

US Environmental Protection Agency

Gulf of Mexico Estuary Program

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposes the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (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 priority estuaries and contributory watersheds identified in this proposal are located adjacent to, but outside of, the study areas of the seven existing Gulf of Mexico National Estuary Programs (NEPs) and the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Restoration Program (LPBRP). For this proposal, EPA estimates 5-12 place-based estuary programs would be developed and stood-up. The actual number of programs is scalable and flexible to meet the desires of the RESTORE Council and funding availability. Once developed and operational, this program would cover approximately 45% of the U.S. Gulf of Mexico coastal zone. These newly established place-based estuary programs would be a superb complement to the existing NEPs and to the LPBRP, which when taken together, would cover approximately 85% of the U.S. Gulf of Mexico coastal zone. Establishing these place-based estuary programs, using a science-based process to develop and implement comprehensive management plans, will help ensure that local programs will be in place to directly address RESTORE Council Comprehensive Plan goals. Requested funding amount: \$11,000,000-\$26,400,000.