

**Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
Initial Funded Priorities List Amendment Approval Summary**

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) amended its 2015 Initial Funded Priorities List (Initial FPL) on January 4, 2023, to approve \$852,653 in implementation funding and the use of any remaining, previously approved planning funds for use during restoration implementation for the Money Bayou Wetlands Restoration (Implementation) project located in Gulf County, Florida.

Money Bayou Wetlands Restoration (Implementation)

The Council originally approved \$387,726 for the planning component for the Money Bayou Wetlands Restoration project, sponsored by the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), as part of the Council's Initial FPL as Category 1 funding. In addition, the Council budgeted \$852,653 for implementation of this project pending completion of required environmental compliance and subject to a Council vote to amend the Initial FPL. Project design and environmental compliance necessary for FPL amendment has now been completed. The Money Bayou Wetlands Restoration project is part of the Connecting Coastal Waters (CCW) initiative that NOAA leads with partners to restore the extent, functionality, and resiliency of Gulf Coast wetlands.

NOAA will work with partners to implement this project to restore a natural hydrology to approximately 1,000 acres of wetlands on the St. Joseph Bay State Buffer Preserve in Florida. During planning, portions of this project were scaled back to meet budgetary constraints while maintaining projected project benefits. Restoration will now include activities to restore natural sheet-flow and hydrologic connectivity of wetlands by filling over 1 mile of ditches; filling, and grading approximately 3,000 linear feet of elevated, unpaved roads; installing or repairing approximately 15 to 23 low-water road crossings; and replacing 1 culvert with a low water crossing. Heavy equipment will be used to excavate segments of elevated road to restore natural grade; the excavated material will be used to fill in adjacent ditches when possible. Previously proposed invasive species control and replanting of native vegetation will only be performed if remaining budget is sufficient to accommodate these tasks after primary hydrologic modifications are completed. A monitoring plan will be implemented before and after construction to support an adaptive management approach. NOAA will also work with partners to monitor restoration outcomes and conduct outreach activities to share restoration practices and engage stakeholders.

To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council has adopted the 2015 PEIS developed by NOAA's Restoration Center. Additional environmental compliance coordination has been completed for the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA), and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) in coordination with NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Florida Division of Historical Resources, and the Seminole Tribe of Florida – Tribal Historic Preservation Office. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection has also determined that the project

meets the requirements for the State General Permit Aquatic Habitat Restoration, Enhancement, and Creation Activities under Rule 62-331.225, F.A.C. pursuant to state assumption of the Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 program. The Council has reviewed the applicable environmental compliance documentation. To ensure compliance with ESA, MSA, NHPA, and other relevant laws, the Council will require that the sponsors of the project adhere to all applicable conditions listed in required permits and consultations.

NOAA's Restoration Center 2015 PEIS and all other completed environmental compliance documentation can be found in the Council's [Initial FPL's Environmental Compliance Library](#).

To learn more about the RESTORE Council visit us at www.restorethegulf.gov or send questions to restorecouncil@restorethegulf.gov.