

Public Review and Comment: Proposed Funded Priorities List (FPL) Amendment - Gulf of Mexico Habitat Restoration via Conservation Corps Partnerships

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) seeks public review and comment on a proposed amendment of its [2015 Initial Funded Priorities List](#) (2015 FPL) to approve additional time and funding for the [Gulf Coast Conservation Corps \(GCCC\) Program](#). This funding would provide for a short-term extension of the GCCC Program while the Council considers longer-term funding through inclusion in its next FPL, known as FPL 3b. This program is sponsored by U.S. Department of Commerce/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (DOC/NOAA) and U.S. Department of the Interior/Bureau of Indian Affairs (DOI/BIA).

This funding would be available by reallocating funds previously approved in the Council's 2017 FPL, known as the [Commitment and Planning Support FPL](#) (CPS FPL). The CPS FPL approved up to \$2.1M over 5 years to each Council member to conduct planning, partner collaboration, and other related activities in support of meeting commitments made in its [2016 Comprehensive Plan Update: Restoring the Gulf Coast's Ecosystem & Economy](#) (2016 Comprehensive Plan Update). The Council realized cost-savings in conducting these activities that may be redirected to the GCCC Program, thus eliminating the need to apportion new funds from the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Trust Fund (Trust Fund). Specifically, the Council is proposing to approve an additional \$2M to continue this program for approximately 16 months longer than was originally approved in the Initial FPL. DOC/NOAA would be provided an additional \$1.7M and DOI/BIA would be provided an additional \$300K.

Background:

Pursuant to the RESTORE Act (33 U.S.C. §1321 (t)), the Council is responsible for administering portions of *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill settlement funds for the purpose of restoring the environment and economy of the Gulf coast. The Council administers two funding programs, one of which is the Council-Selected Restoration Component, referred to as "Bucket 2". Under Bucket 2, the Council votes to approve Gulf ecosystem restoration projects and programs proposed by the Council members. Bucket 2 projects and programs approved for funding by the Council are included in what is called a Funded Priorities List (FPL).

In its 2015 Initial FPL, the Council approved \$8M for the GCCC Program through two primary components:

1. The first overseen by DOC/NOAA and tailored to the unique needs and communities of each State (\$7.5M for "GulfCorps" component; initiated September 2017)
2. The second overseen by DOI/BIA focused on tribal youth engagement (\$500K for "Tribal Youth" component; initiated June 2016).

Young adults are trained under the GCCC Program and help to execute priority habitat restoration projects in each of the five Gulf States. NOAA's GulfCorps component participants provide the labor for projects already approved, permitted, and funded under other restoration

and conservation programs, including other activities funded in the Initial FPL. For the DOI/BIA Tribal Youth component, the Council may consider using an existing U. S. Department of the Interior Categorical Exclusion to address any associated National Environmental Policy Act requirements.

Beginning in June 2017, DOC/NOAA entered into a three-year contract with The Nature Conservancy to implement the GulfCorps program in partnership with regional entities. The GulfCorps program yields ecosystem restoration, while helping to create a platform for establishing a trained, local workforce. The GulfCorps program provides on-the-ground-restoration; builds on existing partnerships; recruits and trains local workers in a variety of habitat restoration techniques; and provides paid, hands-on work experience in project implementation. DOI/BIA, working with Federally recognized local Tribes, implemented a tribal youth conservation corps program that follows a model of adult mentors guiding crews of teenage youth working on compliant conservation projects, and educates youth on cultural and natural resources relevant to their individual Tribes. The funding supports workforce programming and support services for this component.

Both components have proven to be beneficial to the participants, and successful in meeting RESTORE Council goals to restore and conserve habitat, as well as enhance community resilience and the Gulf economy, through the completion of priority restoration projects throughout the Gulf. Due to its success, the Council may consider awarding additional funding for these activities by including the program in its upcoming FPL 3b.

The Council anticipates finalizing FPL 3b in the spring of 2021, while the current GCCC Program funding is projected to be fully expended by September 2020. In the absence of additional funds, GCCC activities would halt, requiring the existing program infrastructure and human resources to be demobilized. If funding is included in FPL 3b, the Council would then need to fund the cost of reestablishing the program infrastructure and human resources. Renewing funding for the GCCC Program in the near-term could avoid the cost of demobilizing ongoing operations and remobilizing the program if funding is approved in a future FPL. Under any future funding scenario, the additional proposed funding in this amendment would directly benefit the environment and support the training of additional local workers in habitat restoration. The Council therefore proposes to provide an additional \$2M to extend the program for approximately 16 months while it considers including the GCCC Program for longer-term funding in FPL 3b. These funds would provide DOC/NOAA an additional \$1.7M to continue the GulfCorps component and DOI/BIA an additional \$300K to continue the Tribal Youth component.

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