

Activity: Tampa Bay National Estuary Program (Implementation)

Unique Identifier: EPA_RESTORE_002_005_Cat1

Location: Florida, Hillsborough, Pinellas and Manatee Counties

Type of Activity: Implementation

FPL Category: 1 – Funding Approved

Cost Estimate: \$1,544,960

Responsible Council Member: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Partnering Council Member(s): State of Florida

Originally submitted by: The EPA as a component within the proposal “Gulf National Estuary Program (NEP) and Lake Pontchartrain Basin Restoration Program (LPBRP) Comprehensive Plan Implementation Program”

Executive Summary: Five elements of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP) - RESTORE Project will be implemented throughout the Tampa Bay watershed. These five elements will collectively result in an estimated reduction of 5,147 tons of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions per year; an estimated 664 acres of coastal habitat restored or enhanced; and 200 acres of seagrass enhanced or created. More than \$3.4M from local, state and federal agencies is provided as cash match.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The TBEP project consists of the following:

Specific Actions/Activities: Tampa Bay RESTORE Implementation project includes the following five elements. Each element has been identified by TBEP partners as priority, and has been vetted and approved by the TBEP Boards.

- o Biosolids to Energy (City of St. Petersburg),
- o Copeland Park Stormwater Enhancements (City of Tampa),
- o Coastal Invasive Plant Removal (Hillsborough County),
- o Robinson Preserve Water Quality and Habitat Restoration (Manatee County), and
- o Ft Desoto Recirculation and Seagrass Recovery (Pinellas County)

Deliverables: Deliverables will include on-the-ground measurable ecological results as described in the Outcomes and Metrics section below, plus the following reporting elements to ensure accountability:

- o Quarterly progress reports from each project element.
- o Pre- and post- implementation monitoring results from each project element.
- o A draft and final report from each project element.
- o A final collated report from all elements of the Tampa Bay RESTORE Implementation project.

Ecological Benefits/Outcomes and Metrics: These five TBEP restoration elements are expected to result in the following environmental benefits:

- An estimated reduction of 5,147 tons/year greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with the Biosolids to Energy element;

- 14.8 acres of coastal upland habitat created or restored at Robinson Preserve, 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;
- Invasive plants removed on approximately 650 acres near Cockroach Bay in Hillsborough County;
- Circulation modeling, monitoring, and an estimated 200 acres of seagrass habitat enhanced or created at Fort DeSoto Park;
- Shoreline restoration, littoral shelf development, and open water habitat restoration on a 1.83-acre pond at Copeland Park.

Each element includes public outreach/education benefits, including volunteer involvement.

Leveraging and Co-Funding:

- o **Co-funding:** Cash leveraged for the Tampa Bay RESTORE Implementation project totals \$3.4M. Partner roles include project construction and long-term maintenance. Funding partners include the following.
 - Local Governments:
 - \$500,000 from Pinellas County
 - \$279,412 from Manatee County
 - \$271,000 from Hillsborough County
 - \$328,570 from the City of Tampa, and
 - \$303,570 from the City of Clearwater
 - State partners: \$375,000 from Florida Department of Transportation and \$1,253,570 from the Southwest Florida Water Management District.
 - Federal partners: \$90,000 from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In addition, the Department of Energy is providing \$6M for the GHG emissions reduction element.
- o **Building on prior or other investments:** Partners for all seven elements have invested in-kind time and funds to plan and permit these elements. Estimated in-kind services are \$20,000 per project element (\$140,000 in-kind equivalent).

Duration of Activity: All project elements and final deliverables are expected to be completed within 4 years of receipt of RESTORE funds.

Life of Activity: Longevity of ecological benefits of the water quality and habitat improvements included in this proposal is expected to be 30-70 years.

RESPONSE TO SCIENCE REVIEWS:

Comment: The comments were generally positive and supportive. One comment requested more reference information be provided on current major water quality and habitat issues for the NEPs, monitoring and adaptive management methods available for NEPs, and types

of projects.

Response: Much more detailed information and references are readily available by visiting the respective NEP website(s). Here are those links: <http://www.cbbep.org/>; <http://www.gbep.state.tx.us/>; <http://www.btnep.org/BTNEP/home.aspx>; <http://www.mobilebaynep.com/>; <http://www.tbep.org/>; <http://www.sarasotabay.org/>; and <http://www.chnep.org/>

Comment: One comment recommended adding climate change and Sea-Level Rise (SLR)-induced uncertainties and risks to the project selection criteria.

Response: The NEPs have incorporated and do address climate change impacts and adaptation measures into their Annual Plans. The NEPs have been conducting Vulnerability Assessments of their estuaries and have begun adaptive planning where warranted.

Comment: Reviewer agreed that obviously NEPs are a good group to do this work, but was disappointed in the effort put into this proposal. Said it read like, “we are the ones to do this, so just give us the funding”. Also said the proposal said would accept it.

Response: The NEPs have been very successful in establishing and implementing a science-based approach to assessing the stressors of their estuaries, as well as developing and implementing Comprehensive Plans that address those stressors. The NEPs can always utilize funding sources to implement additional specific actions.

Comment: Reviewer cited the following statement from the proposal, “Due to the long history of success and the strong partnerships on which these programs are based, there is a very low risk that RESTORE Council-funded efforts would fail to meet RESTORE Council and NEP CCMP goals” and stated it was a bit high and mighty; at the very least not very self-reflecting. The reviewer also noted, “Certainly each of the NEPs and the LPBRP have had ecosystem restoration project failures”

Response: While not all projects and programs planned, developed and implemented by the NEPs and the LPBRP have been successful, and there have been some project failures, the NEPs have been very successful (on the comprehensive scale) in establishing and implementing a science-based approach to assessing their estuaries, identifying the stressors, developing and implementing Comprehensive Plans, Annual Work Plans, and specific projects that address those stressors.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE:

Section 4(h) of the Council's NEPA Procedures provides: “(h) Actions Exempt from the Requirements of NEPA. Certain Council Actions may be covered by a statutory exemption under existing law. The Council will document its use of such an exemption pursuant to

applicable requirements.” In accordance with the above provision, the EPA has provided the Council with documentation confirming that the five TBEP elements listed above fall within the EPA's statutory NEPA exemption. This documentation also contains information demonstrating compliance with other applicable laws, including the Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act and the Magnuson-Stevens Act. In approving implementation funding for these five TBEP elements, the Council is relying upon the EPA's confirmation of its statutory NEPA exemption with respect to these activities. The environmental compliance documentation for this project can be found [here](#). The EPA will be required to adhere to all applicable terms and conditions contained in this documentation.