Priority & Commitment To Plan Evaluation

Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

PROPOSAL TITLE

GULF of MEXICO ESTUARY PROGRAM

PROPORAL NUMBER

EPA-3

LOCATION

Gulf Coast estuaries: Lower Laguna Madre (TX); San Antonio/Matagorda Bays (TX); Sabine/Neches (TX); Calcasieu/Mermentau Basin (LA); Atchafalaya/Vermillion (LA); Mississippi Sound (MS); Perdido (AL, FL); Pensacola (FL);

SPONSOR(S)

Environmental Protection Agency

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

Planning/Technical Assistance/Implementation

REVIEWED BY:

Ebonye T. Allen

DATE:

27 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:

This proposal requests funding to establish the Gulf of Mexico Estuary Program (GMEP). The GMEP would develop and stand-up place-based estuary programs across all 5 Gulf states, develop comprehensive conservation and management plans and implement water quality and habitat restoration and protection projects. The proposal submission suggests that the following estuaries be given priority consideration: Lower Laguna Madre (TX); San Antonio/Matagorda Bays (TX); Sabine/Neches (TX); Calcasieu/Mermentau Basin (LA); Atchafalaya/Vermillion (LA); Mississippi Sound (MS); Perdido (AL,FL); Pensacola (FL); Choctawhatchee (FL); St. Andrews (FL); Apalachicola (FL); and Suwannee (FL). The Goals,

B. Comprehensive Plan Objectives

Proposals must clearly identify which objectives the proposal will address

1. Restore, Enhance, and Protect Habitats

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

2. Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources

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

3. Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources

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

4. Restore and Enhance Natural Processes and Shorelines

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

Notes:

This proposal requests funding to establish the Gulf of Mexico Estuary Program (GMEP). The GMEP would develop and stand-up place-based estuary programs across all 5 Gulf states, develop comprehensive conservation and management plans and implement water quality and habitat restoration and protection projects that address the objectives of the Comprehensive Plan.

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:

As stated in the proposal, the EPA proposes the RESTORE Council provide funding for a Gulf of Mexico Estuary Program (GMEP) that would develop and stand-up place-based estuary programs across all 5 Gulf states. The following estuaries are to be given priority consideration for this program: Lower Laguna Madre (TX); San Antonio/Matagorda Bays (TX); Sabine/Neches (TX); Calcasieu/Mermentau Basin (LA); Atchafalaya/Vermillion (LA); Mississippi Sound (MS); Perdido (AL,FL); Pensacola (FL); Choctawhatchee (FL); St. Andrews (FL); Apalachicola (FL); and Suwannee (FL). The Goals, Objectives and Actions comprising the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plans (CCMPs) developed by the estuary programs would primarily focus on restoring water quality, while also addressing restoration and

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 indicated in the proposal, the established seven NEPs and LPBRP each have a standing Technical/Science Advisory Committee (TAC) which provides extensive vetting of all science and technical reports and management recommendations. The proposed place-based estuary programs in the submission would also have a standing TAC that will provide extensive vetting of all science and technical reports and management recommendations. TAC members will include academics, resource managers and agency technical staff. The TAC provides technical recommendations to a Management Committee/Board(s) of the respective place-based estuary program, consisting of agency and local government resource management department leads.

2. Regional Ecosystem-based Approach to Restoration

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The GMEP regional ecosystem-based restoration approach is articulated in the submission through each of the place-based estuary programs going through a science-based process to determine the estuary-specific water quality and habitat resources, stressors, impacts, and action items that can be undertaken to address these stressors and impacts. This process will lead to the development of the CCMP that is unique to that estuary and will provide Goals and Objectives as well as specific actions to restore and protect the estuary based on a stakeholder driven process rooted in strong science.

3. Engagement, Inclusion, and Transparency

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, the consensus based nature of the estuary programs includes NGOs, local communities, state agencies, federal agencies and other key stakeholders. The true value of these programs is in their ability to bring all parties together toward common agreed upon goals through networking, scientific assessment, project development and issues vetting. The Management Conferences used in the GMEP will employ the same structure as the seven Gulf NEPs and the LPBRP and should experience the same benefits.

4. Leveraging Resources and Partnerships

◉ YES ◯ NO ◯ Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, each Management Conference would work with federal, state, local, NGO and other stakeholders to identify opportunities for leveraging additional resources to ensure the goals, objectives and actions developed in the CCMPs are accomplished. The programs Annual Work Plans would incorporate input and leveraged resources from a wide variety of study area stakeholders.

5. Delivering Results and Measuring Impacts

◉ YES ◯ NO

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, GMEP will incorporate program measures into the CCMPs to ensure the delivery of results and the measuring of the impacts of the actions. These program measures are proposed to be modeled after those developed and incorporated into the existing NEP CCMPs and management programs and measures. Examples of how each existing program measures impacts and reports results are stated in the proposal.

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:

As indicated by the proposal, each place-based estuary program in the proposal submission would build the administrative and project management capacity to receive funds and contract, permit and construct projects to produce results quickly. The Program Office would develop and the Management Conference would review and approve an Annual Work Plan. Each program will establish a financial tracking system for the tracking multiple projects and expenditures.

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:

As indicated in the GMEP proposal submission, the GMEP proposal is foundational in the sense that when implemented, will establish new place-based estuary programs across 45% of the Gulf region. Once established, these estuary programs propose to ensure that the RESTORE Council's Comprehensive Plan goals and priorities can be implemented gulf-wide in place-based actions. This proposal indicates that each place-based estuary program established will aid in addressing ecosystem issues by determining the estuary-specific water quality and habitat resources, stressors, impacts, and action items that can be undertaken to address these stressors and impacts. This process is a component in the

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

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

Established Gulf NEPs and the LPBRP have been implementing their Comprehensive Plans for over 20 years. The proposal anticipates that new place-based estuary programs will earn the support and trust of local, state, and federal agencies, media, and general public resulting from their science-based and consensus-driven approach to understanding the environmental issues and priorities facing their estuaries and the capacity to implement projects and programs.

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

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal and demonstrated in existing programs, place-based estuary programs have withstood hurricanes, oil spills, changes in governing structure and administration, and fluctuation in funding sources over their 20-25 year history while remaining in-tact. Place-based estuary programs, like the NEPs and LBPRP, have earned previous support of local, state, and federal agencies, media, and general public resulting from their science-based and consensus-driven approach to understanding the environmental issues and priorities facing their estuaries and the capacity to implement projects and programs. Additionally, the Management Conferences provides ready access to scientists, engineers, environmental professionals and others from academia, NGOs, the local communities, business

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 submission, the place-based estuary programs would employ several full-time positions Gulf-wide.The staff would live and work in the communities within the estuaries. These place-based estuary programs propose to include representatives from geographically or socially vulnerable communities on their Management Conferences and focus outreach efforts in their CCMP to address ecosystem impacts in their communities and the larger estuary. These place-based estuary programs propose to benefit the natural resources critical to natural-resource dependent industries such as fisheries, tourism through the development and implementation of the Goals, Objectives and Actions comprising the CCMPs. The proposal indicates those actions will primarily focus on restoring water quality, while also addressing