Science Evaluation

Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

PROPOSAL TITLE

Strategic Conservation Assessment of Gulf Coast Landscapes

LOCATION

AL, FL, LA, MS, TX

SPONSOR(S)

DOI

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

Project, Planning

REVIEWED BY:

DATE:

1/08/15

Best Available Science:

These 6 factors/elements help frame the reviewers answers to A, B and C found in next section:

1. Have the proposal objectives, including methods used, been justified using peer reviewed and/or publicly available information?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

Yes, the authors have cited a number of programmatic documents that cover priorities and plans for the region and the methods cite and use a number of standard techniques such as multi-criteria decision analysis.

2. If information supporting the proposal does not directly pertain to the Gulf Coast region, are applicant's methods reasonably supported and adaptable to that geographic area?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

The planning documents are specific to the Gulf Coast region. Seeing as this is more of a social/economic planning and research project rather than implementation the methods are suitable anywhere.

3. Are the literature sources used to support the proposal accurately and completely cited?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

Yes, the citations are accurate and cited completely. The literature review is not at all exhaustive by any means, but some techniques such as multi-criteria decision analysis, one could write a complete book about. But, the authors do a nice job of presenting representative publications.

4. Are the literature sources represented in a fair and unbiased manner?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

Yes, they seem fair and unbiased. Again, since the review is not comprehensive so the pros, cons, and biases are not outlined, but the methodology is widely used and accepted. There is no one way to conduct and build a prioritization tool.

5. Does the proposal evaluate uncertainties and risks in the scientific basis for the proposal, including any identified by the public and Council members?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

Yes, they identify land-use change from urbanization, climate change, and sea level rise as threats to the sustainability of land conservation investments. As they say, all models are not accurate, but some are better than others. However, by at least acknowledging these factors they are reducing the potential risks. They indicate the proposed 3-year time line as an accelerated goal reliant on the planning and design experience within the LCCs, Core Working Group, and stakeholder community as a potential risk. However, I view this as sufficient time, particularly with the number of hires they are asking for.

6. Does the proposal evaluate uncertainties and risks in achieving its objectives over time? (e.g., is there an uncertainty or risk that in 5-10 years the project/program will be obsolete or not function as planned given projections of sea level rise?)

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

Yes, this project is designed to alleviate these longer-term risks and incorporate land conservation under the scenarios of climate change and sea level rise among others.

Based on the answers to the previous 6 questions, and giving deference to the sponsor to provide within reason the use of best available science the following three questions can be answered:

A. Has the applicant made a reasonable determination that the proposal is based on science that uses peer-reviewed and publicly available data?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Information Needed:

Yes, the proposal uses valid science and public data in a reasonable fashion.

B. Has the applicant made a reasonable determination that the proposal is based on science that maximizes the quality, objectivity, and integrity of information (including, as applicable, statistical information)?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Information Needed:

Yes, I believe so.

C. Has the applicant made a reasonable determination that the proposal is based on science that clearly documents and communicates risks and uncertainties in the scientific basis for such projects?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Information Needed:

Yes, see above. They also acknowledge risks related to uncertainties with monitoring following implementation and need for future funding to update the tools.

Science Context Evaluation

A. Have other methods been discussed and reasons provided to why the method is being selected (e.g., scientifically sound; cost-effectiveness)?

Yes, of the three proposal I reviewed this was the only one that did this explicitly at least from a scientific standpoint. It wasn't addressed so much from a cost-effectiveness standpoint.

B. Has your agency/vendor/project manager conducted a project/program like the one proposed?

Yes, not at this large of a scale but at a more localized scale with a focus on riparian areas and wetlands conservation. I am very familiar with the literature and the methods and have little issue with what is proposed.

C. Is there a risk mitigation plan in place for project objectives? (captures risk measures as defined under best available science by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

Not so much aside from indicating the need for future funding requests to update the CPT and SCA to reflect long-term restoration investments in the GCR.

D. Does the project/program consider consequences with implementation? (captures risk measures as defined under best available science by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

They consider consequences of not implementing the program which would be decisions based on politics and the loudest voice in the room rather than science.

E. Does the project/program have clearly defined goals?

Yes, the goal is to support the RESTORE Council by developing a broad-scale and broad perspective decision support system that can integrate the priorities and values of the myriad agencies, entities, and organizations with a stake in Gulf land conservation and can transparently translate those priorities into projects and spatial data layers to inform strategic investments.

F. Does the project/program have clearly defined objectives?

Yes, they have 3 objectives. 1. Develop shared priorities and objectives; 2. Develop a tool to prioritize existing land conservation projects; and 3. Develop a spatial data layer to prioritize the entire Gulf Coast Region. Of the three proposals I reviewed this once did the best job of specifically stating the goals and objectives.

G. Does the project/program have measures of success? (captures statistical information requirement as defined by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

Yes, it is to improve science-based decision-making processes, but as the authors point out that is not easy to quantify in terms of success. Thus, they are proposing using indirect measures such as Google Analytics to monitor the number, timing, and geographic distribution of visitors to the sites. And they do propose a statistical method, which will use a rank test to determine how well the CPT and SCA prioritize land conservation projects compared to those actually funded by the Council, NFWF, and other groups.

H. Is a monitoring program in place to determine project goals, success and help adaptive management (if applicable)? (captures statistical information requirement as defined by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

Yes, they propose to use an adaptive management framework during year 3 of this project to link the shared objectives and priorities to conservation decisions necessary in the future. They also propose to create a monitoring plan for metrics connected to these decisions.

I. Does the project/program consider recent and/or relevant information? (captures statistical information requirement as defined by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

Yes, they indicate the necessity of monitoring land conservation actions to continually update the spatial extent of conservation easements and practices. They also recognize that as land conservation is implemented, it alters the relative rankings of proposed projects by affecting their individual scores for connectivity, complementarity, and other landscape factors. They propose to track this activity with Gulf of Mexico Alliance partners.

J. Has the project/program evaluated past successes and failures of similar efforts? (captures the communication of risks and uncertainties in the scientific basis for such projects as defined by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

Yes, they will meet with stakeholders in their individual conservation landscapes to encourage buy-in into the process and also provide insights as to what are the best conservation strategies in a particular landscape given local concerns over conservation and socio-political issues. Lack of communication usually appears to be the biggest obstacle for many of these types of projects. They cite and credit the South Atlantic LCC for the inclusion of an extension specialist in a similar outreach and extension position (Blueprint v1.0).

Please summarize any additional information needed below:

They have a good collaborative partnership in place which is beneficial. The stakeholder-intensive charrettes are a good touch. Good proposal.