

Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources  
FY 2020 Annual Report for the Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program (COE)  
Grant Number 1 RCEGR010006-01-00

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*Brief Description of the selected COE*

In December 2014, the Alabama Gulf Coast Recovery Council (AGCRC) made available for public comment for 45 days draft Competitive Process documents. After consideration of meaningful input from the public, a final RFP was published in May 2015. As a result of the Final RFP, AGCRC received one proposal. After reviewing the proposal according to the qualifications and criteria described in the Final RFP, the AGCRC made a motion to accept the proposal submitted by the Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium (MESC). MESC was founded to reduce redundancy in Marine Sciences in higher education while serving as a vehicle for collaborative coastal studies. Member institutions include the following 23 public and private colleges and universities: Alabama A&M, Alabama State, Athens State, Auburn, Auburn University at Montgomery, Birmingham Southern, Huntingdon, Jacksonville State, Judson, Samford, Spring Hill, Stillman, Talladega, Troy, Tuskegee, Alabama, Alabama at Birmingham, Alabama in Huntsville, University of Mobile, Montevallo, North Alabama, South Alabama, and West Alabama.

*Overview of focus of the COE*

The focus of MESC, a consortium of Alabama universities, is to provide local, state, and federal officials, and interested citizens access to the findings of innovative research performed on the following priority areas: (1) 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; (2) Coastal fisheries and wildlife ecosystem research and monitoring in the Gulf Coast Region; (4) Sustainable and resilient growth, economic and commercial development in the Gulf of Mexico; and (5) Comprehensive observation, monitoring, and mapping of the Gulf of Mexico. MESC will capitalize on the diverse expertise of the scientists employed by the 23-member MESC colleges and universities, and bringing the state's best science talent to bear on these four focal areas.

*Summary of the annual performance of the COE*

MESC executed a sub-award agreement with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR), the administrative agent for the AGCRC, in February 2020. An Introductory Workshop was conducted via webinar in June 2020 to inform interested investigators about the Center of Excellence, its scientific goals, and to solicit input prior to the preparation of the RFP. An in-person workshop was initially planned but changed to a virtual meeting due to COVID-19 restrictions. Work began on the development of RFP #1 which is anticipated to fund large, multi-investigator research projects. Upgrades to the ARCOS monitoring stations began, as well as improvements to the wetlab facility. Work also began on the Alabama Center of Excellence website which is anticipated to be launched in early 2021.

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**Programmatic Elements**

*Award Recipient*

**Treasury – ADCNR:** Treasury issued the federal award to ADCNR in September 2019, with an effective date of October 1, 2019. AGCRC selected MESC to implement the Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program in Alabama. MESC is a consortium of 23 public and private colleges and universities: Alabama A&M, Alabama State, Athens State, Auburn, Auburn University at Montgomery, Birmingham Southern, Huntingdon, Jacksonville State, Judson, Samford, Spring Hill, Stillman, Talladega, Troy, Tuskegee, Alabama, Alabama at Birmingham, Alabama in Huntsville, University of Mobile, Montevallo, North Alabama, South Alabama, and West Alabama. The MESC serves as the administrator for the consortium. During the reporting period, ADCNR executed the sub-award for implementation of the Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program. ADCNR conducted routine monitoring and reporting, and participated in routine meetings with the Center of Excellence.

*Award Sub-recipient/Consortium Lead*

**ADCNR – Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium:** The sub-award agreement was executed on February 28, 2020, between ADCNR and Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium (Executive Director – Dr. John Valentine, DUNS - 07-507-0474) for \$7,868,353.00. The funds will be used to implement the Alabama Center of Excellence program. This program will conduct research on the Gulf Coast Region that focuses on science, technology, and monitoring.

MESC was selected as Alabama’s Center of Excellence under Bucket 5 of the RESTORE Act. MESC is a consortium of 23 public and private colleges and universities: Alabama A&M, Alabama State, Athens State, Auburn, Auburn University at Montgomery, Birmingham Southern, Huntingdon, Jacksonville State, Judson, Samford, Spring Hill, Stillman, Talladega, Troy, Tuskegee, Alabama, Alabama at Birmingham, Alabama in Huntsville, University of Mobile, Montevallo, North Alabama, South Alabama, and West Alabama. The MESC serves as the administrator for the consortium. The sub-award agreement was executed on February 28, 2020, between the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) and the Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium (DUNS - 07-507-0474) for \$7,868,353.00. The funds will be used to implement the Alabama Center of Excellence program. This program will conduct research on the following priority areas: (1) 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; (2) Coastal fisheries and wildlife ecosystem research and monitoring in the Gulf Coast Region; (4) Sustainable and resilient growth, economic and commercial development in the Gulf of Mexico; and (5) Comprehensive observation, monitoring, and mapping of the Gulf of Mexico.

During the reporting period, ADCNR and MESC conducted routine monitoring and reporting activities, including monthly reporting submittal and monthly status calls, and participated in routine meetings. MESC submitted an amendment request. This request has been submitted to the U.S. Department of the Treasury. MESC executed a sub-award agreement with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR), the administrative agent for the AGCRC, in February 2020. An

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**Financial Elements**

Award Recipient

Recipient: Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources  
Award Amount: \$7,964,464.00  
Expenditures to Date: \$46,459.00  
Funds Leveraged: \$0.00

Award Sub-recipient/Consortium Lead

Sub-recipient: Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium  
Sub-award Amount: \$7,868,353.00  
Expenditures to Date: \$28,109.91  
Funds Leveraged: \$0.00

**Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council Elements**

*Relevant Synergies/Collaboration with other RESTORE funding streams*

Alabama's Center of Excellence (ALCoE) has participated in bimonthly calls with the Gulf Restoration and Science Programs Coordination Forum. This forum is led by the NOAA RESTORE Science Program and works to facilitate collaboration between the different RESTORE funding streams. ALCoE joined one of the working groups examining the metrics used for program success and transfer of research to various stakeholders including State resource managers.

*Relevant Synergies/Collaboration with other DWH funding mechanisms*

Currently, ALCoE does not have any synergies/collaborations with other DWH funding mechanisms to report.

*Opportunities*

Currently, ALCoE does not see any need for modifications to existing laws or program rules to improve the COE grant program.