



Northwest Florida Office

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[www.defenders.org](http://www.defenders.org)

April 28, 2017

Mr. John Ettinger  
Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council  
500 Poydras Street, Suite 1117  
New Orleans, LA 70130  
Via: [frcomments@restorethegulf.gov](mailto:frcomments@restorethegulf.gov)

Re: Defenders of Wildlife's Comments on the Proposed Funding Approval for the Tampa Bay Estuary Program

Dear Mr. Ettinger,

On behalf of Defenders of Wildlife and our over 80,000 members and supporters in Florida, please accept our comments concerning the proposed funding approval for the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP). Defenders is actively monitoring the BP oil spill restoration planning activities along Florida's Gulf coast. We appreciate your efforts to solicit projects from the public and to seek public input as to how these environmental restoration funds will be utilized.

We strongly support the proposed allocation of \$1,544,960 to implement the following five coastal restoration projects within the TBEP's watershed:

1. Ft De Soto Recirculation and Seagrass Recovery Project;
2. St. Petersburg Biosolids to Energy Project;
3. Robinson Preserve Expansion Project;
4. Hillsborough County Parks Coastal Invasive Plant Removal Project; and
5. Copeland Park Pond Restoration Project.

These projects that will directly protect or restore wildlife habitat, seagrass, mangroves, and improve water quality in Tampa Bay and associated waters by lowering nitrogen loadings in stormwater. These are exactly the types of environmental restoration projects that RESTORE Act funds were intended to accomplish. Thank you for funding these types of projects in Tampa Bay and across the Gulf of Mexico.

Thank you very much for considering our comments.

Sincerely,

Kent L. Wimmer, AICP  
Northwest Florida Representative



## NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION

3801 Canal Street, Suite 305  
New Orleans, LA 70119

504-708-5862  
[www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org)

May 19, 2017

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council  
500 Poydras Street, Suite 1117  
New Orleans, LA 70130  
Via: [frcomments@restorethegulf.gov](mailto:frcomments@restorethegulf.gov)

Re: Comments on the proposed amendment to the Council's Initial Funded Priorities List: Tampa Bay Estuary Program

Dear Council Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the proposed amendment to the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council's (Council) Initial Funded Priorities List (FPL) for implementation funding to support the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP) Restoration Project elements.

The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) has a long history of advocacy in the Gulf of Mexico region, and in the wake of the Deepwater Horizon oil disaster and after the passage of the RESTORE Act, we have worked to support the recovery and restoration of the Gulf environment. We work to advance coordinated, strategic, and science-based investments of funds resulting from the spill, with an emphasis on the health of the Gulf's estuaries. We have been closely following the Council's work as you select and implement projects through the FPL process, and we applaud this next step to move these five elements of the TBEP restoration project forward.

On behalf of our more than six million members and supporters across the country, we write you in support of the implementation of the TBEP Restoration Project that would address five coastal restoration elements within the TBEP's watershed boundary: (1) Ft De Soto Recirculation and Seagrass Recovery Project; (2) St. Petersburg Biosolids to Energy Project; (3) Robinson Preserve Expansion Project; (4) Hillsborough County Parks Coastal Invasive Plant Removal Project; and (5) Copeland Park Pond Restoration Project. We support the allocation of \$1,544,960 to implement these projects, including \$100,000 previously allocated for planning and \$1,444,960 that was identified as a priority for future funding, pending the outcome of environmental compliance and further Council review.

These five elements address the Council's responsibility to undertake projects and programs using the best available science to restore and protect the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, coastal wetlands, and economy of the Gulf Coast. This project is anticipated to benefit the health of the Tampa Bay estuary and provide numerous environmental benefits for each of the elements:

- Ft De Soto Recirculation and Seagrass Recovery Project: Circulation modeling and monitoring, and enhancement or creation of an estimated 200 acres of seagrass habitat.

- St. Petersburg Biosolids to Energy Project: Reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by an estimated 5,147 tons per year.
- Robinson Preserve Expansion Project: Create or restore 14.8 acres of coastal upland habitat, including approximately 4.42 acres of live oak hammock; 4.64 acres of pine flatwoods; 2.9 acres of coastal shrub; and 2.81 acres of coastal hammock.
- Hillsborough County Parks Coastal Invasive Plant Removal Project: Remove invasive plants from approximately 650 acres near Cockroach Bay.
- Copeland Park Pond Restoration Project: Shoreline restoration, littoral shelf development, and open water habitat restoration on a 1.83 acre pond.

The expansion of the Robinson Preserve, which is a subset of a larger project, will help restore upland areas of the preserve to a more natural state and open it to the public for passive recreation and education. When complete, this project will provide an ecological connection to existing features of the preserve. By re-contouring the land, planting native vegetation and conducting intensive maintenance, the project will enhance habitats that will benefit water quality, biological diversity and fisheries. Therefore, we are especially encouraged to see this project element advance. We likewise support the reallocation of funds for the NOAA-Sponsored Robinson Preserve Wetlands Restoration project from Planning to Implementation, pending the completion of environmental compliance review.

We also applaud the Council for advancing those elements that have fulfilled outstanding environmental compliance review, while the EPA continues to work on design, engineering and environmental compliance for the final element of the TBEP Restoration Project: Coopers Point Water Quality Improvement project. We support projects moving from planning to implementation after they have been vetted and have fulfilled the appropriate environmental compliance requirements, and when appropriate, we encourage the Council to continue to separate project elements such that those “ready” elements can move forward while outstanding issues with other elements are resolved.

As more of the projects in the Initial FPL are funded and implemented, we hope to see tangible benefits in the Gulf of Mexico such as increased numbers of fish, birds and wildlife and we also hope to see lasting benefits to the quality of life and the economy on the Gulf Coast.

Thank you very much for considering our comments. Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss further.

Sincerely,



David Muth  
Director, Gulf of Mexico Restoration Program  
National Wildlife Federation