Priority & Commitment To Plan Evaluation

Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

PROPOSAL TITLE

Strategic Conservation Assessment of Gulf Coast Landscapes

PROPORAL NUMBER

DOI-4

LOCATION

Across Landscapes within the Gulf Coast Region

SPONSOR(S)

Department of Interior

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

Planning

REVIEWED BY:

Ebonye T. Allen

DATE:

13 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 proposed project would be a collaborative effort by the Department of the Interior working through a voluntary science and planning partnership which uses the capacity of the private, state, and federal Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC) partnerships in the Gulf Coast Region (GCR). The proposed activity would be coordinated through a working group comprised of representatives from Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) member organizations and the other partnerships in which they are involved. This approach could facilitate the synthesis of conservation planning in the GCR, providing a foundation for identifying conservation needs and priorities. Products from this work would include a Conservation Prioritization Tool to evaluate the benefits of land conservation projects, and an initial Gulf-wide Strategic Conservation

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 sponsor asserts there is a need for a decision support system that can integrate the priorities and values of the many organizations with a stake in Gulf land conservation. To that end, the submission is designed to develop shared priorities and objectives; a tool to prioritize existing land conservation projects; and a spatial data layer to prioritize the entire GCR. The proposal anticipates the use of established conservation targets identified through the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, Joint Ventures, State Wildlife Action Plans, the Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation, and the National Estuary Programs.

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 outlines a science-based assessment of ecological value to guide conservation investments across the entire GCR. The approach outlined in this proposal would integrate scientific information from various sources in a format that is easily understood by technical and non-technical individuals involved in restoration and conservation decisions.

2. Regional Ecosystem-based Approach to Restoration

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The geographic footprint of this proposed project is the entire GCR. This project would prioritize conservation investments at both the watershed level and the GCR to provide multiple perspectives on the conservation value of particular projects and individual acres.

3. Engagement, Inclusion, and Transparency

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

This submission includes information regarding engagement, inclusion, and transparency. The charrettes (sessions in which groups come together to draft solutions to problems) described in this proposal have the potential to be collaborative and inclusive ways of engaging broad stakeholder groups.

4. Leveraging Resources and Partnerships

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

Leveraging resources and partnerships is a key feature of this proposed project. The work described in the proposal would be facilitated through the four Landscape Conservation Cooperatives along the Gulf – leveraging their collective technical capacity and organizational participation. This proposal also identifies a coordination structure which includes Joint Ventures, Fish Habitat Partnerships, the Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation, and the Gulf of Mexico Alliance.

5. Delivering Results and Measuring Impacts

(●) YES ( ) NO

Notes:

The proposal details a timeline of actionable tasks and specific deliverables that would guide conservation. The proposal includes a dedicated extension specialist position to solicit feedback on the value of and potential improvements to deliverables. The sponsor would couple this informal assessment with a quantitative evaluation of how well the products reflect proposed land conservation activities.

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 describes quarterly performance periods for specific tasks associated with individual objectives over the 3-year project timeline; and includes a monitoring component to evaluate the use of the proposed tools by the Council and other conservation organizations. The sponsor would regularly assess criteria guiding land conservation investments to ensure accurate prioritizing of parcels and projects that are biologically meaningful, economically beneficial, and socially responsible.

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 sponsor asserts that this proposed submission is foundational in the sense that it would provide an initial assessment of the conservation value of lands across the Gulf. This could help collate priorities and provide a focused view of land conservation needs along the Gulf.

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

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

According to the sponsor, once the proposed work has been completed, it would require relatively little maintenance. Occasional updates would be needed to reflect land conservation that has been implemented over time and which alters the landscape context of further proposed efforts.

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

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

This proposal would build upon an existing foundation of science, expertise, and engagement. The sponsor asserts that the public engagement component would help ensure strong buy-in from the public, which is essential for the success of any such program.

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 five positions supported by this project would be in the Gulf Coast region. The proposal has the potential to benefit communities vulnerable to land-use change or sea-level rise. Effective decisions regarding land conservation can impact local economies through increased opportunities for tourism, continuation of compatible land uses, and maintenance of ecosystem goods and services.