Priority & Commitment To Plan Evaluation

Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

PROPOSAL TITLE

Coastal Alabama Comprehensive Watershed Restoration Planning Project

PROPORAL NUMBER

AL-3

LOCATION

Coastal and Intertidal 12-digit HUC Watersheds in Mobile and Baldwin Counties, Alabama

SPONSOR(S)

Alabama

TYPE OF FUNDING REQUESTED (Planning, Technical Assistance, Implementation)

Planning/Technical Assistance

REVIEWED BY:

Ebonye T. Allen

DATE:

30 January 2015

A. Comprehensive Plan Goals

Of the goals addressed by the proposal, which is the single primary goal?
Proposals should discuss how the proposed activity is designed to address the primary goal.
Check one:

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

Notes:

Utilizing significant community and stakeholder input, the Mobile Bay NEP's (MBNEP) 20-member Science Advisory Committee and 30-member Project Implementation Committee systematically targeted and prioritized the order in which 31 coastal and intertidal watersheds were identified for the development of standardized comprehensive watershed management plans. To date, funding has been secured or watershed management plan development is underway or has been completed in 12 priority watersheds in the MBNEP Program Area. This proposal submission seeks funding to complete the watershed planning component for the remaining 19 priority watersheds in Coastal Alabama. According to the proposal, the completion of all 31 watershed plans for MBNEP will substantially assist in the restoration and protection of water quality in the Gulf

B. Comprehensive Plan Objectives

Proposals must clearly identify which objectives the proposal will address

1. Restore, Enhance, and Protect Habitats

- [x] YES
- [ ] NO
- [ ] Not articulated
- [ ] N/A

2. Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources

- [x] YES
- [ ] NO
- [ ] Not articulated
- [ ] N/A

3. Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources

- [x] YES
- [ ] NO
- [ ] Not articulated
- [ ] N/A

4. Restore and Enhance Natural Processes and Shorelines

- [x] YES
- [ ] NO
- [ ] Not articulated
- [ ] N/A

Notes:

8. Of these objectives which is the single primary objective the proposal addresses?

Check one:

- (●) Restore, Enhance, and Protect Habitats
- ( ) Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources
- ( ) Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources
- ( ) Restore and Enhance Natural Processes and Shorelines
- ( ) Promote Community Resilience
- ( ) Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education
- ( ) Improve Science-Based Decision-Making Processes

C. RESTORE Act and Comprehensive Plan Priority Criteria

All proposals must explain if the proposal addresses one or more of the priority criteria as established by the RESTORE Act and Initial Comprehensive Plan and, if so, how.

1. This project is 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.

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

2. This is a large-scale project/program that is 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.

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

3. This project is 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.

(●) YES ( ) NO

4. This project will 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.

(●) YES ( ) NO

5. Promote Community Resilience

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

6. Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

Notes:

The submission indicates that while the proposed watersheds are specific to Alabama, the efforts targets inputs to the Gulf of Mexico from the vast Mobile Bay watershed, which encompasses two-thirds of the state of Alabama and portions of Mississippi, Georgia, and Tennessee. The proposed work is the basis of the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program's federally approved and state sponsored Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP), which was created by a Management Conference comprised of federal, state, and local government agencies as well as representatives of businesses, non-governmental organizations, and regional planning agencies. Further, according to the submission, appropriate, data driven watershed planning is both the first step and the most effective measure supporting long term

D. Comprehensive Plan Commitments

All proposals must demonstrate how the proposal will achieve any or all of the commitments in the Comprehensive Plan. The commitments in the Comprehensive Plan are as follows:

Does the proposal articulate how it will achieve the following commitments in the comprehensive plan?

1. Science-based Decision-Making

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The proposal indicates that the makeup and technical expertise of the Mobile Bay NEP 20-member Science Advisory Committee and the 30-member Project Implementation Committees assures that the watershed management planning process is committed to science-based decision making.

2. Regional Ecosystem-based Approach to Restoration

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The submission anticipates following the EPA's nationally standardized "Nine Key Elements" of watershed planning, a regionally developed framework that will be applied to local watersheds. The submission indicates that while the proposed watersheds are specific to Alabama, the efforts targets inputs to the Gulf of Mexico from the vast Mobile Bay watershed, which encompasses two-thirds of the state of Alabama and portions of Mississippi, Georgia, and Tennessee. While the planning effort may be local watershed based, implementation efforts can be scaled across the Gulf.

3. Engagement, Inclusion, and Transparency

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The submission details that these watershed plans are locally led. The planning process builds resources and partnerships by involving a wide array of stakeholders. The recent watershed planning efforts in D'Olive Creek and Three Mile Creek have leveraged outside funding from a variety of sources, for detailed research, baseline mapping and assessment, restoration projects (including stream restoration and stormwater management projects), and pre- and post-implementation monitoring efforts. The Mobile Bay NEP has also launched its "Create a Clean Water Future" campaign, which the submission states is directly linked to engaging communities to implement stormwater management components of watershed management plans.

4. Leveraging Resources and Partnerships

- [x] YES
- [ ] NO
- [ ] Not articulated

Notes:

The submission indicates that the recent watershed management plans completed by the Mobile Bay NEP provide a greater level of investigation, mapping, and project identification compared to historical efforts. As a result, the MBNEP has adopted an approach of preparing these comprehensive plans as a precursor to restoration and conservation activities throughout coastal Alabama. The proposal states that the recommendations of the plans are three-pronged and address regulatory improvements, restoration, and community capacity building; and to ensure buy-in from local governments, once released, the first action taken is to have the plans officially adopted by the involved governmental entities through legal resolution.

5. Delivering Results and Measuring Impacts

- [x] YES
- [ ] NO

Notes:

The Mobile Bay NEP spearheaded a watershed management plan for the D'Olive Creek watershed in 2010 (Coffee & Baya, 2010), which the submission indicates has successfully outlined a strategy for restoring degraded streams in the watershed. The planning effort has leveraged funding for detailed research, baseline mapping and assessment, restoration projects (including stream restoration and stormwater management projects), and pre- and post-implementation monitoring efforts. This is the benchmark by which all subsequent plans will be approached.

E. Meeting Commitments and Tracking and Measuring Progress

1. Does the proposal articulate how it will meet and achieve its commitments?

- [x] YES
- [ ] NO
- [ ] Not articulated

2. Does the proposal have a plan for tracking and measuring progress?

- [x] YES
- [ ] NO

Notes:

The proposal submission describes that the Mobile Bay NEP's 20-member Science Advisory Committee and 30-member Project Implementation Committee have the technical expertise to effectively develop, implement and monitor watershed restoration plans and have a proven track record with the successes of recent efforts in the D'Olive and Three Mile Creek watersheds. The NEP's annual workplan and reporting procedures are already in place to track future efforts.

F. Proposal Emphasis Areas

Does the submission describe how the proposed project or program addresses the following four considerations:

1. Is the proposed activity **foundational** in the sense that the project or program forms an initial core step (or steps) in addressing a significant ecosystem issue, and can future activities be tiered to substantially increase the benefits?

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The submission states that watershed planning is foundational and sustainable and represents a prudent way to fully evaluate and assess each watershed, determine a suite of projects and programs targeted to improve ecosystem services within those watersheds, and thereafter prioritize and target limited implementation funds to areas where they will result in the greatest benefit. It is a collaborative, science-based process designed to identify and target the sources or root causes of problems in the watershed, which is inherently a foundational approach to resource stewardship and management.

2. Will the proposed activity be **sustainable** over time?

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The submission indicates that a major component of the watershed management planning process adopted by the Mobile Bay NEP is the characterization and assessment of existing data in the watershed and, if need be, the initial collection of baseline data where information is lacking. While this is inherently an iterative process, as indicated in the submission, this initial collection and summation of data, coupled with ongoing monitoring, provides a foundational basis for sustainable decision making.

3. Is the proposed activity **likely to succeed**?

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The submission states that all watershed management plans are likely to succeed because they will be produced in a standard format and will include a detailed watershed description including hydrology, soils, demographics, land uses and cover, and political institutions; watershed conditions including flow, sediment transport, stream assessment, biological data and condition, and stakeholder input; identification of critical areas impacted by erosion and flooding and including degraded streams and wetlands; management measures; cost estimates; implementation strategies; financing alternatives; community outreach; and monitoring.

4. Does the proposed activity **benefit** the human **community**?
(examples of benefits may include, but are not limited to: how a project will utilize local workers, how a project will benefit geographically or socially vulnerable communities, how a project will benefit the natural resources critical to natural-resource dependent industries such as fisheries, tourism, etc.)

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The submission states that the Coastal Alabama Comprehensive Watershed Restoration Planning project is focused on improving the quality of the water entering Mobile Bay, as well as the Gulf of Mexico, and increasing the amount of nursery habitat necessary for sustaining a healthy fishery. Improving water quality and maintaining healthy populations of fish and shellfish, as detailed by the submission, are at the base of ensuring what is most important to people living along the Gulf coast: access to Gulf waters; abundant fish and shellfish; protection of heritage; environmental health and resilience; and water that is fishable, drinkable, and swimmable. The outcomes of successful watershed planning and restoration implementation are vital to those who work in the Gulf as they drive improvement and sustainability of resource dependent