Priority & Commitment To Plan Evaluation

Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

PROPOSAL TITLE

Gulf of Mexico Habitat Mapping and Water Quality Monitoring Network

PROPORAL NUMBER

DOC-2

LOCATION

Across the Gulf with potential targeted case study area

SPONSOR(S)

Department of Commerce, Department of Interior

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

Technical Assistance

REVIEWED BY:

Ebonye T. Allen

DATE:

6 February 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:

The proposal submission seeks funding for the creation of a Gulf-wide habitat and water quality monitoring network. This 5-year program anticipates to lay the foundation for a governance structure and implementation strategy for an integrated network that leverages the breadth of current state, federal, or other regional programs to acquire existing and new habitat and water quality data, ensures quality assurance/quality control, and enhances data sharing and preservation. The submission indicates that the program's premise is that more effective, holistic, and integrated approaches to managing the Gulf ecosystem can be achieved by cooperative work across institutional and disciplinary boundaries. The submission selected two goals as primary goals: Restore and Conserve Habitat and Restore Water Quality.

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 proposal submission anticipates that the development of a Gulf-wide monitoring network will provide the information required for managers operating at different geographic scales to make informed decisions to effectively protect, restore, and sustain ecosystem resources across the Gulf of Mexico. In the context of Gulf protection and restoration, the proposal submission indicates an environmental monitoring network will support the development, selection, application and performance assessment of management and restoration project alternatives, and inform adaptive management decisions at the local, state, and regional levels. The integrated network proposes to enable the use of data collected at multiple scales by multiple partners to be analyzed and used to inform protection and restoration planning and implementation at the state and at

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:

As stated in the proposal, ecosystem-based adaptive management is a process whereby management actions are modified in relation to their efficacy for restoring or maintaining an ecological system in a desired state or ecological potential. The submission proposes that high quality monitoring information must be made available to the management and scientific communities operating at different geographic scales to enable informed decision making and to allow them to modify their actions as needed to effectively protect and conserve ecosystem resources across the Gulf of Mexico. A key component of adaptive management, as indicated in the proposal, is a feedback mechanism based on characterizing current ecosystem conditions and measured responses to management actions supplemented with a science-based understanding of the system

2. Regional Ecosystem-based Approach to Restoration

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The submission proposes that ecosystem assessments and habitat suitability models are examples of decision support tools that can assist resource managers in planning, designing, and implementing a successful management process at the regional scale. In the context of Gulf protection and restoration, the submission details, a comprehensive observations and monitoring network will provide the data foundation necessary to support the development and selection of management and restoration project alternatives at the individual project and regional scales.

3. Engagement, Inclusion, and Transparency

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The proposal submission indicates the monitoring network will employ a collaborative organizational structure that will incorporate all restoration partners through the development of a monitoring Community of Practice (CoP); and the use of the monitoring CoP will generate a well-designed and broadly communicated program that addresses the region's needs. Cross-institutional support will be garnered by inclusive management, data collection, open access to standardized data, involvement of gulf-wide experts, active stakeholder involvement, and a system that is adaptable to changing needs and priorities.

4. Leveraging Resources and Partnerships

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The proposal submission details that the monitoring Community of Practice (CoP) provides opportunities to: share lessons-learned, best practices, and resources; leverage collective capabilities and capacity; collect high-quality data and maintain consistency and compatibility in data used to help assess restoration success of Council-selected projects; and ensure that the many existing and new monitoring programs (such as the NAS and NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program) are leveraged by the Council, reducing duplication of effort and monitoring costs for Council-funded projects, and the Gulf ecosystem as a whole. The CoP plans to use strategic workshops, and other collaborative means, to conduct the inventory, identify gaps, develop criteria for prioritizing monitoring needs and collaboratively develop the regional network to fill these needs. Although this proposal is being led by NOAA and USGS, the submission explains that the monitoring network will

5. Delivering Results and Measuring Impacts

(●) YES ( ) NO

Notes:

The proposal submission anticipates that this effort will lay the foundation for a regional habitat and water quality monitoring and assessment network built by coordinating and building upon existing observations and monitoring programs. The submission details that monitoring and assessment network will rely upon standardized and repeated measurements in the field, a well-structured data management system that will ensure standardized data formats, high data quality standards, open sharing of methods, protocols, and data, and an effective framework to disseminate data. Reliable data and subsequently-developed decision support tools, as detailed in the proposal, are the foundation for an adaptive management regime that is based upon the use of best available science.

E. Meeting Commitments and Tracking and Measuring Progress

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

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

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

(●) YES ( ) NO

Notes:

The proposal submission details the principal measure of success is the development of a coordinated monitoring network that incorporates existing and new data from all efforts in the Gulf region, shared freely with all partners. For Habitat Mapping, Assessment, and Monitoring and Water Quality Monitoring, the submission details the following measures of success: an important measure of success is the development of new, high-quality habitat maps for priority areas of the Gulf, from inland brown water habitats to deep blue water habitats. Additional measures include: 1) the ability of these products to accurately characterize aquatic and terrestrial habitats; 2) the areal extent and spatial resolution of these products; 3) a broad use of program data and products by scientists, managers, and educators; and 4) establishment of an enduring habitat monitoring

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 Proposal seeks to build the foundation for science-based decision-making and to coordinate and augment where needed the infrastructure necessary for synoptic, persistent collection of habitat, water quality data and other indicators of Gulf of Mexico (GOM) health. The proposal submission anticipates that this effort will lay the foundation for a regional habitat and water quality monitoring and assessment network built by coordinating and building upon existing observations and monitoring programs. The submission details that monitoring and assessment network will rely upon standardized and repeated measurements in the field, a well-structured data management system that will ensure standardized data formats, high data

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

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The proposal submission anticipates that sustainability of the proposed activity will be ensured via the collaboration between NOAA and USGS, and via collaboration with local, state, federal, and energy industry partners. These partners include, but are not limited to, the Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA), the Gulf of Mexico Coastal Ocean Observing System (GCOOS), the Gulf of Mexico University Research Collaborative (GOMURC), state resource management agencies, state Centers of Excellence, and other federal agencies. Long-term support, as indicated in the proposal, will be achieved as stakeholders realize the benefits of the program, which will include participation of pooled regional expertise in monitoring and analyses,

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

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

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:

As indicated in the proposal, local people will be used to maintain instrument arrays and conduct habitat mapping activities, creating jobs and economic opportunities; CoP workshops will rotate around the Gulf increasing revenues to local businesses; and facilities, vessels, and equipment may be designed, built, and/or maintained by the local workforce. The proposal submission anticipates that the outcomes of network implementation and maintenance will include information which will be used to identify and prioritize protection and restoration projects that will benefit the natural resources and ecosystem services on which these communities rely (e.g., marsh creation, oyster reef, seagrass restoration) and track ecosystem indicators that can provide managers with habitat and water quality information needed to make other appropriate natural resource