

# Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council

Council-Selected Restoration Component

Funded Priorities List 3

Proposal Submission Guidelines and  
Review Process

May 15, 2019

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## Introduction

This document provides guidance to members of the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) regarding the development and review of proposals for potential funding under the Council-Selected Restoration Component of the RESTORE Act. Council members are the only entities eligible to submit proposals for potential funding under the Council-Selected Restoration Component. Federally-recognized Tribes may submit proposals via a federal member sponsor.

Activities approved by the Council for Council-Selected Restoration Component funding are listed in a Funded Priorities List (FPL). For each FPL proposal, Council members will enter the information described below into the Council's program information platform. All FPL proposals submitted to the Council as well as subsequent reviews of those proposals will be made available to the public at [www.restorethegulf.gov](http://www.restorethegulf.gov). Background information on the Council, the RESTORE Act, and the Council-Selected Restoration Component can be found in the Council's 2016 Comprehensive Plan update: [https://www.restorethegulf.gov/sites/default/files/CO-PL\\_20161208\\_CompPlanUpdate\\_English.pdf](https://www.restorethegulf.gov/sites/default/files/CO-PL_20161208_CompPlanUpdate_English.pdf).

The Council is now developing FPL 3, which will fund projects and programs using amounts that will be available in the Trust Fund in early 2020, when the Council plans to vote to approve FPL 3. This amount is projected to be approximately \$360 million. FPL 3 is being developed through a collaborative process designed to advance the commitments set forth in the Comprehensive Plan update.

The primary purpose of this document is to help Council members develop complete proposals for potential funding in FPL 3. This guidance document is divided into three sections:

**Section 1- Proposal Evaluation Criteria and Related Information:** This section discusses the statutory criteria that FPL 3 proposals must address to be considered for funding under the Council-Selected Restoration Component, along with other legal requirements pertaining to best available science and environmental compliance. This section also discusses the FPL categories and planning framework that will help guide the selection of projects and programs for inclusion in FPL 3.

**Section 2 - Guidance for FPL Proposal Content:** This section describes the information to be included in FPL 3 proposals.

**Section 3 - FPL Proposal Review Process and Public Engagement:** This section outlines how the Council will review and consider FPL 3 proposals to ensure compliance with the RESTORE Act, best available science, and consistency with the goals, objectives, and commitments set forth in the Comprehensive Plan. It also describes the opportunities for the public to engage in the FPL 3 development process.

## Section 1: Proposal Evaluation Criteria and Related Information

### RESTORE Act Priority Criteria

In selecting projects and programs under the Council-Selected Restoration Component, the RESTORE Act requires the Council give the highest priority to activities that address one or more of the following criteria:

**(I) Projects that are 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.

**(II) Large-scale projects and programs** that are 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.

**(III) Projects 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.

**(IV) Projects that 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.

All proposals must describe how the proposed activity meets one or more of the RESTORE Act Priority Criteria.

### Geographic Eligibility

Under the RESTORE Act, to be eligible for funding in an FPL an activity must be carried out in the "Gulf Coast Region." The Act defines "Gulf Coast Region" as "(A) in the Gulf Coast States, the coastal zones (as that term is defined in section 304 of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. § 1453)), except that, in this section, the term 'coastal zones' includes land within the coastal zones that is held in trust by, or the use of which is by law subject solely to the discretion of, the Federal Government or officers or agents of the Federal Government)) that border the Gulf of Mexico; (B) any adjacent land, water, and watersheds, that are within 25 miles of the coastal zones described in subparagraph (A) of the Gulf Coast States; and (C) all Federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico." Pursuant to the Department of the Treasury regulations for the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund, "[a]n activity selected by the Council is carried out in the Gulf Coast Region when, in the reasonable judgment of the Council, each severable part of the activity is primarily designed to restore or protect that geographic area. The Council must document the basis for its judgment when it selects the activity." 31 CFR § 34.202(a).

### Comprehensive Plan Goals

The Comprehensive Plan goals are listed below. The first four are applicable to the Council-Selected Restoration Component (the fifth goal is applicable to the Spill Impact Component). Proposals must identify which goal(s) the activity will address. A proposal sponsor must select a single primary goal. One or more secondary goals may be identified, but this is not required.

Metrics and quantifiable measures of success will need to be identified for each Comprehensive Plan goal associated with a proposed project or program (including any secondary goals).

**Goal 1: Restore and Conserve Habitat** - Restore and conserve the health, diversity, and resilience of key coastal, estuarine and marine habitats;

**Goal 2: Restore Water Quality and Quantity** - Restore and protect the water quality and quantity of the Gulf Coast region's fresh, estuarine and marine waters;

**Goal 3: Replenish and Protect Living Coastal and Marine Resources** - Restore and protect healthy, diverse, and sustainable living coastal and marine resources;

**Goal 4: Enhance Community Resilience** - Build upon and sustain communities with capacity to adapt to short- and long-term changes; and

**Goal 5: Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy** - Enhance the sustainability and resiliency of the Gulf economy.

## Comprehensive Plan Objectives

The Comprehensive Plan objectives are listed below. A proposal sponsor must select a single primary objective. One or more secondary objectives may be identified, but this is not required.

**Objective 1: Restore, Enhance and Protect Habitats** - Restore, enhance, and protect the extent, functionality, resiliency and sustainability of coastal, freshwater, estuarine, wildlife and marine habitats. These include barrier islands, beaches, dunes, coastal wetlands, coastal forests, pine savannas, coastal prairies, submerged aquatic vegetation, oyster reefs, and shallow and deepwater corals.

**Objective 2: Restore, Improve and Protect Water Resources** - Restore, improve and protect the Gulf Coast region's fresh, estuarine and marine water resources by reducing or treating nutrient and pollutant loading, and improving the management of freshwater flows, discharges to, and withdrawals from critical systems.

**Objective 3: Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources** - Restore and protect healthy, diverse and sustainable living coastal and marine resources including finfish, shellfish, birds, mammals, reptiles, coral and deep benthic communities.

**Objective 4: Restore and Enhance Natural Processes and Shorelines** - Restore and enhance ecosystem resilience, sustainability, and natural defenses through the restoration of natural coastal, estuarine and riverine processes, and/or the restoration of natural shorelines.

**Objective 5: Promote Community Resilience** - Build and sustain Gulf Coast communities' capacity to adapt to short- and long-term natural and man-made hazards, particularly increased flood risks associated with sea-level rise and environmental stressors. Promote ecosystem restoration that enhances community resilience through the re-establishment of nonstructural natural buffers against storms and flooding.

**Objective 6: Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education** - Promote and enhance natural resource stewardship efforts that include formal and

informal educational opportunities, professional development and training, communication and other actions for all ages.

**Objective 7: Improve Science-Based Decision-Making Processes** - Improve science-based decision-making processes used by the Council.

## FPL Categories and Planning Framework

FPLs include activities in two categories. Category 1 activities are approved for Council-Selected Restoration Component funding. Such approval requires a Council vote as set forth in the RESTORE Act. To be approved in Category 1, a project or program must have documentation demonstrating that all applicable environmental laws have been addressed. For example, a construction project would need documentation demonstrating compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and other applicable laws.

Category 2 activities are Council priorities for further review, but are not approved for funding. These are projects and/or programs that are not yet in a position to be approved by the Council, but which the Council considers to be worthy of potential future funding. At the time of FPL 3 approval, funding will be budgeted for potential use on Category 2 activities, but the Council will not in any way be committed to such activities. As appropriate, the Council will review the activities in Category 2 in order to determine whether to: (1) move an activity to Category 1 and approve it for funding, (2) remove it from Category 2 and any further consideration, or (3) continue to include it in Category 2. In these reviews, the Council can consider feasibility, environmental compliance and scientific, technical, policy and/or other related issues. A Council vote and FPL amendment are required to move an activity from Category 2 to Category 1, or to remove an activity from Category 2 and any further consideration.

The combined total for funding approved in Category 1 and budgeted for potential use on Category 2 activities will not exceed the total amount of Council-Selected Restoration Component funding in the Trust Fund at the time of a Council vote to approve FPL 3.

The Council will use the "Planning Framework" document (draft released in April 2019 for public comment) to guide development of FPL 3 and subsequent FPLs. The Planning Framework is intended to serve as a "bridge" between the Comprehensive Plan and FPLs, and from one FPL to the next. The Council's Planning Framework can be found at [www.restorethegulf.gov](http://www.restorethegulf.gov).

## Eligible Activities and Definitions

The Council will consider FPL 3 proposals from members that address planning or implementation phases, or both, of projects or programs. Following are the definitions of these phases from the Council's 2016 Comprehensive Plan update:

**Planning** – FPL submissions may include: planning and development of ecosystem restoration projects and programs; cost estimates; feasibility analysis; engineering and design; environmental compliance and permitting; scientific elements, including evaluation and establishment of monitoring requirements and methods to report outcomes and impacts; and public engagement.

**Implementation** – FPL submissions may include: construction; public outreach and

education; and measurement, evaluation, and reporting of outcomes and impacts of restoration activities.

As set forth in the Comprehensive Plan update, following are the Council's definitions of "activity," "project," and "program." These definitions are applicable to proposals for Council-Selected Restoration Component funding. FPL proposals should indicate whether the proposed activity is a project or a program. If it is the latter, the activity should be consistent with the following definition of program.

**Activity:** A general term that includes both projects and programs, and may also be used to describe components of a project or program. For example, on the Initial FPL, all the funded projects and programs on the list could be referred to as restoration "activities."

**Project:** A single ecosystem restoration and/or conservation activity that cannot be separated into stand-alone sub-activities. A project may be "scalable," meaning that its scope, size, and/or cost can be expanded or reduced as needed and appropriate. A project can be separated into a "planning" or "implementation" phase or can include both. One or more members can conduct a project. For example, a single project might restore marsh in a specific geographic location. Another example of a project might be the planning, engineering, and design required to advance a marsh restoration proposal to a construction-ready status.

**Program:** A suite of intrinsically-linked restoration and/or conservation activities that must be implemented together in order to achieve the desired outcome. A program should generally be covered by one unified Council environmental compliance review and have a common set of performance measures to effectively assess and measure outcomes. A program's sub-activities may be related in terms of geography, environmental stressors, resources, restoration and/or protection activities, and more. A program can be separated into a "planning" or "implementation" phase or can include both. One or more members can conduct a program. For example, a single program might be a Gulf-wide environmental monitoring effort.

## Best Available Science

The RESTORE Act requires the Council to "undertake projects and programs, using the best available science (BAS) that would restore and protect the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, coastal wetlands, and economy of the Gulf Coast." In the 2016 update to its Comprehensive Plan, the Council strengthened its commitment to using BAS and delivering and measuring success through the use of common standards and monitoring protocols, and the development of indicators and metrics of restoration and conservation success by project, region, and/or watershed.

To meet the intent of the RESTORE Act, the Council conducts external BAS reviews of all project and program proposals submitted for FPL funding. Therefore, all FPL proposals must demonstrate that BAS has been taken into consideration and must clearly articulate how a proposal meets the RESTORE Act's BAS requirement. The RESTORE Act defines BAS as science that (A) maximizes the quality, objectivity and integrity of information, including statistical information; (B) uses peer-reviewed and publicly available data; and (C) clearly documents and communicates risks and uncertainties in the scientific basis for such projects.

FPL proposals should demonstrate the use of BAS throughout the proposal narrative components (see Section 2 for additional information on proposal content). BAS should be applied to, as applicable, project planning, design, siting, implementation, evaluation, and adaptive management. The inclusion of the following items in the proposal will assist in demonstrating that BAS has been taken into consideration:

1. Cite peer-reviewed and/or publicly available information, when applicable, and include a complete and accurately cited bibliography
2. Discussion of applicable regional plan(s)
3. Consideration of all the risks and uncertainties associated with the proposal, including short and long-term sustainability and effects associated with implementation
4. Discussion of monitoring and adaptive management strategies (if applicable)
5. Discussion of data management and accessibility sharing plan

## Environmental Compliance

As a federal entity, the Council must comply with all applicable federal environmental laws and other requirements (such as Executive Orders) when approving funding under the Council-Selected Restoration Component. The environmental laws that apply to a proposal are a function of the specific activities being proposed, and their possible direct and indirect influence on the environment.

To approve funds for activities that involve only planning, the Council will use a Categorical Exclusion (CE) to address the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); no other environmental compliance would be needed for Council approval of such activities. CEs are used for types of activities that have been found to have no significant environmental impacts. Similarly, implementation activities that do not involve on-the-ground impacts to the environment can be covered by a CE with no further environmental review/compliance documentation needed for approval of FPL funding. No environmental compliance documentation is needed for portions of proposals that seek FPL Category 2 status (i.e., activities for which no Council funding commitment is sought) until such a project is recommended for elevation to Category 1 status. In addition, some actions may be covered by a statutory exemption under existing law, in which case the Council will document its use pursuant to applicable requirements.

When approving funding for FPL implementation activities that have environmental impacts, the Council must comply with the following laws: NEPA, Endangered Species Act (ESA), Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (FWCA). Other environmental laws and requirements may apply at the award or construction stage of a project or program. The Council encourages regulatory efficiencies by concurrently addressing all applicable environmental compliance requirements, including those that might be triggered at a later stage.

To comply with NEPA when approving implementation funding for an FPL activity, the Council can, where appropriate, adopt existing NEPA documentation such as an Environmental Assessment (EA), use a federal member's CE, or utilize a statutory exemption, in accordance with the Council's NEPA procedures. In such cases, the Council must independently determine that the NEPA documentation addresses the proposed activity and whether additional analysis



might be needed.

If a member recommends that the Council adopt a NEPA document (i.e., EA or Environmental Impact Statement), the proposal may include documentation from the agency that authored the NEPA document (if other than the applicant) supporting Council adoption and indicating whether the given NEPA document fully covers the activity in question. The applicable NEPA document must be included as an attachment to the proposal (or provided via an internet link).

If the sponsor of a proposed implementation activity seeks to use a member CE, the FPL proposal must include written certification from the federal agency that established the CE that (1) there are no extraordinary circumstances that would preclude the use of the CE, and (2) use of the CE would be appropriate for the specific activity under consideration by the Council. If the sponsor seeks to use a statutory exemption under existing law, the FPL proposal must document its use pursuant to applicable requirements.

In addition to NEPA, proposals for implementation funds must include documentation demonstrating compliance with ESA, MSA, NHPA, and FWCA, as applicable. Such documentation may be included as part of a NEPA document (e.g., as an appendix) and/or in association with a federal permit (such as a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit). In the latter case, compliance with these laws might be demonstrated in the compliance documentation, including any associated permit conditions required to ensure compliance with these laws. Documentation of compliance with these laws could also be demonstrated with stand-alone documentation from the agency or agencies responsible for enforcing such laws.

Following are examples of how the Council can address the environmental laws applicable to a proposed FPL implementation activity:

**Environmental Compliance Example 1 - FPL proposal with existing Clean Water Act Section (CWA) 404 permit:** As appropriate, the Council could adopt the existing permit NEPA documentation and include an award condition requiring compliance with permit conditions (e.g., regarding ESA, MSA, and/or NHPA). Prior to using such existing documentation, the Council would ensure that it fully covers the proposed project relative to the applicable laws. There may be instances where additional or supplemental environmental compliance documentation is needed. (The CWA Section 404 process of avoidance, minimization, and compensation can result in modifications to proposed projects. By conducting the CWA Section 404 permit process before Council approval, the Council can avoid the possibility that it could approve a project only to have it subsequently modified in scope and/or cost as a result of the permit process. By using existing permit documentation, the Council also avoids unnecessary duplication of environmental reviews.)

**Environmental Compliance Example 2 - FPL proposal for habitat conservation activity:** As appropriate, the Council could use a member CE that covers the proposed activity, and review sponsor-provided documentation that ensures compliance with other potentially applicable laws. (Note: this example assumes that the activity in question involves only acquisition/protection of existing habitat.)

**Environmental Compliance Example 3 - FPL proposal for planning only:** As noted above, the member need not provide any environmental compliance documentation for proposals that involve only planning activities. In such cases, the Council would use its

own planning CE (set forth in Section 4(d)(3) of the Council's NEPA Procedures) to approve such funds.

All members will have an opportunity to review and comment on environmental compliance documentation the Council proposes to use in connection with approval of funding for FPL implementation activities. This intra-Council review will help ensure efficient and effective compliance with applicable requirements. In addition, the public will have an opportunity to review and comment on the Council's proposed environmental compliance documentation during the public review of the draft FPL. Pursuant to the Council's SOPs, the Executive Director will not adopt and/or execute environmental compliance decision documents on behalf of the Council unless and until the action has been approved by the Council.

## Section 2: Guidance for FPL 3 Proposal Content

Following is guidance on the content of FPL proposals for projects and programs. The FPL proposal must be complete to be considered eligible for funding. Failure to submit all required elements discussed below will result in the proposal being considered ineligible, and returned without review. A submission platform will be made available to members to submit proposals. The proposal content, as described below, will be entered by members into the platform, as opposed to uploads.

### Project Title

*(Character limit: 100)*

### Project Abstract

*(Character limit: 1000)*

Briefly summarize the proposed project or program, including the following information: description of proposed activity (including whether the activity involves planning and/or implementation), anticipated environmental benefits, location, total cost (and amount of Council-Selected Restoration Component funding being requested, if different than total cost), timeline, partners, and other information that might be needed to provide the reader with an overview of the proposed activity. This section should be written for the general public. It may be used verbatim for fact sheets and other public information documents.

### RESTORE Act Priority Criteria

*(Check boxes for 4 criteria)*

### Priority Criteria Justification

*(Character limit: 2000)*

The four RESTORE Act priority criteria are listed in Section 1. All proposals must include the sponsor's justification for how the proposed activity meets at least one of the four Priority Criteria. Following is additional guidance on addressing these criteria for each proposed project and program.

**Greatest contribution:** If a proposed activity is designed to address Criterion I: greatest contribution to restoring and protecting natural resources in the Gulf, the proposal should include a discussion of relevant factors (e.g., scale, duration, and sustainability).

**Large-scale:** If a proposed activity is designed to address Criterion II: large-scale projects and programs, the proposal should include an explanation of how the proposed activity would provide large-scale environmental benefits within the appropriate Gulf-wide, regional, or watershed context, or in the context of the expected benefits of the proposed project or program relative to the restoration needs in the given coastal area.

**Existing Gulf Coast State comprehensive plans:** If an activity is designed primarily to address Criterion III, the proposal should reference the existing Gulf Coast State comprehensive plan containing the proposed activity.

**Restore long-term resiliency of most impacted natural resources:** If an activity is designed to primarily address Criterion IV: restore long-term resiliency of natural resources most impacted by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the proposal should include a discussion of relevant factors (e.g., duration, sustainability, and how the proposal would improve an area's capacity to adapt to short- and long-term changes). The proposal should also discuss how the project or program addresses natural resources most impacted by the spill.

## Narrative

### Introduction and Overview

*(Character limit: 9500)*

Fully describe the proposed project or program, including the following information: description of the activity being proposed (including whether it involves planning and/or implementation), anticipated environmental benefits, environmental stressor(s) being addressed, location, total cost (and amount of Council-Selected Restoration Component funding being requested, if different than total cost), timeline, partners, and other information that might be needed to provide the reader with a full understanding of the proposed activity. This section may briefly discuss and/or reference the specific considerations that will be discussed in other sections of the proposal.

Describe how the proposed activity:

- Will be carried out in the Gulf Coast Region (see the discussion of Gulf Coast Region in Section 1),
- Addresses one or more of the Council's Goals and Objectives, and
- Advances the commitments set forth in the 2016 Comprehensive Plan update.

The primary Comprehensive Plan goal and objective must be identified. Where applicable, describe how the proposed activity aligns with the FPL 3 Planning Framework.

A primary purpose of this section is to make a clear case for how the proposed project or program meets the applicable Comprehensive Plan goal(s) and objective(s). Note, however, that proposed projects and programs need not address each and every criterion, goal, and objective. Proposed projects and programs will not be ranked or scored with respect to how many criteria, goals, and objectives might be addressed.

### Methods

*(Character limit: 3500)*

Describe the proposed method to be used in the project or program, and the reasons that the proposed method was selected. All proposed methods should be justified using best available science (provide citations); methods may also be justified by other reasons (e.g., cost-effectiveness, technical feasibility). For example, a marsh restoration project might utilize a particular source or type of sediment based on engineering, ecological, and/or cost-

effectiveness issues. Proposed activities that do not involve construction might also involve a particular method. For example, a planning project might use information generated by a specific forecasting model and/or field data collection to inform engineering and design plans. Such methodologies should be described.

#### Environmental Benefits

*(Character limit: 2500)*

In addition to the discussion of anticipated environmental benefits in the Introduction and Overview section, provide a detailed description of anticipated environmental benefits. Environmental benefits can be achieved through multiple activities that could be considered for funding (e.g., planning, implementation, science, education, improved resilience). Such benefits can be quantitative (e.g., acres restored or conserved, amount of nutrients or other pollutant reductions) and/or qualitative (e.g., increased community resilience, increased public stewardship of natural resources). Such benefits must be discussed in reference to one or more underlying environmental stressors identified by best available science and/or an applicable ecosystem restoration plan(s). Some proposals such as those involving natural resource stewardship and improving science-based decision-making may not specifically address an underlying environmental stressor. Discuss the rationale for the anticipated duration/sustainability of the environmental benefits that would accrue from the proposed activity (consistent with the following discussion of risks and uncertainties). If the proposed activity involves only planning, engineering and design, and/or permitting (i.e., no construction), this section should make it clear that the actual environmental benefits would only accrue if implementation funding is secured in the future.

#### Metrics and Measures of Success

*(Character limit per metric:1500)*

Identify metrics for evaluating project and program objectives, and describe how the project or program's success will be evaluated over time. The metrics identified for evaluating project/program objectives should align with the Comprehensive Plan goal(s) that the proposed project or program has identified, as well as any anticipated quantifiable environmental benefits (discussed above).

The Council acknowledges that additional planning, permitting, or other factors may result in changes to target outcomes for metrics. It is thus understood that targets identified for metrics in proposals are approximate and may be subject to change. Material revisions to targeted outcomes may require an FPL amendment (e.g., changes to project scope).

#### Risks and Uncertainties

*(Character limit: 5000)*

Using best available science, summarize risks and uncertainties associated with the proposed activity, along with any proposed measures to mitigate such risks and uncertainties. In general, risks and uncertainties should be considered in both the near- and long-term, and with respect to the anticipated lifespan of the proposed project or program.

This section may provide perspective on such risks and uncertainties relative to the potential benefits of the proposed project or program. For example, a long-term risk to the project or program posed by sea level rise might be offset by the potential near- and mid-term

environmental benefits of the activity. Conversely, a potential benefit of the proposed project or program might be the mitigation of future risks associated with sea level rise, subsidence and/or storms.

The proposal should discuss whether the project or program is vulnerable to applicable climate risks under varying future scenarios, including but not limited to sea level rise, alterations in rainfall patterns, and/or potential increases in hurricane intensity. Consider how such risks might affect the benefits and duration of the project or program. The proposal should describe any design or other measures taken to mitigate these risks.

Other applicable risks and uncertainties might include questions and unknowns relating to construction feasibility, unanticipated cost increases, land rights, regulatory review, project timing, public opposition, and/or the potential for unanticipated adverse environmental and/or socio-economic impacts. Any relevant scientific uncertainties and/or data gaps should also be discussed (including the appropriate citations). Proposed measures to mitigate risks should be discussed. For proposals that involve only planning (no construction), this section should discuss how the foregoing risks and uncertainties would be addressed in the planning process.

#### Monitoring and Adaptive Management (Character limit: 2500)

Describe the type and duration (e.g., number of years post-construction) of monitoring that will be undertaken and the adaptive management strategies that may be implemented, as needed, to improve project performance and decision criteria. Monitoring types could include monitoring for compliance, construction, research support, adaptive management, and other surveys, etc. Discuss how monitoring will support the identified project metrics, and provide citations for relevant monitoring protocols. This section may specify the duration, timing, and type of data to be collected under each monitoring type. This section may also describe the amount and type of monitoring undertaken before, during, and after project construction. Members are encouraged to consider existing monitoring guidelines (e.g. NRDA MAM Manual<sup>1</sup>, Council ODP Guidance<sup>2</sup>) when describing plans for project/program monitoring and adaptive management.

#### Data Management (Character limit: 1500)

Provide an overview of the plan for data management and data sharing for the proposed project/program. This description could include a discussion of the data management protocols to be used, policies for addressing data stewardship and preservation, and procedures for providing public access to project/program data.<sup>3</sup>

#### Public Engagement, Outreach, and Education (Character limit: 2500)

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<sup>1</sup> NRDA Monitoring and Adaptive Management Procedures and Guidelines Manual Version 1

<sup>2</sup> RESTORE Council Interim Observational Data Plan Guidance

<sup>3</sup> Also note: All approved projects/programs will require an Observational Data Plan and Data Management Plan at the application stage. Council members should consider this when preparing project/program budgets.

The 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update outlines the Council's commitment to engagement, inclusion, and transparency with all stakeholders, including under-represented communities and federally recognized Tribes. Program proposals should describe public engagement activities and stakeholder input that was considered in the selection of potential activities within the program. Grant applications should also provide information regarding any additional considerations of stakeholder engagement, education activities, or outreach that took place between proposal submission and the request for disbursement of funds for the project. There should be communication with the Director of External Affairs as public engagement events are developed to allow a broad reach to potential attendees. Additionally, a brief summary of technical stakeholder meetings should be provided to the Director of External Affairs to meet the Council's commitment to transparency.

#### Collaboration, Partnerships, and Leveraging (Character limit per leveraging opportunity: 750)

The Comprehensive Plan update emphasizes the importance of collaboration among the Council members and with other Gulf restoration funding sources and stakeholders. As applicable, describe how such collaboration was used to identify, develop, and/or refine the proposed project or program. If applicable, the proposal should also include a description of the partnerships that will be used to advance the proposed project or program. Sponsors of planning projects that do not have associated Category 2 implementation proposals are encouraged to provide information regarding potential implementation funding sources, when such information is available.

Include a description of any resources that may be leveraged with this proposal. In such cases, the discussion of leveraging should indicate which of the following three types of leveraging is proposed:

**Co-Funding:** Costs will be shared across funding from two or more sources. The leveraged funding from all sources is required in order to achieve the project or program objective. In cases where co-funding is to be used, the commitment of such leveraged resources is required prior to award of Council-Selected Restoration Component funds. There may be an exception to this rule in cases where a project could be scaled down in the event that the anticipated co-funding did not materialize. In such cases, the Council would need to consider whether an FPL amendment and/or award amendment would be needed to address the change in project scale.

**Adjoining:** Activities are proposed in a location that adjoins another existing or proposed project. Geographic proximity is key to this type of leveraging of resources across projects.

**Builds on Other Work:** The project builds upon activities completed or ongoing as part of other projects or programs but is not captured by either of the other two types of leveraging.

#### Environmental Compliance (Character limit: 2500 not including uploads)

All proposals must address environmental compliance and should indicate whether Category 1 or Category 2 status is being sought for the given activity. The attached [environmental compliance checklist](#) will be used in the proposal platform to summarize the status of a proposal with respect to applicable environmental laws. In addition to the checklist, following are instructions for environmental compliance related information that should be included in the submission, depending on the type of project or program being proposed.

**Planning:** As discussed above, no environmental compliance documentation is needed for proposals covering only planning activities that do not involve or lead directly to ground-disturbing activities that may have significant effects individually or cumulatively, and do not commit the Council or its applicants to a particular course of action affecting the environment. Such proposals should include the following statement in the environmental compliance section: “This proposed activity involves only planning actions that are covered by the Council’s NEPA Categorical Exclusion for planning, research or design activities (Section 4(d)(3) of the Council’s NEPA Procedures).”

**Environmental Education and Outreach:** No environmental compliance documentation is needed for proposals covering only outreach, education or related activities that do not involve or lead directly to ground-disturbing activities that may have significant effects individually or cumulatively, and do not commit the Council or its applicants to a particular course of action affecting the environment. Such proposals should include the following statement in the environmental compliance section: “This proposed activity involves only implementation actions that are covered by the Council’s National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Categorical Exclusion for training, technical assistance, and other related activities (Section 4(d)(1)(vi) of the Council’s NEPA Procedures).”

**FPL Category 2:** No environmental compliance documentation is needed for proposals seeking FPL Category 2 status for implementation activities. Such proposals should include the following statement in the environmental compliance section: “This proposal seeks FPL Category 2 status for implementation activities. Environmental compliance documentation is not needed until the sponsor seeks FPL Category 1 funding approval at a later date.” Some proposals might seek Council approval of planning funds, along with Category 2 status for the implementation component of a project or program. In such cases, the proposal should include the reference to the Council’s planning CE described above, while also indicating that Category 2 status is sought for the implementation component.

**Implementation Activities with Environmental Impacts:** All requests for FPL Category 1 funding approval for implementation activities that could have environmental impacts must be accompanied by up-to-date documentation of compliance with NEPA, ESA, NHPA, MSA, and FWCA, as applicable. Such documentation must fully cover the potential environmental effects of the proposed action. The environmental compliance section should describe how the sponsor proposes that the Council address environmental compliance for the proposed activity (e.g., adopt existing NEPA documentation, use a member CE) and confirm that the proposed project or program is fully covered by the associated environmental compliance documentation. All such documentation should be attached to the proposal (or included via a link to the internet location of the documentation). The sponsor is also encouraged to provide the status of compliance with other environmental laws that might be applicable at the implementation phase of the project or program. For example, a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit and/or compliance with the Coastal Barrier Resources Act might be needed prior to implementation of a given project.



## Location

*(Character limit: 250 not including uploads)*

A location description is needed for each proposal. State, County, HUC8 watershed(s), and Congressional District(s) will also need to be identified. Geographic Information System (GIS) files (point, line, and/or polygon) are required for each proposal (templates are available for member use and can be found at <https://www.restorethegulf.gov/apps/piper/web/>). A project map is also required (acceptable formats are JPEG or PNG). Up to four additional image files (e.g. charts, figures, etc.) are allowed. All maps, charts, and figures uploaded will require a public engagement-friendly caption for the 508 compliant PDF.

## Budget

*(Character limit: 4500)*

Include a budget that summarizes the amount of funding requested in major functional cost categories. The amounts provided for the cost categories listed below represent estimates that can be adjusted at the funding application stage, provided that the total cost of the project or program does not exceed the total amount for the activity as approved in the FPL. Please note, the functional cost categories in the proposal are distinct from the object class categories that will later be required in the grant application budget. The proposal budget should include the following where applicable:

1. Planning
2. Construction
3. Implementation (e.g., for proposals that do not involve construction, such as education and outreach, or involve some combination of construction and other activities)
4. Monitoring and Adaptive Management (MAM)
5. Data Management
6. Environmental Compliance
7. Engineering and Design
8. Operation and Maintenance
9. Deauthorization/Decommissioning (at the end of project life)
10. Overhead/Indirect Costs (not to exceed 3% of total project cost)
11. Project Management
12. Other (description required)

The budget should differentiate between project costs being requested under this proposal and in-kind or leveraged resources (see the above discussion of the different types of leveraging). If a project requires ongoing management or maintenance, please specify

When developing the overall budget, please consider all costs that may be necessary to carry out the proposed project or program, including:

- Member costs necessary for general pre- and post-award grant/interagency agreement management and management and oversight of pass-through funding provided to one or more subrecipients; and
- Contingency costs that may appropriately be associated with the various budget categories.

## Scalability

*(Character limit: 2500)*

As indicated in the Council's definitions of "project" and "program," proposals for FPL funding may cover activities that can be scaled up or down depending on available resources, ecosystem needs, and other considerations. In the budget section, the sponsor should indicate whether the activity is scalable. If the activity is scalable, the sponsor is encouraged - but not required - to provide one or two options (scaled down iterations of the activity). Such scale options should include an estimated total cost for each variation of the activity, along with the associated ecosystem benefits. For example, if the proposal seeks \$10 million for 250 acres of wetland restoration, the sponsor may offer different scale options, such as 150 acres of marsh restoration at a cost of \$7.5 million. Sponsors may also use this section to discuss any efficiencies that could be realized through economies of scale with larger options for a proposal. This would provide the Council with additional options and flexibility in developing the FPL.

### Bibliography

(To be provided in the proposal platform)

Please list all literature cited in the proposal, and please provide the appropriate links where available.

### Additional Information

Additional proposal fields to be populated within the proposal platform include: Sponsor(s), Activity Type (Planning, Implementation, Planning & Implementation), Project or Program, Priority Criteria, Primary Goal, Primary Objective, Secondary Goal(s) (if applicable), Secondary Objective(s) (if applicable).

Sponsors may include other information in support of the given proposal, including for example:

1. Letters of support
2. Pledges of in-kind cost sharing
3. Environmental compliance documentation (see above)
4. Public engagement activities and results
5. Tables (and associated 508 compliant caption)
6. Other

Such additional information may be appended to the proposal and/or provided via an internet link. Appended information must be in PDF, DOC, or DOCX format.

## Section 3: FPL 3 Proposal Review Process and Public Engagement

This section describes how proposals for Council-Selected Restoration Component funding in FPL 3 will be reviewed and considered by the RESTORE Council. Opportunities for public input in the FPL 3 development process are also described.

### Statutory Requirements and Environmental Compliance

All proposals will be reviewed for compliance with the RESTORE Act priority criteria and best available science requirements (discussed below), conformity with the Comprehensive Plan, and compliance with applicable environmental laws. All proposals will be reviewed to ensure that each meets at least one of the four RESTORE Act priority criteria. All proposals will also be reviewed for consistency with the applicable goal(s) and objective(s) of the Comprehensive Plan. As noted above, proposals need not address each and every goal and objective, and will not be ranked or scored on the number of goals and objectives addressed. The priority criteria and Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives are listed in Section 1 of this document. These reviews will be conducted by Council staff (i.e., RESTORE Council employees that serve the full membership of the Council). A summary of these reviews will be made available to the public on the Council's website.

### Best Available Science Review Process

Under the RESTORE Act, all approved FPL projects/programs must be based on and conducted according to best available science. To meet the intent of the Act, the Council supports a process for external independent scientific review of all project and program proposals submitted for funding. Following the review of FPL proposals for RESTORE Act compliance (described above) each proposal will be independently reviewed by at least three external expert science reviewers. Details of the Best Available Science Review process are provided in [Appendix A](#).

### Public Transparency and Input

All proposals will be made available for public review, as will a summary of the Council staff review of all the proposals. This review summary will provide the outcome of the statutory review discussed above, the environmental compliance status of the proposal, and other relevant information to assist the public in understanding and considering the proposals. Similarly, the results of the BAS review will also be available to the public on the Council's webpage. While the names and affiliations of reviewers and review panel members will remain anonymous to the extent permitted by law, all external BAS reviews, as well as a summary of the BAS review panel discussions, will be made available to the public on the Council's website. In addition, the summary qualifications of the entire pool of reviewers will be made available to the public on the Council's website.

There are two opportunities for public input on the FPL 3 process. First, the Council will seek public input on the proposed Planning Framework for FPL 3. The Council will consider all such public input as it finalizes the FPL 3 Planning Framework. Second, as was done with the Initial FPL, the Council will also seek public input on the draft FPL 3, and will fully consider all such input prior to voting to approve the final FPL 3.

## Appendix A. Best Available Science Review Process

Under the RESTORE Act, all approved FPL projects/programs must be based on and conducted according to best available science (BAS).

Following the review of FPL proposals for RESTORE Act compliance each proposal will be independently reviewed by at least three external expert science reviewers. In this case, “external” refers to reviewers outside of Council member agencies sponsoring the specific projects and programs under review. In general, one of these reviewers will be from the Gulf state most directly linked to the proposal (e.g., a reviewer from the state in which the proposed activity will take place), and the other two will be from another state in the Gulf of Mexico region (the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas), or from outside of the Gulf of Mexico region. For proposals that cross-state boundaries, reviewers will be identified with familiarity with the appropriate watershed or gulf-wide perspective.

Science reviewers for Council-funded projects are derived from several sources including, but not limited to, the following:

### Previous Council Reviewers:

In 2014-2015, under the direction of the Council Science Staff, a broad pool of expert volunteer science reviewers were used to evaluate Council-funded proposals. The pool of experts was derived from funded RESTORE and other *Deepwater Horizon* activities, regional associations, the National Academies of Sciences, Sea Grant, the National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) System, National Estuary Programs, the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, numerous universities nationwide, and public websites.

### New Reviewers:

In 2017, the Council contracted with the Gulf of Mexico Alliance and the Gulf of Mexico University Research Collaborative to identify and solicit additional science evaluations for Council-funded projects.

General criteria used to guide identification of three reviewer nominees per project include:

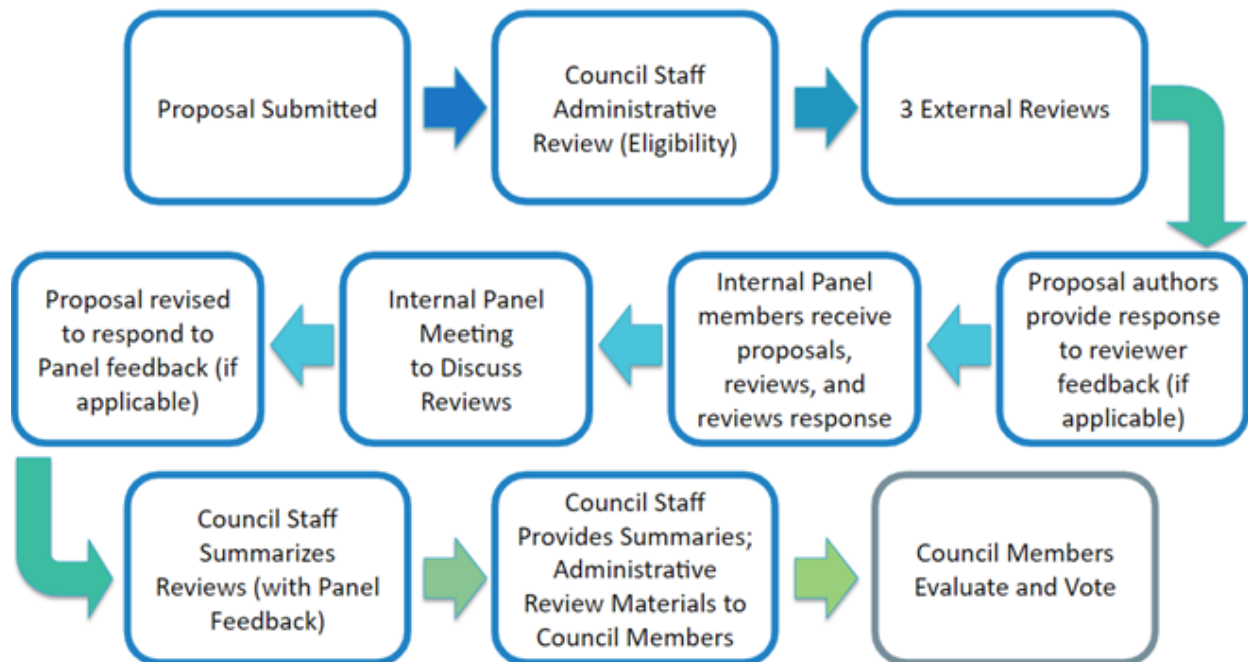
- Professional qualifications including relevant advanced degrees and/or professional experience and skills related to science and restoration.
- Disciplinary expertise appropriate for proposed project scope and objectives.
- Diversity of reviewers from in-state, region, and outside the Gulf region.
- No conflicts of interest.

In addition to the use of three external BAS reviewers, the FPL 3 review process will also include an internal BAS Proposal Review Panel. This panel was established by the Council following the 2016 update of its [Comprehensive Plan](#), in which the Council committed to exploring the use of one or more science review panels in an effort to help identify opportunities for synergies and maximizing benefits.

The BAS Proposal Review Panel will be composed of Council member agency technical staff, and will be facilitated by Council staff. The purpose of this panel will be to use Council member-agency expertise to address external BAS review concerns, and potentially identify project/program synergies not identified prior to proposal submission. The ultimate goal is to provide Council members with substantive best available science content to inform their decision-making. The panel members will be identified by the Council’s Steering Committee.

The revised BAS review process is shown in Figure 1 below. Following the external BAS review process Council staff will summarize the external BAS reviews for each proposal and provide an opportunity for proposal writers to respond to the external reviews. The BAS review panel will then consider the external BAS reviews and the response from proposal writers and provide feedback on addressing BAS concerns and potential for project synergies. Council staff will consolidate the panel feedback, and again, allow proposal writers to respond to these summary comments. The external BAS reviews, panel summary, and BAS review responses from proposal writers will then be made available to the Council and to the public.

Figure 1. FPL 3 Best Available Science Review Process



## Appendix B. External Best Available Science Review Questions

**For SC review and consideration: In the 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update the Council committed to updating the external Best Available Science review questions. Below are the proposed revised external Best Available Science review questions as recommended by majority consensus of the Council's Monitoring and Assessment Working Group.**

*These 4 factors/elements help frame the answers to A, B and C found in next section:*

1. Has the proposal objectives, including proposed methods, been justified using peer reviewed and/or publicly available information?

Yes  No  Need Additional Information

*Comments:*

2. If information supporting the proposal does not directly pertain to the Gulf Coast region, are applicant's methods reasonably supported and adaptable to that geographic area?

Yes  No  Need Additional Information

*Comments:*

3. Are the literature sources used to support the proposal accurately and completely cited? Are the literature sources represented in a fair and unbiased manner?

Yes  No  Need Additional Information

*Comments:*

4. Does the proposal evaluate uncertainties and risks in achieving its objectives over time? (e.g., is there an uncertainty or risk in the near- and/or long-term that the project/program will be obsolete or not function as planned?)

Yes  No  Need Additional Information

*Comments:*

Based on the answers to the previous 4 questions, and **giving deference to the sponsor to provide within reason the use of best available science**, the following three questions can be answered:

A. Has the applicant provided reasonable justification that the application is based on science that uses peer- reviewed and publicly available data?

Yes  No  Need Additional Information

*Comments:*

B. Has the applicant provided reasonable justification that the application is based on science that maximizes the quality, objectivity, and integrity of information (including, as applicable, statistical information)?

Yes  No  Need Additional Information

*Comments:*

C. Has the applicant provided reasonable justification that the proposal is based on science that clearly documents and communicates risks and uncertainties in the scientific basis for such projects/programs?

Yes  No  Need Additional Information

*Comments:*

### **Science Context Evaluation**

A. Has the project/program sponsor or project partners demonstrated experience in implementing a project/program similar to the one being proposed?

Yes  No  Need Additional Information

*Comments:*

B. Does the project/program have clearly defined goals objectives?

Yes  No  Need Additional Information

*Comments:*

C. Has the proposal provided a clear description of the methods proposed, and appropriate justification for why the method is being selected (e.g., scientifically sound; cost-effectiveness)?

Yes  No  *Need Additional Information*

*Comments:*

D. Does the project/program identify the likely environmental benefits of the proposed activity? Where applicable, does the proposal discuss those benefits in reference to one or more underlying environmental stressors identified by best available science and/or regional plans?

Yes  No  *Need Additional Information*

*Comments:*

E. Does the project/program have measures of success (i.e, metrics) that align with the primary Comprehensive Plan goal(s)/objectives? (captures the statistical information requirement as defined by Act)

Yes  No  *Need Additional Information*

*Comments:*

F. Does the proposal discuss the project/program's vulnerability to potential long-term environmental risks (i.e., climate, pollution, changing land use.) (captures risk measures as defined under best available science by the RESTORE Act (Act))

Yes  No  *Need Additional Information*

*Comments:*

G. Does the project/program consider other applicable short-term implementation risks and scientific uncertainties? Such risks may include the potential for unanticipated adverse environmental and/or socio-economic impacts from project implementation. Is there a mitigation plan in place to address these risks? Any relevant scientific uncertainties and/or data gaps should also be discussed.

(captures risk measures as defined under best available science by the Act)

Yes  No  *Need Additional Information*

*Comments:*



H. Does the project/program consider recent and/or relevant information in discussing the elements above?

Yes  No  *Need Additional Information*

*Comments:*

I. Has the project/program evaluated past successes and failures of similar efforts? (captures the communication of risks and uncertainties in the scientific basis for such projects as defined by the Act)

Yes  No  *Need Additional Information*

*Comments:*

J. Has the project/program identified a monitoring and data management strategy that will support project measures of success (i.e., metrics). If so, is appropriate best available science justification provided? If applicable, how is adaptive management informed by the performance criteria? (captures statistical information requirement as defined by the Act)

Yes  No  *Need Additional Information*

*Comments:*

Please summarize any additional information needed below: