficacy of projects and programs in meeting mission goals and objectives of the Council and track annual performance. The FLP 1 projects funded during 2016 and 2017 are already achieving results as shown in Table 1.

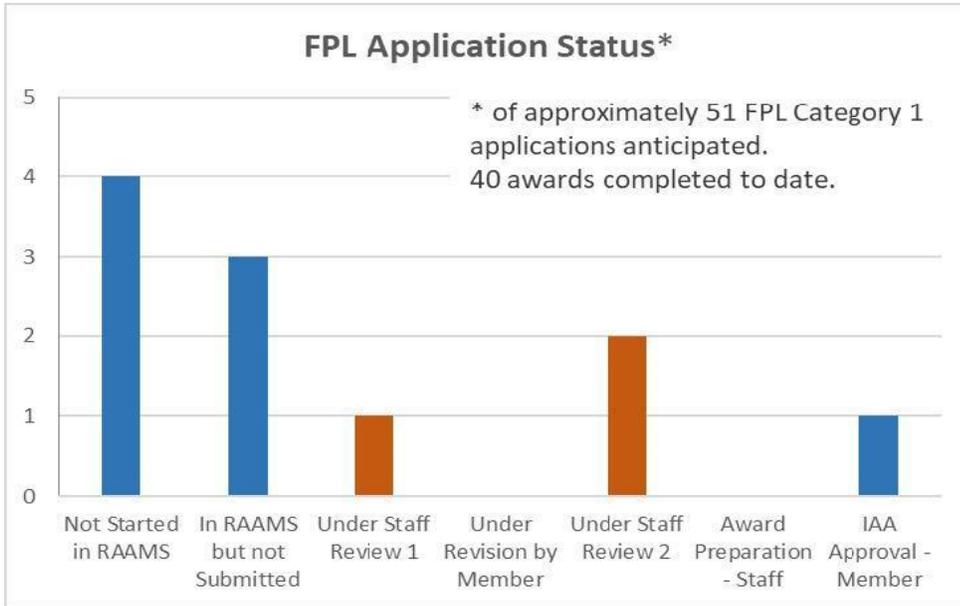


Figure 2. Progress of processing and funding projects selected in the Initial FPL. “RAAMS” refers to the Council’s grants management system, the Restoration Assistance and Awards Management System.

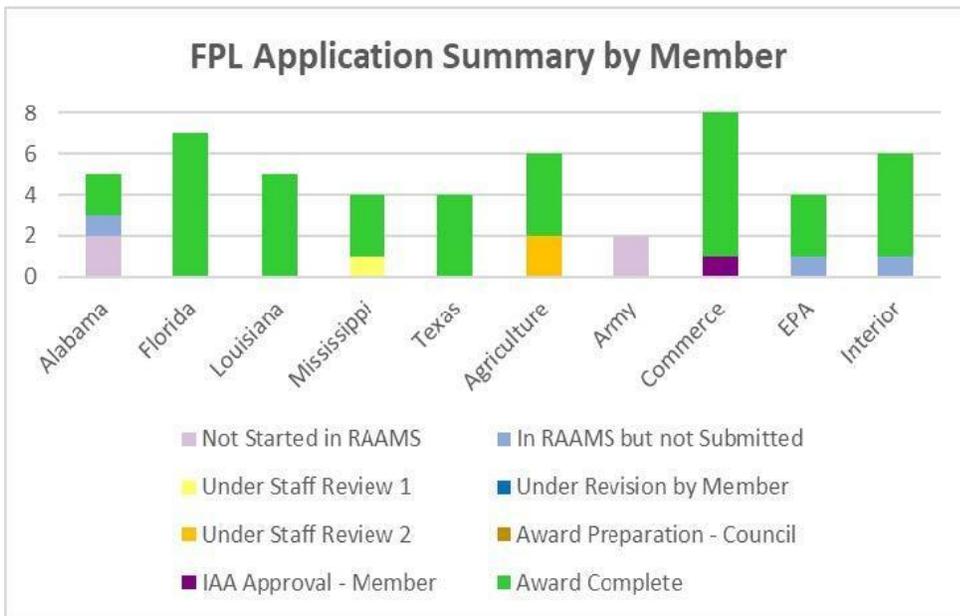


Figure 3. Application status by member for projects selected in the Initial FPL. “RAAMS” refers to the Council’s grants management system, the Restoration Assistance and Awards Management System.

Table 1. Performance-level metrics results from projects funded under the Initial FPL.

Metric Category	Metric Measure	Value
Outreach/Education/Technical Assistance	Number of individuals reached by outreach, training, or technical assistance activities	263 individuals
	Number of users engaged online	345 users
	Number of subgrants/agreements to disseminate education and outreach materials	5 subgrants/agreements
Building institutional capacity	Number of participants that successfully completed training	258 participants
Economic benefits	Number of jobs created - temporary jobs	75 jobs
	Number of local contracts	1
	Percentage of program funding to existing local organization(s)	17.5%
Land Acquisition	Acres Acquired in fee	7242.9 acres
	Miles Acquired	8 miles
Improved management practices	Acres under improved management	5164 acres
	Miles under improved management	8 miles
Land restoration	Acres restored	1481.48 acres
Marine habitat restoration	Acres restored - Oysters habitat	317 acres
Removal of invasives	Acres restored	57.1 acres
Wetland restoration	Acres restored	398.1 acres
Research	Number of studies used to inform management	6 studies

FPL 1 Awards 2018 Progress Reports

The following section provides progress report summaries for the 14 projects funded through 2017 which totaled \$62.14 million, and for the 10 Initial FPL projects totaling \$34.43 million funded during 2016, along with links to additional information (including the projected duration of each project).

Project Title: Bayou Greenways (Planning and Implementation)

Council Member(s): State of Texas

Project Start Date: 04/28/2016

Project End Date: 11/30/2019

Award Amount: \$7,109,000

Performance Narrative: The Houston Parks Board (HPB), subrecipient for the project, aims to purchase 80 to 100 acres of land along the Clear Creek Greenway as part of the larger Bayou Greenways initiative to acquire and preserve nearly 4,000 acres of riparian buffer corridors along major waterways, (bayous and creeks) running predominately through Harris County and the City of Houston. The HPB will conduct due diligence in determining specific tracts of land and the required environmental reporting. The properties will ultimately be transferred to the City of Houston for long-term operations and management under the Houston Parks and Recreation Department. Houston Parks Board has made offers of five parcels, totaling approximately 60.41 acres.

Project Title: Matagorda Bay System Priority Landscape Conservation

Council Member(s): State of Texas

Project Start Date: 04/28/2016

Project End Date: 11/30/2019

Award Amount: \$6,012,000

Performance Narrative: The Huitt properties of the undivided interest properties was purchased. Work continues to identify willing sellers for the inholding properties and the undivided interests. Work has begun on the Sartwelle tract to identify allowable costs performed by Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation (TPWF) that are reimbursable. We are also working to ensure that these costs are not duplicated when the property is purchased by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). The project and budget narratives are being reviewed to clarify and answer questions from Council staff. The Newcomb Point tract has begun due diligence pre-award work. A plan for the project has been developed to demonstrate how the purchase of the required 6,554 acres will be accomplished.

Project Title: Bahia Grande Coastal Corridor

Council Member(s): State of Texas

Project Start Date: 04/28/2016

Project End Date: 08/31/2019

Award Amount: \$4,378,500

Performance Narrative: The Thomas and Zarate properties were successfully transferred to USFWS.

Project Title: Gulf of Mexico Habitat Restoration via Conservation Corps Partnerships/Youth Conservation Corps (BIA)

Council Member(s): Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs

Project Start Date: 05/15/2016

Project End Date: 12/30/2018

Award Amount: \$500,000

Performance Narrative: All of the Gulf Tribes were able to conduct youth programs in 2017. The 2nd year of the programs proved to be a huge success with a full year of planning. Tribal youth participation in the program grew from 55 the first year to 98 in year two. Youth have had valuable experiences learning hands-on conservation practices on approximately 1,000 acres over the last two years. The program continues to be extremely popular and well received by the tribal leaders and tribal community. Based on savings from the grant, all of the Gulf Tribes should be able to again provide youth conservation programs.

Project Title: West Grand Terre Beach Nourishment and Stabilization (Planning)

Council Member(s): State of Louisiana, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA)

Project Start Date: 10/6/2016

Project End Date: 6/19/2019

Award Amount: \$7,259,216

Performance Narrative: Final survey report was provided to CPRA in November. CEC initiated and completed the Reconnaissance Geotechnical and the Detailed Geophysical and Geotechnical investigations of the borrow area. Analysis has been completed for both the Recon Geotechnical and Detailed Geophysical investigations. Geotechnical Investigation of the island has been completed and final Geotech report will incorporate the data results of the Detailed Geotechnical Borrow Investigation. The preliminary plans and a preliminary design report were provided to

CPRA for review and comment. The Detailed Geotechnical Investigation Analysis has been initiated. A task order has issued for structure removal design and is currently being negotiated with the engineering and design (E&D) firm. Land Rights contractor is continuing to perform title research/abstracts and is expected to be complete by the end of the year. Title opinions are then being developed based on this work.

Project Title: Biloxi Marsh Living Shoreline (Planning)

Council Member(s): State of Louisiana, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA)

Project Start Date: 11/01/2016

Project End Date: 5/31/2019

Award Amount: \$3,220,460

Performance Narrative: The current E&D end date will be delayed past the expected date of May, 2019. A grant amendment request for time extension will be forthcoming. CPRA plans to solicit information on artificial reef products to develop a list of approved products to be used in the design and construction of the Project. The goal of the solicitation is to obtain information on available artificial reef products for consideration. CPRA will use the information provided, along with engineering analyses conducted by the project design team, to evaluate the artificial reef products to determine applicability for use at the project site. Solicitation during E&D will result in a lengthened E&D schedule, but will expedite the bid process and construction. A grant amendment request for time extension will be forthcoming.

Project Title: Golden Triangle Marsh Creation (Planning)

Council Member(s): State of Louisiana, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA)

Project Start Date: 11/01/2016

Project End Date: 5/1/2020

Award Amount: \$4,347,733

Performance Narrative: Survey of borrow and fill areas was completed. Permits for geotechnical investigations were received and all field work associated with geotechnical and cultural investigation. Most of the data collection effort was complete. The draft 30% design was submitted to CPRA for review.

Project Title: Enhancing Opportunities for Beneficial Use of Dredge Sediments (Planning)

Council Member(s): State of Mississippi, Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ)

Project Start Date: 12/01/2016

Project End Date: 11/30/2019

Award Amount: \$2,178,847

Performance Narrative: Task 1: Site Refinement – As a result of due diligence performed, MDEQ updated the selected site specific locations for beneficial use planning activities during the reporting period. MDEQ will no longer pursue the Pelican Key site and will instead conduct site refinement activities on three potential sites: east of the Gulfport channel from nearshore to the channel islands, north of Cat Island, and south of Cat Island. (The areas near Cat Island are collectively referred to as the Western Sound Site.)

Task 2: Engineering and Design of Containment, Marsh, and Living Shorelines/Breakwaters, as appropriate MDEQ held meetings and conference calls with the engineer to develop work orders specific to selected project sites. Work orders for the Western Mississippi Sound site area and the Greenwood Island site were executed in July 2018. Bi-weekly conference calls and meetings were held for coordination of engineering and design work. During the next reporting period, the initial engineering reconnaissance/planning activities on the Western Sound Site area will be completed and engineering and design for the Greenwood Island site will be ongoing.

Task 3: Environmental Compliance and Permitting - During the reporting period, no work towards this task was completed.

Task 4: Program Management and Oversight - During the reporting period, MDEQ, with contractual support, performed oversight and coordination activities. MDEQ performed program management activities that included coordination of site refinement, procurement of engineering and design services, coordination and execution of the engineering and design agreement, coordination and execution of work orders for project sites, review of contractor invoices, reconciliation of expenditures, and preparation and submittal of financial and performance reporting.

Task 5: Data Management – During the reporting period, MDEQ updated the Observational Data and Data Management Plans.

Project Title: Sea Grant Education and Outreach

Council Member(s): State of Mississippi, Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ)

Project Start Date: 12/01/2016

Project End Date: 11/30/2019

Award Amount: \$750,000

Performance Narrative: Task 1: Develop the Competitive Process used for the Sea Grant Education and Outreach (EOE) Grant Program – The milestone related to this task (i.e., Develop Competitive Grant Application Process) was completed during the prior reporting period.

Task 2: Solicit EOE Grant Applications, and Identify and Execute Grant Awards – During the reporting period, MDEQ finalized its review of Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium’s (MASGC) evaluation of the eleven (11) proposals received during the prior period. MDEQ selected five (5) projects for implementation. After providing sub-award information to the RESTORE Council (as required by a Special Award Condition), MDEQ executed a Sub-Award Agreement for each selected project. MDEQ held a project kickoff webinar for each sub-recipient to review the scope of work, reporting requirements, and the terms and conditions of each sub-award agreement.

Task 3: Host “Connecting Upstream Land Conservation and Restoration to Downstream Systems” Conference – During the reporting period, no work towards this task was completed.

Task 4: Program Management and Oversight – During the reporting period, MDEQ, with contractual support, performed oversight and coordination activities. MDEQ performed program management activities that included review of contractor invoices, reconciliation of expenditures, monitoring and activity reports, financial reporting, preparation of semi-annual and annual reporting for prior periods, and compliance monitoring. MDEQ assessed sub-recipient risk, and prepared, negotiated, and issued sub-award agreements. MDEQ reviewed Monthly Project Progress Reports received and coordinated periodic status update conference calls for each sub-award issued. During the reporting period, MDEQ requested a one-year, no-cost extension, which would extend the Council award through November 30, 2020; this request was under consideration at the end of the reporting period.

Project Title: Baseline Flow, Gage Analysis & On-Line Tool to Support Restoration

Council Member(s): Department of Interior, US Geological Survey (USGS)

Project Start Date: 12/01/2016

Project End Date: 11/30/2023

Award Amount: \$5,549,800

Performance Narrative: In 2018, we took a more involved approach to the development of daily streamflow time series. While the approach is more complex numerically, we saw the opportunity to develop daily mean streamflow time series for the Gulf States and some surrounding areas as effort that would benefit not only the project, but also state partners. We opted to develop a continuous time series of daily mean streamflow for the period 1950 - 2010 for all of the HUC12 pour points in the study area (~9000). While this has been a bit more involved than the initial ideas started in 2017, it is both useful in the long-term for the project, and has been recognized by the states as information that will be of high-value to them. For this

project, we will be able to utilize this new data for quantifying flow alteration and support network analysis. In the Phase 2 large watershed assessment, we will be able to use the same datasets to support the development of flow-ecology models and DSS in phase 2. We have made strides this year developing the web mapping application for Phase 1. The application is currently founded on initial draft datasets for proof of concept and testing. As new, approved datasets come on-line, they will be added and functionality of the application increased accordingly. This application was demoed for the technical advisory committee in September 2018.

Project Title: Pensacola Bay Living Shoreline - Phase 1 (Planning)

Council Member(s): State of Florida, Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

Project Start Date: 01/01/2017

Project End Date: 03/31/2019

Award Amount: \$231,314

Performance Narrative: During the reporting period the sub-recipient, Escambia County, developed a scope of work to advertise for a contractor. The scope of work has been presented and approved by Naval Air Station (NAS) Pensacola authorities. Additionally, the draft scope of work was presented to the Gulf Coast Interagency Environmental Restoration Working Group (GCIERWG) involving representatives from Florida Department of Environmental Protection, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA Fisheries, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Escambia County staff has incorporated these comments received from the GCIERWG and NAS Pensacola into the final scope of work.

Project Title: Bayou DuLarge Ridge, Marsh and Hydrologic Restoration (Planning)

Council Member(s): U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Project Start Date: 02/23/2017

Project End Date: 12/31/2019

Award Amount: \$5,162,084

Performance Narrative: NRCS staff have completed a DRAFT Scope of Work (SOW) by which a design contractor will be selected to fully design the project. The SOW includes all design drawings, engineering support information, surveys, geotechnical analysis and magnetometer information needed to design the project. As part of this analysis, we have initiated a cultural and archaeological investigation, preliminary land rights investigation and oyster lease assessment for the project.

Project Title: Apalachicola Bay Oyster Restoration (Implementation)

Council Member(s): State of Florida, Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

Project Start Date: 04/01/2017

Project End Date: 07/01/2020

Award Amount: \$4,680,000

Performance Narrative: At the completion of the project implementation 317 acres of oyster reefs were restored using approximately 95,000 cubic yards of material. Shapefiles of the restored oyster reefs were created. A Memorandum of Understanding between the FDEP Division of Water Restoration's Deepwater Horizon program and the DEP Florida Coastal Office's Central Panhandle Aquatic Preserve program (CPAP) was executed on Sep. 20, 2017 for the post-implementation monitoring. CPAP developed an Implementation Plan and Schedule for the monitoring that identifies the location of the reefs with latitudes and longitudes and map; and the monitoring schedule and methodology.

Project Title: Bayou Chico Contaminated Sediment Removal-Planning, Design and Permitting

Council Member(s): State of Florida, Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

Project Start Date: 04/14/2017

Project End Date: 01/15/2020

Award Amount: \$356,850

Performance Narrative: Sub-recipient grant was executed between the FDEP and Escambia County for the County to implement the project. Since the issuance of the sub-recipient grant, Escambia County completed work to estimate the current volume of soft sediments in Bayou Chico. The report included 485 probes. Soft sediments ranged from 0-21.4 ft. The report estimates the current volume of soft sediment at 2 million yds³. Contamination levels are not yet known and therefore conclusions should not be drawn as to the level of contamination in the soft sediment volume estimate. Escambia County is working with the University of West Florida to develop a pilot project to get a better idea of the vertical distribution of contaminants. The data from these reports will be incorporated into the solicitation and Scope of Work to procure a consultant for the planning and design. The Updated Leveraged Funding will be updated based on the amount received at the close out of this grant or once the individual leveraged projects are completed.

Project Title: Mobile Bay National Estuary Program - Planning

Council Member(s): Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Project Start Date: 06/01/2017

Project End Date: 09/30/2019

Award Amount: \$358,000

Performance Narrative: 2018), EPA has overseen the sub-recipient (MBNEP) actions and activities to advance the project. MBNEP has been focused on soliciting and reviewing consultant and contractor proposals that will be preparing the following; (a) Twelve Mile creek stream restoration plan, (b) Environmental compliance documentation, and (c) Development of the Three Mile creek invasive species eradication plan. Work has started slower than anticipated and thus EPA will be requesting a "no-cost time extension" for this Interagency Agreement.

Project Title: Beach Haven – Joint Stormwater & Wastewater Improvement Project Phase II

Council Member(s): State of Florida, Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

Project Start Date: 06/15/2017

Project End Date: 12/31/2022

Award Amount: \$5,967,000

Performance Narrative: The completion of the design plans has been delayed as Escambia County is working with the engineer of record to incorporate lessons learned from the Beach Haven Phase I project. The County is currently reviewing the 100% complete plans to determine if additional changes are needed before approving them to move forward with the procurement of the construction firm.

Escambia County's engineer of record completed 100% design plans of Beach Haven Phase II. Escambia County is currently reviewing the plans. Once they have been approved by the County, they will be submitted. The engineering and design services are paid through co-funding from Escambia County Local Option Sales Tax and Emerald Coast Utilities Authority (ECUA). Procurement of a contractor for construction has not yet been initiated. Escambia County purchased a quanti-tray sealer to analyze water quality for bacteria. This monitoring will be included as part of the monitoring plan developed as part of the project. The Northwest Florida Water Management District has issued an Environmental Resource Permit (ERP) General Permit for the stormwater and sewer retrofit portion of the project. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has issues a NWP 43 (stormwater) and 12 (utility line). Once Escambia County approves the design plans, it will work with the permitting agencies to determine if modifications to the permits are required.

Project Title: Council Monitoring & Assessment Program Development (2 Interagency Agreements)

Council Member(s): Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Department of Interior, US Geological Survey (USGS)

Project Start Date: 06/15/2017

Project End Date: 06/14/2020

Award Amount: \$1,700,000

Performance Narrative:

The Program Advisory Team (PAT) holds conference calls every 3 weeks to discuss the status of tasks and activities and conduct planning for CMAP activities. Council Monitoring and Assessment Working Group (CMAWG) conference calls occur every 6 weeks. The first CMAWG meeting was held January 29-30, 2018. Quarterly conference calls have been set up for the Monitoring Coordination Committee (MCC), the first of which was held March 2, 2018. GOMA has hired a coordinator to facilitate the development of a monitoring Community of Practice (MCoP). The MCoP will support CMAP by informing monitoring needs and challenges, reviewing CMAWG recommendations and sharing lessons learned. There is ongoing coordination and communication with the GOMA coordinator and the PAT. Assumptions (criteria for either including monitoring programs in the inventory) were documented and vetted with the CMAWG. Existing data sources and inventories to be included in the CMAP inventory were compiled and vetted with the CMAWG and User Group Workshop participants. New programs suggested by the CMAWG and workshop participants were added to the list to be included in the inventory. Inventory attribute fields have been developed and vetted with the CMAWG and User Group Workshop participants. An internal process was developed to synthesize, record, and quality control information for the monitoring program inventory. Staff have been entering program information into the database (322 records completed to date) and expect to be done entering the initial list in September 2018. They will reach out to programs to verify information and/or obtain missing information. Community of Practice Coordination, Workshops and SAV Pilot: Two workshops were held targeting water quality (March 6-7, 2018, 37 attendees) and habitat monitoring and mapping data users (April 3-5, 2018, 53 attendees). The workshops explained the goals and objectives of CMAP and sought user input to needs and gaps. An Introductory Webinar on the MCoP was held by GOMA February 23, 2018. The first MCoP workshop occurred June 11th at the GOMA All Hands meeting.

Project Title: Gulf of Mexico Habitat Restoration via Conservation Corps Partnership

Council Member(s): Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Project Start Date: 06/15/2017

Project End Date: 09/30/2020

Award Amount: \$7,500,000

Performance Narrative: NOAA competed a Federal Funding Opportunity and awarded \$7 M to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to implement GulfCorps for three years. TNC subsequently

entered into contracts with The Corps Network and the Student Conservation Association to assist with training and program oversight. NOAA and TNC collaborated with each of the state RESTORE points of contact assigned by their respective RESTORE principal, to identify restoration projects for Year 1 GulfCorps work. Each state POC provided names for potential project sponsors from which specific project scopes and schedules were derived. NOAA and TNC worked with approximately 17 project sponsors to develop 20 project scopes for the Year 1 crews. The project sponsors assisted in the development of the project scopes by providing management plans, equipment/gear suggestions, training needs, existing compliance documents, and estimated number of days/weeks that crew members could work on sites during the work term (January 2018 through June 2018). The project scopes were compiled to gather the relevant information needed for the environmental compliance reviews, and also to act as the contractual limits of work for the conservation corps participating in Year 1 of GulfCorps. TNC contracted with five local conservation corps organizations to recruit, train, and mobilize crews to implement the projects in their respective Gulf state, 8-10 people per crew, for approximately 50 people. These organizations include: Conservation Corps of the Forgotten Coast in Apalachicola, FL; the Student Conservation Association in Mobile, AL; Climb CDC Conservation Corps in Gulfport, MS; Limitless Vistas, Inc. in New Orleans, LA; and American YouthWorks in Houston, TX. The Work Orders for Year 1 ended on June 30, 2018 giving most of the crews about 22 work weeks that included orientation, project-specific training, and project-related work. NOAA is currently completing web pages specific to GulfCorps work, and continuing to partner with RESTORE members to attend site visits and plan for the fall (Year 2) season of GulfCorps projects. State POCs have assisted NOAA and TNC with project/site prioritization for fall 2018, and project scope development has commenced. Recruiting and training will commence in early fall, and following the next orientations in September and October, the Year 2 crews will mobilize to their project sites. In Year 2, GulfCorps will double in size to include two, 8-10 person crews in each state, thus employing up to 100 people to conduct the next round of restoration projects. These projects will continue to meet stewardship needs on public lands such as invasive species removal, native plant revegetation, habitat protection, and prescribed fire preparation and implementation.

Project Title: Strategic Conservation Assessment of Gulf Coast Landscapes

Council Member(s): Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)

Project Start Date: 06/20/2017

Project End Date: 04/30/2020

Award Amount: \$1,842,583

Performance Narrative: To fulfill the need for project staffing, the Strategic Conservation Assessment (SCA) project team successfully hired a coordinator, ecological modeler, and GIS analyst in and launched immediately into addressing project objectives 1 (developing shared priorities) and 2 (developing the Conservation Prioritization Tool [CPT]) shortly thereafter. In progress toward the first two project objectives our project team reviewed approximately 300

existing conservation plans and identified shared priority attributes, which were geospatially cataloged and visualized in an online web-mapping environment (http://bit.ly/sca_gulf). These shared priorities were used to inform our first round of project charrettes, where stakeholders reviewed and refined shared priorities as related to Restore Goals, and identified measures under each priority attribute to be incorporated into the geospatial SCA tool. Charrettes took place in March – May 2018 (with a prototype charrette hosted in December 2017 in Alabama), but we report here on the charrette that took place on March 26, 2018, in Louisiana during this reporting period. Progress is ongoing and information gathered from the first round of charrettes is presently being incorporated into a comprehensive multi-criteria decision analysis framework for development of the objective 2 Conservation Prioritization Tool.

Project Title: Tate's Hell Strategy 1

Council Member(s): U.S. Department of Agriculture, US Forest Service (USFS) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Project Start Date: 06/20/2017

Project End Date: 10/15/2022

Award Amount: \$7,000,000

Performance Narrative: The US Forest Service (USFS) recently expanded an internal partnership with the Southern Research Station's (SRS) Center for Aquatic Technology Transfer (CATT) team to include the Southeastern Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP). SARP and CATT will plan Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) surveys and additional cross-drain surveys which are set to occur on the Apalachicola National Forest between October and November 2018. The partnership agreement funded CATT to assemble a team of specialists to assess all cross-drain structures (e.g., culverts, low-water crossings) on the Apalachicola National Forest and surrounding public lands which are linked to the landscape scale hydrologic assessment milestone. The Chesapeake Conservancy's Conservation Innovation Center (CIC) is providing assistance for the development of GIS and remote sensing workflows and landscape level products. The USFS met with CIC staff in May and developed a statement of work which includes assistance with prioritization of cross-drain structure restoration (based on data collected by CATT), initial investigation into updating prescribed fire and wildfire data and setting up a web-based mapping interface for collaboration. Work has already begun on this task and will support the Hydrologic Assessment and Regional Restoration Decision Support System (RRDSS) milestones. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a Participating Agreement (PA) were signed between the USFS and Florida A&M University (FAMU). Which establishes the new Center for Spatial Ecology and Restoration (CSER) which is a joint USFS-FAMU center that will be a critical component of Tate's Hell Strategy 1. USFS staff is working with the Vice President for Research at FAMU and staff with FAMU's Sustainability Institute to develop a CSER hiring plan to meet project goals and deliverables. Through this partnership FAMU has brought on a Remote Sensing analyst to process moderate and high resolution satellite and aerial imagery for

production of critical datasets for the Tate's Hell Strategy 1 project area. This partnership relates to all project aspects and milestones.

Project Title: Apalachicola Watershed Agriculture Water Quality Improvements

Council Member(s): State of Florida, Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

Project Start Date: 07/10/2017

Project End Date: 07/10/2022

Award Amount: \$2,219,856

Performance Narrative: Originally it was anticipated that the existing Landowner/Producer Template would be used for this project; however, after further consideration it was determined that an agreement specific to this award needed to be developed. Due to this, additional time was needed for updating the agreement template to reflect the applicable state and federal requirements and to allow time for review and approval by Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) Senior Management and Legal Office, prior to being utilized for the Program. Also, due to the second-tier sub-recipient's lack of knowledge and experience with administering federally funded programs, additional time and effort was required to ensure that the second-tier sub-recipient can fulfill all the requirements of the agreements before agreements with landowners/producers may commence. With this delay, it is anticipated that the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) will begin their work with the landowners/producers in August 2018. Work accomplished includes the execution of the sub-recipient agreement between Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and FDACS on February 20, 2018. Since the execution of the agreement, FDACS' Offices of Energy (OOE) and Agricultural Water Policy (OAWP) developed the Landowner/Producer Agreement template that will be utilized as the cost-share agreement for agricultural producers participating in the energy and water conservation project. FDACS OAWP executed the second-tier sub-recipient agreement with the Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) on June 14, 2018. FDACS OOE anticipates having their agreement with the SWCD finalized by July 20, 2018.

Project Title: Suwannee River Partnership Irrigation Water Enhancement Program (Implementation)

Council Member(s): State of Florida, Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

Project Start Date: 08/25/2017

Project End Date: 08/25/2022

Award Amount: \$2,884,000

Performance Narrative: It was originally anticipated that the existing Landowner/Producer Template would be used for this project; however, after further consideration it was determined

that an agreement specific to this award needed to be developed. Due to this, additional time was needed for updating the agreement template to reflect the applicable state and federal requirements and to allow time for review and approval by FDACS Senior Management and Legal Office, prior to being utilized for this project. Also, due to the second-tier sub-recipient's lack of knowledge and experience with administering federally funded programs, additional time and effort was required to ensure that the second-tier sub-recipient can fulfill all the requirements of the agreements before agreements with landowners/producers may commence. With this delay, it is anticipated that the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) will begin their work with the landowners/producers in August 2018. Execution of the sub-recipient agreement between FDEP and FDACS occurred on February 20, 2018. Since the execution of the agreement, FDACS' Offices of Energy (OOE) and Agricultural Water Policy (OAWP) developed the Landowner/Producer Agreement template that will be utilized as the cost-share agreement for agricultural producers participating in the energy and water conservation project. FDACS OAWP and OOE executed the second-tier sub-recipient agreements with the Suwannee County Conservation District (SWCD) on June 15 and June 21, 2018, respectively.

Project Title: Mississippi River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp (Planning)

Council Member(s): State of Louisiana

Project Start Date: 09/22/2017

Project End Date: 09/21/2020

Award Amount: \$14,190,000

Performance Narrative: The Mississippi River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project's objective is to restore and enhance the health and sustainability of the Maurepas Swamp through the reintroduction of seasonal Mississippi River inflow.

Awarding Funds for FPL 1 Restoration Projects and Programs during 2018

In 2018, the Council awarded funds for 16 Initial FPL projects, totaling \$42.99 million. The Initial FPL activities awarded funds in 2018 are listed below, along with links to additional information (including the projected duration of each activity). These projects and programs support planning, implementation and science activities that will provide on-the-ground ecological benefits to key Gulf watersheds, develop shovel-ready projects, and help build a strong science foundation for future decision-making. In 2019, the Council will continue to award funds for activities on the Initial FPL, while also conducting technical and financial oversight of existing awards.

Project Title: Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program (GCCRP) (Planning & Implementation) - Mississippi

Council Member(s): U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service

Project Start Date: 1/5/2018

Project End Date: 2/3/2023

Award Amount: \$1,500,000

Project Abstract: The Mississippi Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program focuses on restoring terrestrial habitats on the six MS coastal counties and improving water quality in waters flowing into the Gulf of Mexico. Restoration activities will take place on both Private & Eligible Public Lands within the following MS counties: George, Jackson, Hancock, Harrison, Pearl River, and Stone. Primary objectives of this project are restoration, enhancement, and protection of habitat while secondary objectives include, restoration, improvement and protection of water resources. This landscape scale project meets RESTORE Act and Comprehensive Plan priority criteria by substantially contributing to the restoration and protection of the natural resources and wildlife habitats of Gulf Coast ecosystems. These ecosystems provide habitat for numerous threatened and endangered plant and animal species. Our primary objective is the control of non-native invasive species, such as Cogongrass, through our NRCS practice code 315. Our secondary goal is to improve other habitat conditions by implementing the following practice codes: Brush Management (314); Herbaceous Weed Control (315); Prescribed Burning (338); Firebreak (394); Tree/Shrub Site Preparation (490); Tree/Shrub Establishment (612); and Forest Stand Improvement (666). The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) would oversee the technical and financial assistance for implementation of these NRCS conservation practices.

Project Title: [Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program \(GCCRP\) \(Planning & Implementation\) - Alabama](#)

Council Member(s): U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service

Project Start Date: 2/15/2018

Project End Date: 9/30/2026

Award Amount: \$1,500,000

Project Abstract: The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) will complete site specific conservation planning, engineering design, environmental evaluations, and conservation practice (best management practices or BMP) implementation on agricultural and forested lands in two coastal Alabama Counties. This program will reduce the discharge of sediments and pollutants from agricultural operations and associated critically eroding areas that drain to the Mobile Bay, Mississippi Sound, Bon Secour Bay and Perdido Bay. USDA and partners will work with landowners to implement conservation practices that will restore habitat, stabilize eroding areas, improve infiltration, and reduce pollutants (primarily sediment) in runoff.

Project Title: Tampa Bay National Estuary Program (Implementation)

Council Member(s): Environmental Protection Agency

Project Start Date: 2/22/2018

Project End Date: 1/31/2023

Award Amount: \$1,544,960

Project Abstract: The Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP)-RESTORE activities include 5 priority water quality and habitat improvement elements located throughout the Tampa Bay watershed which have been vetted by the local government and agency partners participating in TBEP. The five priority elements are:

1) Biosolids to Energy (City of St. Petersburg); 2) Copeland Park Stormwater Enhancements (City of Tampa); 3) Coastal Invasive Plant Removal/Cockroach Bay Aquatic Reserve (Hillsborough County); 4) Robinson Preserve Water Quality and Habitat Restoration (Manatee County); and 5) Ft Desoto Recirculation and Seagrass Recovery (Pinellas County).

Project Title: Lowermost Mississippi River Management Program (Planning)

Council Member(s): State of Louisiana, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority

Project Start Date: 3/6/2018

Project End Date: 9/30/2021

Award Amount: \$9,300,000

Project Abstract: The Lowermost Mississippi River from Baton Rouge to the Gulf of Mexico is a critical, multi-use resource for the nation and the State of Louisiana. The Lowermost Mississippi River Management Plan (LMRMP) is a large-scale program that will build the technical knowledge base needed to develop and implement a plan that moves the nation toward a holistic management framework for this important resource. A fundamental premise for the plan is that a sustainable navigation system requires a sustainable coast, and vice versa. This program will continue to refine our understanding of Mississippi River physical processes to improve navigation, reduce flood risk, and maximize river-based restoration benefits. The program is comprised of five technical elements: 1) Expanded Use and Development of Lowermost Mississippi River Models, 2) Subsidence investigations, 3) Impact of Storm Surge within the Mississippi River, 4) Geomorphology of LMR Lateral Bars, and 5) Dredged Material Management. The LMRMP will build upon and complement the Mississippi River Hydrodynamic and Delta Management Study, which included the development of single and multi-dimensional hydrodynamic and sediment transport models of the main river channel and passes. It will also coordinate a cross-calibration of these numerical models with the new Small Scale Physical Model at LSU. Outreach to key stakeholders, user groups, academia and the general public will be conducted throughout the entire program.

Project Title: Palm River Restoration Project Phase II, East McKay Bay (Implementation)

Council Member(s): State of Florida, Department of Environmental Protection

Project Start Date: 4/2/2018

Project End Date: 10/31/2021

Award Amount: \$856,430

Project Abstract: The Florida Department of Environmental Protection will provide funding to the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) to implement extensive habitat restoration, water quality improvements, and mitigation of erosion along the Palm River at the mouth of McKay Bay. The project focuses on improving water quality and enhancing upland and wetland areas on approximately 50 acres of SWFWMD land. It will remove exotic vegetation on two parcels, create and enhance wetlands, and build three stormwater management areas to provide water quality treatment for 436 acres of residential, commercial and industrial developed land.

Project Title: Plug Abandoned Oil and Gas Wells (Implementation)

Council Member(s): Department of Interior, National Park Service

Project Start Date: 04/25/2018

Project End Date: 04/01/2019

Award Amount: \$1,317,567

Project Abstract: This project was originally proposed as part of a larger project to plug wells, remove surface equipment, and reclaim surface acreage at National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife sites in Texas and Louisiana. Partial funding was provided to plug wells at Padre Island National Seashore (PAIS). In 2013, 11 oil and gas wells and their associated pads and roads were abandoned at PAIS. The NPS pursued litigation and other legal avenues to have these abandoned wells plugged, but the company relocated outside of the United States thereby protecting it from legal action. NPS has an agreement with the Railroad Commission of Texas (RRC), the state agency responsible for managing the state's oil and gas program, to plug and abandon oil and gas wells within PAIS. Through the use of a pass-through, the RRC as a sub-recipient will plug these 11 wells. While the original work was not fully funded, plugging the 11 wells eliminates the potential for contamination resulting in protection of water quality in adjacent waterways, improves habitat for dependent wildlife, and improves visitor safety, thereby meeting the RESTORE Council's goal of funding on-the-ground restoration activities in key watersheds across the Gulf and laying a foundation for comprehensive restoration and effective use of future funding opportunities. Additionally, a \$200,000.00 performance bond from the delinquent company will help co-fund(ed) this project.

Project Title: Gulf of Mexico Estuary Program (GMEP) (Planning)

Council Member(s): Environmental Protection Agency

Project Start Date: 6/25/2018

Project End Date: 4/30/2023

Award Amount: \$2,200,000

Project Abstract: This project will develop and stand-up a place-based estuary program encompassing the following bays in Florida’s northwest panhandle region: Perdido Bay, Pensacola Bay, and Escambia Bay.

Project Title: Alabama Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Restoration and Monitoring Program (Implementation)

Council Member(s): State of Alabama

Project Start Date: 7/30/2018

Project End Date: 9/30/2023

Award Amount: \$875,000

Project Abstract: The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) will complete a submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) restoration program in Perdido Bay, upper Mobile Bay, and lower Mobile/Tensaw River Delta; and an SAV comprehensive mapping and monitoring program for coastal Alabama. These programs will speed the recovery of areas that have known losses of SAV beds, either by prop scarring or natural disasters, and provide ADCNR with vital SAV status and trends data, allowing further investigation to the factors that influence historic SAV loss as well as observed fluctuations in SAV coverage. Additionally, mapping will provide critical SAV extent and species composition data for resource managers and regulatory agencies, better informing regulatory decisions, future restoration efforts and the need for additional long-term SAV monitoring, protection and restoration. The ADCNR will execute a subrecipient agreement with the Dauphin Island Sea Lab to complete all tasks as outlined in the project description.

Project Title: Texas Beneficial Use/Marsh Restoration

Council Member(s): State of Texas

Project Start Date: 7/31/2018

Project End Date: 5/31/2020

Award Amount: \$968,000

Project Abstract: The Beneficial Use/Marsh Restoration project is located in Jefferson and Galveston Counties Texas. It will facilitate beneficial use of dredged materials (BUDM) through careful site selection, survey data collection, preparation of engineering and design plans, environmental compliance and permitting. The primary goal is to create shovel-ready restoration sites that, when fully implemented, will transform areas that have subsided into open waters back to tidally influenced coastal wetlands. This method has proven to be a highly effective in restoring and creating habitat for fish and wildlife, improving water quality and enhancing natural storm buffers. The funding will provide for advance planning for three proposed projects: (1) Marsh Restoration in the Nelda Stark Unit of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's (TPWD's) Lower Neches WMA within the Sabine Lake-Neches River Watershed; (2) Marsh Restoration in the Salt Bayou Unit of the J.D. Murphree WMA in the Salt Bayou Watershed; and (3) Marsh Restoration in Pierce Marsh on West Bay in the Galveston Bay Estuary. Texas has a history of successful BUDM projects with cooperative agreements among state and federal natural resource agencies and the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in place through the Texas Coastal Management Program (CMP). The project proponent will coordinate with USACE and private dredging operations to identify potential source materials and timelines for placement of dredge material.

Project Title: Robinson Preserve Wetlands Restoration (Implementation)

Council Member(s): Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency

Project Start Date: 8/17/2018

Project End Date: 9/30/2023

Award Amount: \$1,790,546

Project Abstract: The Robinson Preserve Wetlands Restoration project is part of the Connecting Coastal Waters (CCW) initiative NOAA is leading with partners to restore the extent, functionality, and resiliency of several Gulf Coast wetlands. The CCW projects seek to restore and enhance ecosystem resilience, sustainability, and natural defenses by reestablishing natural hydrology and connectivity between freshwater and marine habitats in priority areas across the Gulf Coast. The Robinson Preserve Wetlands Restoration project is located on a 150-acre parcel within the Robinson Preserve in Manatee County, FL. This project will implement restoration activities, conduct monitoring to assess restoration outcomes, engage in outreach and educational activities, and develop a hydrologic restoration project inventory for the Tampa Bay watershed. When completed, the project will provide approximately 57.6 acres of coastal upland habitat and 60.6 acres of wetland, open water sub-tidal, and open freshwater habitats, for a total of 118.2 acres of restored productive habitat.

Project Title: Marsh Restoration in Fish River, Weeks Bay, Oyster Bay & Meadows Tract (Planning) - Fish River and Weeks Bay Marsh

Council Member(s): Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency

Project Start Date: 8/17/2018

Project End Date: 7/31/2020

Award Amount: \$333,651

Project Abstract: The purpose of this project is to complete the planning, modeling/flow regime analysis, engineering, and design required to restore hydrology and improve water quality to 70 acres of estuarine tidal marsh and tidal creeks at the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) “dead end canals” site in Baldwin County, Alabama. Completion of these activities will provide the NOAA Restoration Center with a full understanding of the construction alternatives at this site, complete with environmental impact and benefits metrics. This information will provide the NOAA Restoration Center with the necessary information to seek Category 2 funds for implementation.

Project Title: [Marsh Restoration in Fish River, Weeks Bay, Oyster Bay & Meadows Tract \(Planning\) - Meadows Tract](#)

Council Member(s): Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency

Project Start Date: 8/17/2018

Project End Date: 7/31/2020

Award Amount: \$309,651

Project Abstract: The purpose of this project is to complete the planning, modeling/flow regime analysis, engineering, design, and permitting required to restore the hydrology of 250 acres of tidal freshwater and brackish marsh located east of County Road 1 in Baldwin County, Alabama, known as the Meadows Tract. Completion of these activities will provide the NOAA Restoration Center with a full understanding of the construction alternatives at this site, complete with environmental impact and benefits metrics. This information will provide the NOAA Restoration Center with the necessary information to seek Category 2 funds for implementation.

Project Title: [NOAA Marsh Restoration in Fish River, Weeks Bay, Oyster Bay & Meadows Tract \(Planning\) - Oyster Bay](#)

Council Member(s): Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency

Project Start Date: 8/17/2018

Project End Date: 7/31/2020

Award Amount: \$264,651

Project Abstract: The NOAA Restoration Center will complete planning, design, and engineering required to restore the hydrology of 150 acres of estuarine tidal marsh and brackish marsh that

historically drained south through two tidal creeks into Oyster Bay and Bon Secour Bay, located in the City of Gulf Shores, Baldwin County, Alabama. Completion of these activities will provide the NOAA Restoration Center with a full understanding of the construction alternatives at this site, environmental impact and benefits metrics; and the necessary information to seek Category 2 funds for implementation. Replacing the existing culverts at the site with larger box culverts or bridges will improve flow, maximize tidal exchange, restore aquatic species movement, and improve overall function to 150 acres of adjacent wetlands.

Project Title: Coastal Alabama Comprehensive Watershed Restoration Planning Project (Planning)

Council Member(s): State of Alabama

Project Start Date: 9/14/2018

Project End Date: 9/13/2022

Award Amount: \$4,342,500

Project Abstract: The State of Alabama will oversee the distribution of RESTORE funds to the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) to complete comprehensive Watershed Management Plans (WMPs) for watersheds identified as priorities in coastal Alabama by the MBNEP’s Science Advisory Committee and Project Implementation Committee. The planning process is designed to build community partnerships; characterize current conditions in each watershed; identify goals and solutions for reducing pollutants entering the bay, sound, and Gulf waters; and establish implementation programs that include a schedule, interim milestones, criteria to measure progress, a monitoring component, information/education programs, and identification of technical and financial assistance needed to implement the plans.

Making Projects “Shovel-Ready”

In addition to approving funds for specific projects and programs, the Initial FPL also lists activities the Council has identified as priorities for potential future funding. This category of activities (referred to as Category 2 activities) are projects and programs the Council believes have merit, but which were not ready for implementation funding because the requisite environmental compliance had not been completed. The Council set aside a pool of available funds for potential use on Category 2 activities, pending Council approval. The Council also approved planning funds to address the environmental laws applicable to these Category 2 activities. Once these laws have been addressed for a Category 2 activity, the Council can vote to approve funding for that activity through an amendment to the Initial FPL. Such a vote only occurs after public comments have been considered by the Council. In 2018, the Council amended the Initial FPL to approve implementation funding for the following restoration project that was originally in Category 2:

Robinson Preserve Wetlands Restoration

Location: Florida

Sponsor: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Funding approved: \$1,790,546

Sub-Awards to Non-Governmental Organizations

The RESTORE Act requires that, for purposes of awards made under the Council-Selected Restoration Component, a State or federal award recipient may make a grant or subaward to or enter into a cooperative agreement with a non-governmental entity that equals or exceeds 10 percent of the total amount of the award provided to the State or federal award recipient only if certain notice requirements are met. The Council has provided notice in advance of each such proposed subaward through the *Federal Register* and to specified Congressional Committees. In addition, the Council must include the name, purpose and amount of each qualifying subaward in its Annual Report to Congress. The below table provides the required information.

Table 2. 2018 Subawards to Nongovernmental Entities that Exceed 10 Percent of an Award

Name of Subrecipient	Purpose and Amount of Subaward
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.	<p>Under an interagency agreement (IAA) with the Council for the Bahia Grande Wetland System Restoration (planning) project, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Restoration Center, Department of Commerce, will complete the planning and design necessary to restore natural hydrology to approximately 600 acres of estuarine tidal and open water in the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. The ultimate goal of the project is to reconnect the bisected watershed via culvert installation under Highway 100 so that freshwater will flow into wetlands adjacent to Laguna Larga. Increased freshwater inflows will increase the wildlife benefits of the wetlands and the wildlife and estuarine fishery benefits in the Bahia Grande system.</p> <p>The NOAA Restoration Center will provide a subaward in the amount of \$313,115.31 to Ducks Unlimited, Inc. to complete planning, design, and engineering for this restoration project in the Laguna Atascosa Wildlife Refuge. Notice of this subaward was originally published in the <i>Federal Register</i> on December 12, 2018 (83 FR 63889).</p>
Mississippi Wildlife Federation and Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation	<p>Under a grant from the Council, the Mississippi Department of Environmental (MDEQ) is implementing the Extension, Outreach, and Education (EOE) grant program to fund extension, outreach, and education programs about the benefits of restoration and conservation work, specifically the connection between upstream land conservation and downstream estuarine and marine ecosystem benefits. The EOE grant program will leverage existing education programs in Mississippi, as well as strongly encourage public/private partnerships.</p> <p>As part of this project, MDEQ will provide a subaward in the amount of \$84,150 to the Mississippi Wildlife Federation for the enhancement of the Mississippi Habitat Stewards Program. Through the subaward, the Mississippi Wildlife Federation will expand an existing curriculum that relays the ecosystem benefits of upstream land conservation, habitat restoration and water quality restoration, for youth, ages 9-12; local high school environmental clubs; and volunteers.</p>

Name of Subrecipient	Purpose and Amount of Subaward
	<p>MDEQ will also provide a subaward in the amount of \$99,050 to the Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation (PGCLC). The PGCLC will conduct an outreach initiative that includes three components: the development of science-based communication products for use with a general audience that summarize and explain the benefits of land conservation in the Gulf coast region in lay terminology; field visits that bring together stakeholders to illustrate the connectivity that land conservation practices along our coastal streams have to water quality in the northern Gulf of Mexico and to our marine and estuarine living resources; and the development of a short digital film that illustrates the connection between riparian and wetland forests and marine and estuarine living resources in the northern Gulf of Mexico.</p> <p>Notice of these subawards was originally published in the <i>Federal Register</i> on July 19, 2018 (83 FR 34135).</p>
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	<p>Under an IAA with the Council for the Robinson Preserve Wetlands Restoration (Implementation) project, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Restoration Center, Department of Commerce, will implement restoration activities, conduct monitoring to assess restoration outcomes, engage in outreach and educational activities, and develop a hydrologic restoration project inventory for the Tampa Bay watershed.</p> <p>The NOAA Restoration Center will provide a subaward in the amount of \$1,624,625 to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to implement restoration activities, conduct monitoring to assess restoration outcomes, engage in outreach and educational activities, and develop a hydrologic restoration project inventory for the Tampa Bay watershed. When completed, the project will provide an estimated 57.6 acres of coastal upland habitat and 60.6 acres of wetland, open water sub-tidal, and open freshwater habitats, for a total of 118.2 acres of restored productive habitat. Notice of this subaward was originally published in the <i>Federal Register</i> on December 12, 2018 (83 FR 63889).</p>

4.3. Promoting Coordination and Collaboration

Commitment and Planning Support Funded Priority List

The 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update, developed from a comprehensive evaluation of the Initial FPL process emphasizes the importance of coordination and collaboration among the Council members and with other programs in order to leverage resources and maximize the effectiveness of available restoration funding. During 2018, the Council approved the Funded Priorities List: Comprehensive Plan Commitment and Planning Support (CPS FPL). A major challenge to Gulf-wide ecosystem restoration is coordinating efforts within each state, among Council members, among stakeholders, and across the Gulf restoration efforts. Prior to the CPS FPL, there were no designated funding stream to support Council member efforts to plan and coordinate restoration activities under the Council-Selected Restoration Component. Historically, Council members had to rely upon general, tax-generated or appropriated funds to support their work on matters such as FPL development and the Comprehensive Plan update.

The CPS FPL funding provides the necessary resources for Council members to stimulate and encourage the coordination and collaboration necessary to achieve the commitments of the Comprehensive Plan. Specifically, the CPS FPL funding will provide funds necessary for members to:

- Strengthen ecosystem restoration proposals for future FPL(s) under the Council-Selected Restoration Component;
- Enhance the efficiency of future FPL development processes; and
- Facilitate long-term planning and leveraging efforts across funding streams.

The CPS FPL is intended to ensure the Council members have the resources needed to develop highly effective projects and programs for future funding under the Council-Selected Restoration Component. Under the CPS FPL, each of the eleven Council members may apply for up to \$500,000 per year for up to three years and up to \$300,000 per year for two years thereafter. This equals up to \$23.1 million, or 1.44% of the total funds available (not including interest) in the Council-Selected Restoration Component. As with the Initial FPL, the CPS FPL includes a clause that incentivizes savings and efficiency by enabling the Council to apply unused planning funds to projects and programs sponsored by the member that achieves the savings.

The Council believes that investing a relatively small amount of resources in planning can ensure that restoration projects selected for funding will yield greater ecosystem benefits in the future. The Council will review the effectiveness of this CPS FPL funding at year four and consider whether extending planning and commitment support efforts beyond the five-year period is needed to continue to meet the Comprehensive Plan commitments.

In approving the CPS FPL, the Council provided the opportunity for its members to receive the necessary funds to enhance collaboration, coordination, public engagement and use of best available science in developing and selecting restoration projects. Council members began using

these CPS FPL funds to support the collaboration and other planning activities needed to develop effective project and program proposals for the next round of funding decisions, which is scheduled to take place in early 2020. Nine CPS awards providing \$18.7 million over the next five years, were awarded to members in 2018 for CPS activities as described below.

Project Title: Commitment and Planning Support – Florida

Council Member(s): State of Florida

Project Start Date: 4/23/2018

Project End Date: 3/31/2023

Award Amount: \$2,093,880

Project Abstract: The purpose of this project is to enhance collaboration, coordination, public engagement and the use of best available science to more effectively meet the requirements of the RESTORE Act Council-Selected Restoration Component, meet the commitments of the Comprehensive Plan Update, and address associated planning needs for developing future Funded Priorities Lists (FPLs). Early activities will focus on identifying priority projects and partners that fit within the broader vision for coastal Florida in order to develop proposals for the next FPL. The State will take a stepwise approach to planning and collaboration activities over the 5-year period of this award to meet the near-term need to develop the strongest proposals as possible for the next FPL while setting the foundation for long-term restoration success. Because planning is inherently iterative, these CPS funds will be administered in a way that allows the flexibility needed as the planning process proceeds. To that end, more work plans for subsequent years will be developed as part of each year’s activities

Project Title: Commitment and Planning Support—Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority

Council Member(s): State of Louisiana

Project Start Date: 5/16/2018

Project End Date: 5/15/2023

Award Amount: \$2,100,000

Project Abstract: The purpose of this project is to enhance collaboration, coordination, public engagement and the use of best available science to more effectively meet the requirements of the RESTORE Act Council-Selected Restoration Component, meet the commitments of the Comprehensive Plan Update, and address associated planning needs for developing future Funded Priorities Lists (FPLs). Initially, CPRA, along with contractors, will identify priority projects, partners, and available sources of funding consistent with the Coastal Master Plan and Council

goals and objectives appropriate for the next FPL. To allow flexibility with the planning funds, work plans will be developed each year for activities in future years.

Project Title: Commitment and Planning Support – Alabama

Council Member(s): State of Alabama

Project Start Date: 5/16/2018

Project End Date: 5/15/2023

Award Amount: \$2,100,000

Project Abstract: The purpose of this project is to enhance collaboration, coordination, public engagement, and the use of best available science to more effectively meet the requirements of the RESTORE Act Council-Selected Restoration Component, meet the commitments of the Comprehensive Plan Update, and address associated planning needs for developing future Funded Priorities Lists (FPLs). The State of Alabama will draw and build upon existing partnerships and collaborative endeavors, including the Management Conference of the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program to develop portfolios of projects for inclusion on future FPLs that will provide significant benefits for the natural resources of Coastal Alabama. Initial grant activities will be focused on identifying priority projects that present opportunities for cross-State and/or Federal collaboration and/or projects that fill an existing gap or address a critical ecosystem need/opportunity, to support the development of FPL proposals. The State will take a stepwise approach to planning and collaboration activities over the 5-year period of this award to meet the near-term need to develop strong proposals for future FPLs while setting the foundation for long-term restoration success. Because planning is inherently iterative, these CPS funds will be administered in a way that allows the flexibility needed as the planning process proceeds. To that end, more work plans for subsequent years will be developed as part of each year’s activities.

Project Title: Commitment and Planning Support – DHS / U.S. Coast Guard

Council Member(s): Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Coast Guard

Project Start Date: 6/1/2018

Project End Date: 5/31/2023

Award Amount: \$1,964,776

Project Abstract: The purpose of this project is to enhance collaboration, coordination, public engagement and the use of best available science to more effectively meet the requirements of the RESTORE Act Council-Selected Restoration Component, meet the commitments of the Comprehensive Plan Update, and address associated planning needs for developing future Funded Priorities Lists (FPLs). The Department of Homeland Security, through the United States

Coast Guard, will build upon existing partnerships to strengthen collaboration between Regional and Area Response Committees and Council members to determine the need to better integrate spill resiliency and acute pollution response readiness into restoration planning. The Coast Guard will take a stepwise approach to planning and collaboration activities over the 5-year period of this award to meet the near-term need to develop the strongest proposals as possible for the next FPL while setting the foundation for long-term restoration success. Because planning is inherently iterative, these CPS funds will be administered in a way that allows the flexibility needed as the planning process proceeds. To that end, the collaboration strategies directly connected to processes and engagements of bucket 2 efforts for subsequent years will be developed as part of each year's activities to build upon the progress, success and lessons learned in each year.

Project Title: Commitment and Planning Support - Texas

Council Member(s): State of Texas

Project Start Date: 6/1/2018

Project End Date: 5/31/2023

Award Amount: \$2,100,000

Project Abstract: The purpose of this five year plan is to work in coordination with a team of Texas coastal experts, elected officials, representatives for NRDA and NFWF, the four Gulf states, federal entities and the public, using the best available science, in meeting the requirements of the RESTORE Act Council-Selected Restoration Component and the commitments of the Comprehensive Plan update in 2016. The result will address and determine planning needs and identify project proposals for the upcoming Funded Priority Lists (FPLs) and to set up the foundation for successful long-term restoration projects. The State will hire a contractor to conduct planning and collaboration activities over this 5-year period to determine the highest level of restoration needs along the Texas coast, as well as the Gulf coast, and to provide the basis for a 10-year Strategy approach for long-term restoration across Texas and the other Gulf of Mexico States.

Project Title: Commitment and Planning Support—Mississippi

Council Member(s): State of Mississippi

Project Start Date: 6/8/2018

Project End Date: 6/7/2023

Award Amount: \$2,100,000

Project Abstract: The purpose of this project is to enhance collaboration, coordination, public engagement and the use of best available science to effectively meet the requirements of the

RESTORE Act Council-Selected Restoration Component, meet the commitments of the Comprehensive Plan Update, and address associated planning needs for developing future Funded Priorities Lists (FPLs). The State of Mississippi will build upon existing partnerships and collaboration pathways developed through its existing Deepwater Horizon restoration program, administered by the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ). Early activities will focus on identifying priority projects and partners in order to develop proposals for the next FPL. The State of Mississippi will take a stepwise approach to planning and collaboration activities over the 5-year period of this award to meet the near-term need to develop proposals for the next FPL while setting the foundation for long-term restoration success. Because planning is iterative, these Commitment and Planning Support (CPS) funds will be administered in a way that allows the flexibility needed as the planning process proceeds. To that end, work plans for subsequent years will be developed as part of each year's activities.

Project Title: Commitment and Planning Support

Council Member(s): Department of Interior

Project Start Date: 7/18/2018

Project End Date: 7/15/2023

Award Amount: \$2,100,000

Project Abstract: DOI is requesting CPS funding to plan for future on-the-ground restoration projects for 2020 and beyond with fellow RESTORE Council members, RESTORE Council staff and the public. Early CPS activities will focus on identifying priority projects and partners that fit within the broader RESTORE Council vision for Gulf restoration in order to develop proposals for the next Funded Priorities List (FPL). Annual work plans will be developed for each year's activities. Progress will be reviewed annually both to ensure effective and efficient use of CPS funds and to provide information to support future FPL projects.

Project Title: Commitment and Planning Support—United States Department of Agriculture

Council Member(s): U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service

Project Start Date: 8/8/2018

Project End Date: 7/15/2023

Award Amount: \$2,100,000

Project Abstract: The purpose of this project is to enhance collaboration, coordination, public engagement, and the use of best available science to more effectively meet the requirements of the RESTORE Act Council-Selected Restoration Component, meet the commitments of the Comprehensive Plan Update, and address associated planning needs for developing future Funded Priorities Lists. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) will build upon

existing partnerships and collaboration pathways developed through its existing structure. Early activities will focus on working with other Council members to identify priority watersheds, restoration partners, and local stakeholders that fit within the broader vision for improved water quality and wildlife habitat to develop proposals for the next FPL. USDA will work in collaboration with other Council members to take a stepwise approach to planning and collaboration activities over the 5-year period of this award to meet the near-term need to develop the strongest proposals possible for the next FPL while setting the foundation for long-term restoration success. Because planning is inherently iterative, these CPS funds will be administered in a way that allows the flexibility needed as the planning process proceeds. To that end, more work plans for subsequent years will be developed as part of each year's activities. USDA will utilize the CPS funds to support a personnel service contract; however, USDA staff will be substantially involved.

Project Title: Commitment and Planning Support

Council Member(s): Environmental Protection Agency

Project Start Date: 8/15/2018

Project End Date: 6/30/2023

Award Amount: \$2,068,820

Project Abstract: This project will enhance collaboration, coordination, public engagement and use of best available science to more effectively meet the requirements of the RESTORE Act Council-Selected Restoration Component, meet the commitments of the Comprehensive Plan Update, and address associated planning needs for developing future Funded Priorities Lists (FPLs). The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will build upon existing partnerships and collaboration pathways with the RESTORE Council member designees and alternates in the Gulf Coast States (TX; LA; MS; AL; and FL) and the six Federal agencies (Army; DOC; DOI; USCG; and USDA); NGOs in the Gulf Coast region; and estuary programs in the Gulf Coast region. Early activities will focus on identifying priority projects and partners that fit within the broader vision for each of the Gulf Coast States in order to collaboratively develop proposals for the next FPL. The EPA will take a stepwise approach to planning and collaboration activities over the 5-year period of this award to meet the near-term need to collaborate and support each state in developing the strongest proposals as possible for the next FPL while setting the foundation for long-term restoration success. Because planning is inherently iterative, these CPS funds will be administered in a way that allows the flexibility needed as the planning process proceeds. To that end, more work plans for subsequent years will be developed as part of each year's activities.

Building on a Foundation of Collaboration: Moving Towards FPL 3 in 2020

The RESTORE Council is using a collaborative process to help ensure that Council-Selected Restoration Component (Bucket 2) funded projects and programs complement restoration being accomplished through other funding streams. The funding available through the Council, as well

as the other DWH-related funding sources (including other components of the RESTORE Act, Natural Resource and Damage Assessment (DWH NRDA), and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund (NFWF GEBF)) presents an unprecedented opportunity to restore Gulf ecosystem conditions and functions, representing one of the most substantial investments in landscape-level restoration in U.S. history. However, these funds will not fully address all the ecosystem restoration needs of the Gulf given the multiple stressors impacting the region, ranging from man-made sources like the DWH oil spill disaster, water quality/quantity issues and the annual offshore hypoxic zone, as well as naturally-occurring impacts including hurricanes. Because of these large-scale stressors and ever-changing conditions of these coastal environments, it is infeasible to restore the Gulf to conditions that were present at a specific time in the past. By working collaboratively among the Council members and with other DWH-related funding sources, as well as working with other federal, state, and philanthropic funds, great strides can be achieved to increase the resiliency of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem against these stressors.

The RESTORE Council intends to develop FPLs approximately every three years until all funds in the Trust Fund are disbursed. Beginning with FPL 3, future FPLs will be presented within the context of a funding strategy (Funding Strategy). The Funding Strategy divides Bucket 2 (\$1.6 billion plus interest) into 4 categories, 1) Category 1 projects and/or programs, 2) Category 2 projects and/or programs, 3) Future FPL Planning Framework and 4) Future Decisions (each category is described below).

Bucket 2 funds will, in general, move through the aforementioned categories - from “Future Decisions” to “Category 1” - over successive FPL funding cycles until all funds are dedicated to specific Category 1 projects and programs. Each category represents an allocation (or planned allocation) from the entire amount of money to be deposited over the life of the Trust Fund for Bucket 2. The purpose of presenting each future FPL as part of the Funding Strategy is to provide context for the Council’s funding decisions over time.

FPL Category 1 activities are projects and programs that have been approved for Bucket 2 funding. To be approved in Category 1, a project or program must have the documentation demonstrating that all applicable environmental laws have been addressed. For example, a construction project would need documentation demonstrating compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and other applicable laws. Such approval requires a RESTORE Council vote as set forth in the RESTORE Act.²

² In addition, before funds are obligated for an approved project via a grant or interagency agreement, the project must meet all other administrative and national policy requirements applicable to federal assistance, including 2 CFR part 200, the Council’s Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions, and other terms applicable to a federal award.

FPL Category 2 activities are Council priorities designated for further review and potential future funding. These are projects and/or programs that are not yet in a position to be approved by the Council, but which the Council considers to be worthy of potential future funding. In the 2015 Initial FPL, the Category 2 activities lacked the environmental compliance documentation needed for Council approval. As with the 2015 Initial FPL, funding will be budgeted for potential use on Category 2 activities at the time of FPL 3 approval, but the Council will not be committed to such activities. As appropriate, the Council will review the activities in Category 2 to determine whether to: (1) move an activity to Category 1 and approve it for funding, (2) remove it from Category 2 and any further consideration, or (3) continue to include it in Category 2. In these reviews, the Council can consider feasibility, environmental compliance and scientific, technical, policy and/or other related issues. A Council vote is required to move an activity from Category 2 to Category 1.

The combined total for funding approved in Category 1 and budgeted for potential use on Category 2 projects will not exceed the total amount of Bucket 2 funding available in the Trust Fund at the time of a Council vote to approve FPL 3. A project or program need not be in Category 2 prior to being approved in Category 1, provided that all applicable environmental laws have been addressed.

The third category of FPL funding is the Planning Framework. The Planning Framework category is a new element of the FPL process and is being used for the first time in the development of FPL 3. This framework identifies priority approaches and techniques within geographic focus areas of the Gulf for planning of projects and programs. In the future, the Planning Framework will be included as part of each FPL. The Planning Framework will be adapted over time to guide the development of subsequent FPLs based on best available science, adaptive management, and other planning considerations.

The fourth category of FPL funding, Future Decisions, represents the process by which decisions will be made for all remaining funds anticipated from future payments. This category includes all future funds that are not prioritized toward a particular project, program, geographic region or approach. Amounts in this category will move over time through future Planning Frameworks and ultimately become Category 1 investments in projects and programs, through a science-based adaptive management strategy.

Planning Framework

The Planning Framework serves as a “bridge” from one FPL to the next. It is not intended to describe all of the restoration needs of the Gulf. Rather, the Planning Framework identifies priorities that will strategically link past and future restoration funding decisions. As the 2015 Initial FPL focused on Comprehensive Plan goals related to habitat and water quality, the Planning Framework will provide an indication of the types of resources, habitats, and geographic areas where the RESTORE Council will focus in a given FPL. In this way, this first Planning Framework draft signals priorities designed to continue building on previous investments in habitat and water quality, while expanding opportunities to meet Comprehensive Plan goals and

objectives in the future. Thus, the Planning Framework also serves as a “bridge” between the Council’s overarching goals and objectives identified in the 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update and the specific restoration projects and programs approved in subsequent FPLs.

Best Available Science and Data Systems

Under the RESTORE Act, The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) is required to “undertake projects and programs, using the Best Available Science (BAS) that would restore and protect the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, coastal wetlands, and economy of the Gulf Coast.” BAS is defined in the RESTORE Act as science that “maximizes the quality, objectivity, and integrity of information, including statistical information; uses peer-reviewed and publicly available data; and clearly documents and communicates risks and uncertainties in the scientific basis for such projects.” In 2018, the Council engaged in a variety of activities that promote enhanced application of BAS at all stages of project/program development.

Best Available Science Reviews

The Council’s Initial Funded Priorities List utilized voluntary, confidential and external mail-in reviews to ensure all proposals were developed using Best Available Science. To follow through with the Council’s comprehensive plan commitments to revise this process for Funded Priority List 3, Council staff developed an updated BAS Review Process that incorporates an internal BAS Proposal Review Panel in addition to external mail-in reviews. This panel, comprised of technical experts from each Council-member agency, will also review proposal application materials, including the external mail-in reviews.

Monitoring Progress, Success, & Performance

In its Comprehensive Plans, the Council has committed to delivering results, measuring impacts, and implementing/improving adaptive management. Ongoing coordination around science and monitoring has already reaped tangible benefits such as: alignment of overlapping tasks across entities, shared work products, and plans for future leveraging of shared resources.

Funded under the initial FPL, the Council Monitoring and Assessment Program (CMAP) is a network of diverse experts who collaborate around Gulf-wide regional monitoring to measure impacts of investments in restoration. The Council Monitoring and Assessment Workgroup (CMAWG), comprised of technical staff from each Council member agency, is partially supported by CMAP funds and will largely be responsible for developing monitoring standards and protocol recommendations for RESTORE Council approval. In 2018, Council Staff and CMAWG members updated the Observational Data Plan Guidance to assist projects and programs in providing the Council with a plan for data collection and compilation. Data will be used to evaluate if funded projects are meeting or exceeding project goals and restoration targets.

Enhanced Access to Information through Data Systems

Data collected for Council-funded activities can only be useful for reporting and evaluation if users are able to find the data, assess its utility, and understand how it was generated. To enhance current and future use of data, Council staff and partners developed the Council Metadata Records Library and Information Network (MERLIN) in 2018. MERLIN is an online metadata records tool developed in partnership with US Geological Survey and NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information. MERLIN houses metadata-- records that describe information about data. The development of this tool supports the Council's 2018 approval of the use of the ISO 19115 metadata standard for all Council funded projects to promote consistency in the data collection for Council-funded activities.

Enhancing Environmental Compliance Efficiency through Interagency Collaboration

The RESTORE Council is an active member of the Gulf Coast Interagency Environmental Restoration Working Group's (GCIERWG), which was formed to help achieve more effective and efficient environmental reviews of Gulf ecosystem restoration projects. Improved environmental reviews should then result in more timely restoration implementation. Formed in recognition of the critical need for increased regulatory collaboration through early and consistent interagency coordination and prioritization of restoration work across funding streams, GCIERWG coordinates through standing monthly interagency conference calls and is currently led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) assisted by Council staff.

Until this year the workgroup was comprised of only federal members including representation from the U.S. Departments of Army, Agriculture, Commerce, the Interior, and the Environmental Protection Agency. In mid-2018, the Gulf states were invited to participate in GCIERWG to increase the group's utility and inclusiveness moving forward.

In 2018, GCIERWG continued two interagency regulatory clearinghouse pilots (the [Pensacola Bay Living Shoreline – Phase 1 project](#) sponsored by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection) and the [Golden Triangle Marsh Creation project](#) sponsored by the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana. These pilot efforts are demonstrating both the utility and efficiency of early, field-level collaborative technical review during restoration project planning. Both Florida and Louisiana have expressed that the assistance of GCIERWG proved to be very valuable, and they have an interest in working to potentially expand this pilot approach. Also in 2018, NOAA elected to dedicate a portion of its upcoming CPS FPL funding over the next several years to work with GCIERWG to identify, refine and utilize tools and approaches to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and transparency of environmental compliance to accelerate achievement of ecosystem benefits.

5. Spill Impact Component Accomplishments

5.1. Background

In addition to the Council-Selected Restoration Component funding, the remaining 30 percent of the Trust Fund under the Council's purview is allocated to the States under the Spill Impact Component, according to a formula established by the Council and implemented through a regulation. These funds are spent according to individual State Expenditure Plans (SEPs) that contribute to the overall economic and ecological recovery of the Gulf. The SEPs must adhere to four basic criteria set forth in the RESTORE Act and are subject to approval by the Council in accordance with those criteria. On December 15, 2015, the Council published the Spill Impact Component regulation, which set forth allocation for each State. These allocations became effective on April 12, 2016, following entry of the Consent Decree.

5.2. Approving State Expenditure Plans

Once a SEP is approved, funding for activities in the SEP is disbursed to the respective State via Council grants when the requisite funds become available in the Trust Fund and upon application by the State. As part of the grant process, all activities for which funding is sought are carefully reviewed to ensure consistency with the approved SEP and compliance with the RESTORE Act and all other applicable requirements. Funding for implementation activities is disbursed to the State after verification of compliance with all applicable federal environmental and other laws. Funding for planning activities in the SEP will be disbursed after verification of a direct relationship to the Spill Impact Component criteria.

Spill Impact Component funds are disbursed to the Gulf States via grants after the Council Chair has approved of the given state's SEP. By the end of fiscal year 2018, the Council had approved SEPs and amendments for Louisiana and Mississippi; the Florida SEP; and planning SEPs for Texas, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. (Planning SEPs are used to fund the development of SEPs.) The Council has also approved a Stand-Up SEP for Florida, which funds administrative activities for implementation of the Florida SEP. These SEP approvals total \$822,799,088, which is approximately 51 percent of the total funding available to the Gulf States under the Spill Impact Component.

Spill Impact Component Awards 2018 Progress Reports

In 2018, the Council awarded \$35.6 million in grant funding for implementation of approved SEPs. These 2018 grant awards are summarized below:

Project Title: Mississippi Gulf Coast Water Quality Improvement Program

Council Member(s): State of Mississippi

Project Start Date: 3/15/2018

Project End Date: 7/31/2023

Award Amount: \$14,326,789

Project Abstract: The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (RESTORE Council) has identified restoration of water quality as a restoration goal. Further, as a result of multiple stakeholder engagement forums the State of Mississippi has prioritized the improvement of water quality for promoting ecosystem health and restoring and revitalizing Mississippi's economy. Restoration and improvement of water quality, as a natural resource, will benefit the marine/coastal ecosystems, habitats, and fisheries, as well as the economy of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Region. This program will support the restoration of water quality of Mississippi's coastal water resources by targeting stormwater sources, discharges, and/or wastewater improvements that will result in the improvement of water quality and the restoration and protection of natural resources. Efforts to achieve such improvements will include enhancing the State's understanding of source water quality problems, implementing upgrades, repairs, and/or construction activities associated with stormwater and wastewater systems to restore water quality and promote ecosystem health.

Project Title: Houma Navigation Canal Lock Complex (Planning)

Council Member(s): State of Louisiana

Project Start Date: 3/19/2018

Project End Date: 5/29/2020

Award Amount: \$18,520,214

Project Abstract: The objectives of the current phase for the Houma Navigation Canal (HNC) Lock Complex (TE-113) will complete design, engineering and feasibility assessments that will reduce salt water intrusion and distribute freshwater within the Terrebonne Basin. It is estimated that the design will consist of a lock that provides 110' of clear width and an 800' long Lock Chamber and a floodgate that provides 250' of clear width with integral sluice gates and closure walls to connect to existing flood protection features. This project will help to limit the intrusion of salt water into freshwater marsh systems allowing for the maintenance of thousands of acres of wetlands which serve as critical wildlife habitat and nurseries for fisheries. The HNC Lock Complex will also provide crucial flood protection by blocking storm surge as a key component of the Morganza to the Gulf Hurricane Protection Project.

Project Title: Compatibility, Coordination and Restoration Planning

Council Member(s): State of Mississippi

Project Start Date: 4/13/2017

Project End Date: 4/30/2022

Award Amount: \$1,299,806

Project Abstract: This project will provide planning assistance to support MDEQ's coordinated restoration planning effort to maximize the effectiveness of coordination of restoration in the Gulf Coast Region and the development of new and/or amended State Expenditure Plan(s). The RESTORE Council's Initial Comprehensive Plan outlines commitments to coordination and leveraging. Mississippi has also established leveraging and coordination as core principles to maximize the effectiveness of restoration being implemented in the Mississippi coastal landscape. Across the restoration landscape there are coordination needs to enhance leveraging, integration, and compatibility in the development of new or amended MSEPs. Coordination activities may include, but are not limited to, participation in RESTORE Council activities directly related to this activity, collaboration of funding efforts to ensure compatibility and coordination of projects being considered to be placed on the MSEP, stakeholder engagement, project identification, evaluation, and development, the identification of the appropriate funding source to implement a project, and planning activities within Mississippi and adjacent states. This project will also enable Mississippi to continue to apply this shared commitment of coordination and leveraging in subsequent MSEP development. Activities include program oversight and management and the development, coordination, and execution of the grant award between MDEQ and the RESTORE Council.

Project Title: Laboratory to Support Mississippi Gulf Coast Water Quality Improvement Program

Council Member(s): State of Mississippi

Project Start Date: 9/7/2018

Project End Date: 7/31/2020

Award Amount: \$1,451,147

Project Abstract: This project will support increased microbiological sampling efforts through the construction, via remodeling/retrofitting of existing space, of a microbiology laboratory that will be used for bacterial analysis, source tracking analysis, and other bacterial monitoring efforts. This new capacity will enhance and expand bacteriological monitoring capabilities in a number of ways such as rapid detection of bacteria, same-day notification of recreational water quality, as well as provide MDEQ a mechanism to identify pollution sources within a specific watershed, both point and nonpoint sources.

6. Council Public Engagement and Tribal Relations Accomplishments

The [2016 Comprehensive Plan Update: Restoring the Gulf Coast's Ecosystem and Economy \(2016 Comprehensive Plan Update\)](#) outlined the RESTORE Council's (Council) intent to improve its decisions by "improving the efficiency, effectiveness and transparency of Council actions." The Council staff hired to focus on external affairs, public engagement and tribal relations assessed the past practices and tools available to create a strategy to begin implementing the Council's two overarching commitments to "engagement, inclusion and transparency" and to "maintain and enhance public engagement and transparency".

6.1. Enhancing Public Engagement

The Council distributes information about their activities via automatic email updates referred to as Eblasts. Initially, there were two subscription categories available, "Press- Media Releases" and "Gulf-wide". In January 2018, the RESTORE Council began a 90 day campaign to allow for modification of Eblast subscription to include the addition of each of the five Gulf coast states (Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida) as separate categories. In recognition of the stakeholder interests associated with federally recognized tribal lands and public meeting or public comment periods, the "Tribal" and "Public Meetings or Public Comment Periods" categories were created.

As of late April 2018, the modification campaign concluded with 802 unique subscribers which continued to increase a total of 878 unique subscribers at the end of 2018. The year-end distribution of subscribers across all available categories is as follows:

- **Press- Media:** 764
- **Gulf-wide:** 747
- **Texas:** 257
- **Louisiana:** 293
- **Mississippi:** 246
- **Alabama:** 244
- **Florida:** 333
- **Tribal:** 270
- **Public Meetings or Public Comments Periods:** 503

Modifying the Eblast tool was the first step in streamlining the distribution of information of interest to Gulf stakeholders. As part of the commitment to transparency, the Council staff then began develop a strategy for communicating the process for the next round of funding of

ecosystem restoration activities as part of what would be a larger initiative to provide ongoing education opportunities to Gulf stakeholders.



Figure 4. Image of the eBlast subscriptions options available to the public.

As stated in the 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update, “It is the Council’s intent to seek broad participation and input from the diverse stakeholders who live, work, and play in the Gulf Coast region in both the continued development of this Plan and the ultimate selection and funding of ecosystem restoration activities”. This group of stakeholders is inclusive of under-represented communities and federally-recognized tribes. Council staff is working with other Council Member agencies to finalize an agreement to re-establish a relationship with the federally-recognized tribes to continuing developing a Tribal policy to ensure effective coordination and consultation.

Enhancing Transparency

In September 2018, the Council began providing webinars as an opportunity for Gulf stakeholders to learn more about its activities as part of a new initiative, RESTORE Education Opportunities Series (REOS). REOS is a collection of webinars aimed to, not only provide education related to the path towards the next Funded Priorities List, but also to return to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill to explain how the RESTORE Council and similar restoration efforts

are working to restore the Gulf. In the 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update, the Council committed to providing ongoing educational opportunities for Gulf stakeholders who live, work, and play in the Gulf Coast region. A collection of webinars recorded to explain its activities are currently available on www.restorethegulf.gov. As the Council continues to work through the process of drafting and approving the next FPL, additional live webinars will be scheduled and recorded to allow Gulf stakeholders to not only participate, but also have their questions answered. Those recordings will be posted on the website with the questions and responses for stakeholders who were unable to participate. The Council will continue to explore the use of webinars and other creative tools, such as social media, to increase transparency and opportunities for public education and participation.

Public Outreach

To increase awareness of the the Council's future activities, public engagement staff and technical staff represented the Council at public meetings, workshops and conferences. The majority of the Gulf states have hosted meetings to provide a status report and overview of the path forward for ecosystem restoration. The Council has used these meetings as an opportunity to obtain feedback from participants on the ongoing restoration and develop a common understanding of the challenges.

7. Administrative Accomplishments

7.1. Grants Management

The Council has awarded over \$219 million through 57 grants and interagency agreements under the Council-Selected Restoration and Spill Impact Components of the RESTORE Act. In May 2016, the Council signed its first Council-Selected Restoration Component federal interagency agreement award to the Department of Interior for the first stage of an \$8 million Youth Conservation Corps Gulf-wide habitat restoration project, and in September 2016, the Council made its first grant award to Louisiana for a \$7.26 million West Grand Terre Beach restoration project. The Council will continue to award and administer grants and interagency agreements in both components to achieve the goals and objectives of the Council-Selected Restoration and Spill Impact Components of the Act. Council staff also conduct grants management activities, including technical and financial oversight, for all grants and interagency agreements.

Council-Selected Restoration Component

In 2017, the Council awarded funds for 14 Initial FPL projects, totaling \$62.14 million. This is in addition to the 2016 awards for 10 Initial FPL projects totaling \$34.43 million. In 2018, the Council awarded funds for 16 additional Initial FPL projects, totaling \$42.99 million, one of which was a project moved from Category 2 to Category 1 and approved by the Council, and 9 Commitment and Planning Support awards to Council members for \$18.7 million. FPL funding obligated to date totals \$158.3 million.

Spill Impact Component

The Council has awarded grants to implement 3 Planning SEPs, provide \$6.3 million in funding for the development of SEPs for submission to the Council. Five additional grants have been awarded for \$55 million to fund implementation of projects or programs under an approved SEP. Four such awards, totaling \$35.6 million, were awarded by the Council to the member States in 2018. Spill Impact funding obligated to date totals \$61.4 million

7.2. Enhancing Efficiency of the Grant System

In December 2015, the Council deployed its automated grants management system, the Restoration Assistance and Agreements Management System (RAAMS), and began implementing its grants and IAA program concurrent with the approval of the Initial FPL. The Council is committed to ensuring that the process used for awarding and disbursing funds is as efficient as possible, while also providing the oversight needed for sound fiscal management. As it did with the Initial FPL, after a year of experience the Council initiated a thorough review of its application, disbursement and post-award oversight processes to identify and implement system changes that will lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness.

In September 2017, the commercial owner of Easygrants (the COTS software underlying RAAMS) announced they will no longer support the program beyond a reasonable transition period to select and move to a new system. In response, the Council established a Task Force to develop system requirements and explore replacement options. The Task Force considered both federal shared service and commercial off-the-shelf grants management systems and recommended the Council's needs would best be met by a federal shared service provider. Upon the Task Force's recommendation, the Council approved entering into an Interagency Agreement with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to conduct an analysis of GrantSolutions, a federal shared service provider, to determine key data and components of Council programs and processes that fit within Grant Solutions and gaps needing solutions. HHS Grant Solutions completed the Fit/Gap Analysis Summary and Transition Plan in August 2018.

The Council made a final "unified solution" systems selection and funding decision at the November 28-29 2019 Steering Committee meeting, with an anticipated implementation and migration to the new systems no later than September 30, 2019. The unified solution includes the selection of GrantSolutions as the grant management system and the development of the Program Information Platform for Ecosystem Restoration (PIPER). The Council is taking advantage of this opportunity to reengineer processes and streamline award processing and management while maintaining the existing rigorous financial and compliance controls and does not expect any impact to its operations during the transition period or as a result of a migration of its data.

Tables 3-5 provide the current funding status of the Comprehensive Plan, the Oil Spill Impact Component, and the apportionments of the funds by fiscal year. (Apportionments are the draw-downs of funding authority by the Council). Comprehensive Plan Administrative Funds and Program Expense Funds are the funds used by the Council to carry-out its operations. Tables 4 and 5 further illustrate the current status of the Comprehensive Plan Projects and the Oil Spill Component. They identify funding amounts made available in FY18, grants awarded and the remaining balance with the Trust Fund.

Table 3: FY 2018 Trust Fund Balances

As of September 30, 2018	Comprehensive Plan Administrative (6011)	Comprehensive Plan - Expenses, Programs and Projects (6012)	Total Comprehensive Plan	Spill Impact (6013)
Trust Fund Balance (No Funds Sequestered)	12,986,306	419,890,561	432,876,867	419,704,309
FY13	360,000	-	360,000	-
FY14	896,214	1,067,950	1,964,164	-
FY15	1,241,229	2,307,158	3,548,387	-
FY16	1,107,649	159,711,176	160,818,825	6,400,000
FY17	1,375,568	4,078,906	5,454,474	70,800,000
FY18	1,417,740	35,155,947	36,573,687	22,300,000
Total Apportionments	6,398,400	202,321,137	208,719,537	99,500,000
Trust Fund Balance Less Apportionments	6,587,906	217,569,424	224,157,330	320,204,309

Table 4. Initial FPL and CPS FPL Status

	INITIAL FPL/ CAT 2- CAT1 FUNDS APPROVED	CPS FPL FUNDS APPROVED	TOTAL FUNDS AVAILABLE	GRANTS AND IAA'S AWARDED	UNOBLIGATED BALANCE (CARRY- FORWARD)
FY 2016	156,553,618	-	156,553,618	7,759,216	148,794,402
FY 2017		-	148,794,402	81,654,227	67,140,175
FY 2018	7,511,276	23,100,000	97,751,451	52,989,232	44,762,219

Table 5. Spill Impact Trust Fund by State

SPILL IMPACT PROJECTS	TRUST FUNDS DEPOSITED <i>AS OF</i> 10/01/2019	GRANTS AWARDED	REMAINING BALANCE
ALABAMA	85,619,679	-	85,619,679
FLORIDA	77,057,711	4,640,675	72,417,036
LOUISIANA	145,175,720	37,988,069	107,187,651
MISSISSIPPI	80,037,612	18,452,354	61,585,258
TEXAS	31,813,587	292,503	31,521,084
TOTAL	419,704,309	61,373,602	358,330,707

To best serve the communities of the Gulf Coast region, the Council carries out its activities to implement the Updated Comprehensive Plan and accomplish the requirements of the RESTORE Act in an effective and efficient manner, at the minimum cost possible to maximize the dollars available for restoration projects and programs. The Council has managed its fiscal resources through a strategy of incremental growth to correspond to the development of its Council-Selected Restoration Component and the Spill Impact Component programs. The Council has achieved steady-state operations, while a significant amount of non-reimbursed support was provided to the Council staff by many of its members in the first several years of existence.

Administrative Costs

The RESTORE Act specifies that of the Council-Selected Restoration Component amounts received by the Council, not more than three percent of the funds may be used for administrative expenses, including staff. This is further detailed in the Treasury regulation implementing the Act at 31 CFR §34.204(b), “Limitations on administrative costs and administrative expenses” (as amended September 28, 2016), which provides “Of the amounts received by the Council under the Comprehensive Plan [Council-Selected Restoration] Component, not more than three percent may be used for administrative expenses. The three percent limit is applied to the amounts it receives under the Comprehensive Plan [Council-Selected Restoration] Component before the termination of the Trust Fund. Amounts used for administrative expenses may not at any time exceed three percent of the total of the amounts received by the Council and the amounts in the Trust Fund that are allocated to, but not yet received by, the Council under § 34.103.”

The Council worked with OMB to segregate administrative funds through the apportionment process. The Treasury regulation implementing the Act at 34 CFR § 34.2 provides the definition of administrative expenses that guides the Council in properly classifying certain expenses as administrative and the remaining categories of expenses as programmatic.

Since the Council must oversee projects and programs during the post-award phase, the Council has forecast its administrative and operational expenses through the projected closeout of all grants. Based on the Consent Decree payment schedule, Council operations have been projected through 2040 to ensure that operational costs are fiscally prudent and well managed through the life of the program. This analysis projects that the cumulative administrative expense will be approximately \$47.1 million which is less than the more than \$48 million that will be available for such expenses from the aggregate current and future deposits into the Trust Fund (not including accrued interest). Table 6 shows the Council’s apportionments for administrative expense are well below the \$12,986,306 of administrative funds available in the Trust Fund, and at this time equal 3 percent of the total funds apportioned from the Council-Selected Component.

Table 6: 3 Percent Analysis

STATUS OF 3% ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSE FUNDS		
Trust Funds-Comprehensive Plan		
Amount Available	432,876,867	
Sequestration for 2018		
Total Amount Available		432,876,867
Administrative Expense Funds available: 3%		12,986,306
FY2013 Admin Budget	360,000	
FY2014 Admin Budget	896,214	
FY2015 Admin Budget	1,241,229	
FY2016 Admin Budget	1,107,649	
FY2017 Admin Budget	1,375,568	
FY2018 Admin Budget	1,417,740	
Total Administrative Funds Apportioned through 2018		6,398,400
Balance of Administrative Funds remaining in the Trust Fund		6,587,906

7.3. Audits of the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (GCERC) mission is to effectively manage and execute the Council’s RESTORE Act responsibilities with a primary focus of overseeing Trust Fund expenditures in implementation of the Comprehensive Plan and State Expenditure Plans. To provide proper oversight, the U.S. Treasury and other Federal entities audit the Council’s programs, financial management and administrative functions to ensure compliance with federal regulatory requirements. The following graphic (Figure 5) provides a summary of audits that were completed (N=17, all with no action), audits in progress (N=2), and audits planned for fiscal year 2019 (N=7).

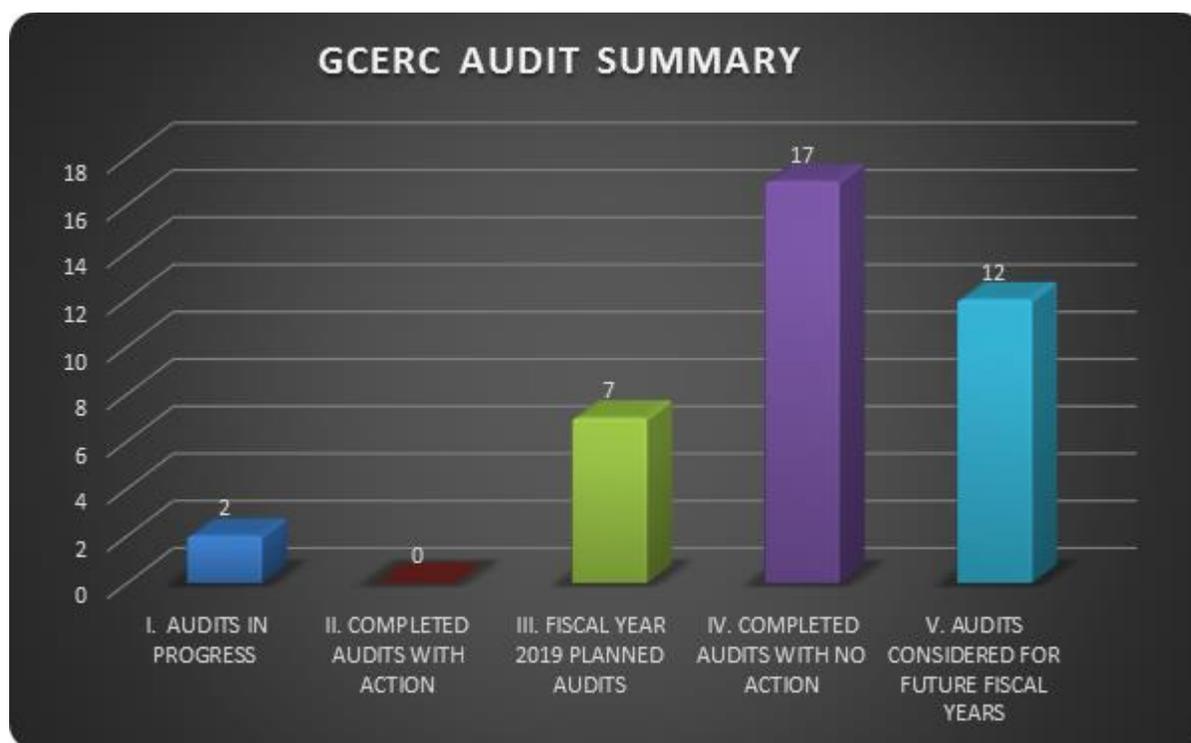


Figure 5. Summary of audits that were completed, audits in progress and future audits planned as of October 2018.

The audits have revealed the following information:

- The majority of the audits are from Treasury OIG;
- GCERC is in compliance with all Federal Statutory and Regulatory requirements;
- Results from our Annual Audit of Financial Statements show GCERC to have adequate Financial internal controls and processes in place with Financial Statements accurately reflecting the Council’s Financial Position, in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America;
- A certified independent public accountant (IPA), working under OIG supervision, issued an unmodified opinion on the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council fiscal years 2018

and 2017 financial statements. The audit did not identify any matters involving internal control and its operation to be considered material weaknesses in internal control over financial reporting. No instances of reportable noncompliance with laws, regulations, contracts, and grant agreements tested were identified. All Financial Statement audits since the Council inception have received unmodified (clean) opinions.

7.4. Federal Information Security Modernization Act (FISMA)

During 2018, the Council underwent an independent evaluation of the Council's information systems' security program and practices. The *Federal Information Security Modernization Act of 2014* (FISMA) requires federal agencies to have an annual independent evaluation performed of their information security program and practices to determine the effectiveness of such program and practices, and to report the results of the evaluations to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). OMB delegated its responsibility to Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for the collection of annual FISMA responses. DHS prepared the FISMA questionnaire to collect these responses (FISMA Reporting Metrics). Applicable OMB policy and guidelines, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) standards and guidelines were also considered.

FISMA requires that the agency Inspector General (IG) or an independent external auditor, as determined by the IG, perform the annual evaluation. The Department of the Treasury Office of Inspector General engaged RMA Associates, LLC to conduct an evaluation in support of the FISMA requirement for an annual evaluation of the Council's information security program and practices. The objective of this evaluation was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Council's information security program and practices for the period July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018.

This evaluation was performed in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation. Consistent with applicable FISMA requirements, OMB policy and guidance, and NIST standards and guidelines, the Council's information security program and practices were established and have been maintained for the five Cybersecurity Functions³ and eight FISMA Metric Domains.⁴ We found that the Council's information security program and practices were effective for the period July 1,

³ OMB, DHS, and the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) developed the FISMA Reporting Metrics in consultation with the Federal Chief Information Officers (CIO) Council. The 8 FISMA Metric Domains were aligned with the 5 functions: (1) identify, (2) protect, (3) detect, (4) respond, and (5) recover as defined in the NIST *Framework for Improving Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity*.

⁴ As described in the DHS' FISMA Reporting Metrics, the 8 FISMA Metric Domains are: (1) risk management, (2) configuration management, (3) identity and access management, (4) data protection and privacy, (5) security training, (6) information security continuous monitoring, (7) incident response, and (8) contingency planning.

2017 through June 30, 2018. Overall within the FISMA categories the agency was rated at level 3, *“Consistently Implemented,”* which means *“Policies, procedures, and strategies were consistently implemented, but quantitative and qualitative effectiveness measures were lacking.”* The Council continues to work with HMS to implement their Continuous Diagnostics and Mitigation Program.

7.5. Freedom of Information Act Requests

During FY 2018, Council staff received seven Freedom of Information Requests (FOIA). The average number of days needed to respond to four simple FOIA requests was 4.5 days, while it took 335 days on average for three complex FOIA requests. No funds were collected from the requesters.

8. Centers of Excellence Accomplishments

8.1. Background

The RESTORE Act dedicates 2.5 percent of the Trust Fund to the Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program, administered by the Department of Treasury. These funds may be used to establish Centers of Excellence and by those Centers of Excellence for science, technology, and monitoring in one or more of the following disciplines:

- Coastal and deltaic sustainability, restoration, and protection, including solutions and technology that allow citizens to live in a safe and sustainable manner in a coastal delta in the Gulf Coast Region;
- Coastal fisheries and wildlife ecosystem research and monitoring in the Gulf Coast Region;
- Offshore energy development, including research and technology to improve the sustainable and safe development of energy resources in the Gulf of Mexico;
- Sustainable and resilient growth, economic and commercial development in the Gulf Coast Region; and
- Comprehensive observation, monitoring, and mapping of the Gulf of Mexico.

The RESTORE Act specifies who may apply to receive funds under the Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program. The following are the Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program eligible applicants for each State:

- In Alabama, the Alabama Gulf Coast Recovery Council or such administrative agent as it may designate;
- In Florida, the Florida Institute of Oceanography;
- In Louisiana, the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority Board of Louisiana through the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana;
- In Mississippi, the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality; and
- In Texas, the Office of the Governor or an appointee of the Office of the Governor.

Pursuant to the RESTORE Act, each Center of Excellence provides an annual report to the RESTORE Council with information regarding all grants, including the amount, discipline or disciplines, and recipients of the grants, and in the case of any grant awarded to a consortium, the membership of the consortium. This information is to be included in the Council's Annual Report to Congress. As of the date of this report, four Centers of Excellence have been established. Following are summaries of the activities of these [Centers of Excellence](#).

8.2. Florida Institute of Oceanography

The Florida RESTORE Act Centers of Excellence Program (FLRACEP) closed out the initial ten Centers of Excellence research grant awards funded through the first Request for Proposals in May of 2018. While these awards were slated to close November 30, 2017, Hurricane Irma in

2017 caused significant delays and disturbances to data collection, analysis and manuscript preparation, and all awards were issued no-cost extensions. FLRACEP's long-term fisheries monitoring project, funded the program's second Request for Proposals, underwent an external science review in June of 2018. In July, the Program Management Team (PMT) opted to extend elements of the program for a further three years, and the program is updating an Application for Funds with the Treasury Department's Office of Gulf Coast Restoration in order to provide funds for these activities. In addition to extending the fisheries monitoring project, the PMT approved the content and timing for FLRACEP's next Request for Proposals (RFP III): marine wildlife research grants, habitat mapping coordination, and science support for Northwest Florida Panhandle Estuary Program planning. RFP III release is estimated for January 2019, with subsequent RFP releases targeted for every two years afterward.

8.3. Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority

On April 8, 2014, the Coastal and Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) named The Water Institute of the Gulf as the State of Louisiana's Center of Excellence. On November 1, 2015, the U.S. Department of the Treasury awarded CPRA a grant to begin its research program. The mission of the RESTORE Act Center of Excellence for Louisiana (LA-COE) is to support research directly relevant to implementation of Louisiana's Coastal Master Plan by administering a competitive grants program and providing the appropriate coordination and oversight support to ensure that success metrics are tracked and achieved.

On April 8, 2014, the Coastal and Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) of Louisiana named The Water Institute of the Gulf as the State of Louisiana's Center of Excellence. On November 1, 2015, the U.S. Department of the Treasury awarded CPRA a grant to begin its research program. The mission of the RESTORE Act Center of Excellence for Louisiana (LA-COE) is to support research directly relevant to implementation of Louisiana's Coastal Master Plan by administering a competitive grants program and providing the appropriate coordination and oversight support to ensure that success metrics are tracked and achieved.

The LA-COE completed coordination of the review process of 76 proposals (graduate studentship, research and collaborative awards) that were solicited under the first request for proposals (RFP1). The proposals were all reviewed by subject matter experts (SME) and CPRA for criteria defined in the RFP. The SME and CPRA reviews of the research and collaborative proposals were compiled for the External Review Board (ERB). The ERB consists of nationally and internationally recognized subject matter experts on topics relevant to Louisiana's Coastal Master Plan. An in-person ERB meeting was held in Baton Rouge, LA in April 2017. The ERB made funding recommendations (based on a scale of 1-3) for each research and collaborative proposal based on review and discussion of the proposals, the SME reviews, and the CPRA reviews. A Recommendation Meeting was held on May 2, 2017 with CPRA and LA-COE staff to discuss the ERB's recommendations and to develop a potential list of projects to fund, subject to concurrence by CPRA and LA-COE leadership. A Concurrence Meeting was held on May 30, 2017 to finalize which graduate studentship, research and collaborative awards would be granted.

Principal investigators (PIs) were notified of the awards and then a public announcement was made via a joint LA-COE and CPRA press release on June 22, 2017. A total of 13 awards were announced; six graduate student awards, two collaborative awards, and five research awards.

Contracting and research grants management procedures were developed to help manage the funding process and research subrecipients, with research subawards executed in March 2018. Assessment and reporting on progress using defined metrics that address federal reporting requirements including reports to the U.S. Department of Treasury have been developed.

A conference session was co-moderated by LA-COE and CPRA to highlight research project findings at the 2018 State of the Coast conference on June 1, 2018 in New Orleans, LA. The inaugural All Hands Meeting was hosted on August 17, 2018, in Baton Rouge, LA to obtain updates from the 13 funded projects.

8.4. Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality

MBRACE is a consortium of four Mississippi universities - Jackson State University, Mississippi State University, University of Mississippi and University of Southern Mississippi. The University of Southern Mississippi serves as the lead university for the consortium. The focus of MBRACE, a consortium of Mississippi's research universities, is a sound, comprehensive science- and technology-based understanding of the chronic and acute stressors, both anthropogenic and natural, on the dynamic and productive waters and ecosystems of the northern Gulf. The goals of MBRACE are: (1) serve as a focal point for new, long-term research and socioeconomic initiatives along the northern Gulf with relevance to Mississippi's resources; (2) serve the people of Mississippi and the northern Gulf region with a scientifically based understanding of ecosystem status and trends (past to present, predictive) with special emphasis on improved forecasting abilities to ensure sustainable coastal and ocean ecosystems of the Gulf; and (3) work within a consortium of stakeholders including Mississippi's research universities under the Mississippi Research Consortium, state and federal agencies, local communities, private industry, and non-governmental organizations.

During the reporting period, MDEQ, with contractual support, performed program management activities, including the oversight, coordination, and monitoring of grant activities, sub-recipient activities, and funds expended under the program. MDEQ prepared federal financial and performance reports for the prior reporting period.

MDEQ reviewed the sub-recipient's Monthly Project Progress Reports and monthly status calls were held to discuss project activities and support overall program scope and schedule management. Sub-recipient reimbursement requests were reviewed for consistency with the grant and sub-award agreement scope of work and budget.

USM's proposal for funding under the Core Research Program was approved for \$625,000; activities are being performed under the existing subaward between MDEQ and USM. These funds are being used for research on the sustainability and restoration of oyster reef habitat in the Mississippi Sound. The University of Southern Mississippi continued work on their project titled "Sustainability and Restoration of Oyster Reef Habitat in Mississippi Sound: A Larval Transport and Recruitment Approach."

Relevant Synergies/Collaboration with other RESTORE funding streams

In 2016, MDEQ included a \$3.5 million project titled "Pascagoula Oyster Reef Complex Relay and Enhancement" on its initial Mississippi State Expenditure Plan (RESTORE Act Oil Spill Impact Component). This project supports the restoration and protection of natural resources by relaying oysters from the Pascagoula Oyster Reef Complex (ORC) to harvestable reefs and enhancing the ORC. This project may include benthic habitat mapping, reef monitoring, and relay of oyster resources to increase productivity on harvestable reefs. The data collected from the MBRACE-funded projects will help inform the outcomes of this project. MDEQ will coordinate the storing and analysis of the data to come out of various DWH-funded projects. This coordination will be key in leveraging results coming out of multiple projects and multiple funding mechanisms.

8.5. Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

In January 2015, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) competitively selected two consortia, the Texas A&M University Corpus Christi - Texas OneGulf Consortium and University of Houston (UofH) - Subsea Systems Institute.

The mission of the Texas OneGulf Center of Excellence is to gather and improve knowledge about the Gulf of Mexico to inform decision making around the challenges to environmental and economic sustainability of the Gulf of Mexico and its impact on the health and well-being of Texans and the nation. Texas OneGulf is designed with the capacity and flexibility to address all five focus disciplines denoted in Section 1605 of RESTORE Act (1605). This Center has been awarded funding and has begun or completed activities on six projects. Highlights include: completed the competitive grant process Request for Proposal #2 that resulted in the development of the "Hurricane Harvey Decision-Support – Resilient Environments and Communities" project; populated delayed-mode glider data collected on website <http://tabs.gerg.tamu.edu/tceq> for eight associated missions and provided final Glider Monitoring Implementation Plan for the Disaster Research Response (DR2) Program; completed Strategic Plan to integrate the data from Gulf of Mexico Coastal Ocean Observing System Regional Association's (GCOOS-RA), Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative Information & Data Cooperative (GRIIDC), Gulf of Mexico Alliance Geoportal (GOMAportal); implemented priority action items from strategic plan to deliver data integration products and developed/deployed a website that will promote the Texas OneGulf Knowledge Base <http://tkb.geos.tamu.edu/>; began annual cycle of input and review to help ensure that the Strategic Research and Action Plan

(SRAP) evolves with Texas OneGulf as a means of guiding future work plans and focus; and began implementation of Stakeholder Communication and Engagement Plan.

Subsea Systems Institute (SSI) is a collaborative endeavor focusing on translational engineering, validation science and appropriate policy towards maintaining the technological, economic and workforce leadership of the Gulf coast area in the realm of deepwater and ultra-deepwater hydrocarbon use. The SSI is addressing offshore energy development, including research and technology to improve the sustainable and safe development of energy resources in the Gulf of Mexico as its focus on one of the disciplines denoted in Section 1605 of RESTORE. This Center has been awarded funding and has begun or completed activities on eight projects. Highlights include:

- Developed and tested a prototype supercapacitor-battery unit for under subsea environmental conditions; progress made on modifying reduced order model for predictive modeling of performance of blowout preventers; progress was made to experimentally validate the proposed adaptive mode health monitoring solution;
- Completed testing of prototype autonomous underwater vehicle with NASA's Neutral Buoyancy Lab; designed and integrated hardware solution and protocol stack complete for stress-wave communication and pipeline and flow system for fiber-optic sensing system; and
- Mobilization of project with recruitment of personnel for the remote robotics for unmanned human environments work.