

Initial FPL Amendment
Time and Cost Extension for the Gulf Coast Conservation Corps
Program (GCCC)
Response to Public Comments
Public Comment Period: January 15 - February 14, 2020

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Response to Comments

Introduction

From January 15, 2020 to February 14, 2020, the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) sought public comment on a proposed amendment to its [2015 Initial FPL](#). The proposed amendment is titled: [Time and Cost Extension for the Gulf Coast Conservation Corps Program \(GCCC\)](#). The proposed funding for this project is administered by the Council pursuant to the [Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies Act of the Gulf Coast States of 2012 \(RESTORE Act\)](#), and comes from the RESTORE Act allocation known as the Council-Selected Restoration Component or “Bucket 2.” The Council approves projects and programs for Bucket 2 funding in “Funded Priorities Lists” (FPLs). The Initial FPL, approved in 2015, included funding for The Gulf Coast Conservation Corps (GCCC) Program (Program), a regional workforce-training program established to benefit local communities and support long-term Gulf coast restoration implementation. The Council has proposed to amend its Initial Funded Priorities List to provide additional funding and time to continue the previously approved and implemented GCCC program while the Council considers whether to include longer-term funding for the program in its next FPL, FPL 3b.¹

During the public comment period, the Council provided an overview of the proposed 2015 Initial FPL amendment, with one public webinar held on January 15, 2020. The Council solicited public comments during this event. The Council also accepted written comments via mail and digital submissions via email. The Council has reviewed all comments received by the above deadline. The Council received one comment during the public webinar. Fifteen individuals submitted comments digitally via email. The Council appreciates those who participated in the public review and comment process, as well as those who have supported Gulf restoration activities for many years.

¹ For more information on the approach the Council is taking to develop FPL 3b please visit the Council's website www.restorethegulf.gov.

Summarized Comments and Responses

Comments Requesting More Information (1 total)

Comment: During the public webinar held on January 15th, 2020, a commenter asked for details on the allocation of funding, specifically whether the funding comes from a certain state or federal agency, CPS, or taking a portion from each grant.

Response: This funding would be available by reallocating funds previously approved in the Council's 2017 Commitment and Planning Support Funded Priorities List (CPS FPL). The CPS FPL approved up to \$2.1M over 5 years to each Council member to conduct planning, partner collaboration, and other related activities in support of meeting commitments made in its [2016 Comprehensive Plan Update: Restoring the Gulf Coast's Ecosystem & Economy](#). The Council realized cost-savings in conducting these activities that may be redirected to the Gulf Coast Conservation Corps Program, thus eliminating the need to apportion new funds from the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Trust Fund (Trust Fund). These savings are not from grants that have been awarded, but rather from apportioned funds that certain members did not request. Specifically, the Council is proposing to approve an additional \$2M to continue this program for approximately 16 months longer than was originally approved in the Initial FPL. The U.S. Department of Commerce/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration would be provided an additional \$1.7M and the U.S. Department of the Interior/Bureau of Indian Affairs would be provided an additional \$300K

Comments in Support of the Proposed Amendment (12 total)

Twelve commenters submitted digital comments expressing support for adding funds and time to continue the Gulf Coast Conservation Corps (GCCC) Program.

Comment: Many commenters highlighted the opportunities for professional growth and development available to young adults involved in the GCCC Program. Two commenters shared direct personal experiences with job training and development opportunities they had received as crew members. Others noted the value of hands-on training in job-marketable skills and certification credentials that are key to careers in conservation and restoration in the Gulf. Commenters point to job placement and continued education of program graduates as indicators of the Program's success in advancing the professional development of GulfCorps members.

Response: The Council appreciates each of these commenters for sharing their support for the GulfCorps' program and its contributions to Gulfwide environmental stewardship and training. The Council applauds the program's success in providing

meaningful training and skills to young adults, acknowledging the high job placement rate for GulfCorps members as an indicator of the program's efficacy.

Comment: Five commenters described benefits that the proposed extension would provide for funded programs, noting the importance of continuity of work for GulfCorps crew members and retention of infrastructure and experienced leadership and staff. These commenters stress that an interruption in funding could impact program momentum toward conservation goals and capacity-building.

Response: The Council acknowledges the importance of continuity of funding for existing GCCC programs. In proposing the amendment, the Council hopes to avoid the cost of demobilizing ongoing operations and remobilizing the program if additional funding is approved as part of FPL 3b in Spring of 2021. The comments provided underscore this rationale.

Comment: In addition to describing benefits to individuals involved in the GulfCorps program, commenters also highlighted the importance of the program in supporting region-wide capacity for coastal restoration and disaster response in the Gulf Coast region. Commenters spoke to the importance of conservation education and community engagement in increasing awareness in future generations, with one commenter noting that many of the GulfCorps crew members view the local communities where GCCC-funded work is being implemented as "home".

Response: The Council acknowledges the importance of local and regional capacity-building, which is one of the reasons why it has prioritized the continued work -of the GCCC program with the proposed amendment. These comments speak to the regional benefits of the program, and its role in supporting the Council's commitment to goals of enhanced community resilience and revitalized Gulf economies outlined in the [2016 Comprehensive Plan Update: Restoring the Gulf Coast's Ecosystem & Economy](#).

Comment: Three commenters shared details about the success of past and current habitat restoration projects implemented as part of the GCCC program.

Response: The Council is grateful for the current and past efforts of GCCC workers. These comments illustrate the success of just a few projects out of more than 60 projects that have been implemented across the five Gulf states by the GulfCorps program.

Comments Opposing the Proposed Amendment (3 total)

Three commenters submitted digital comments expressing concerns about adding funds and time to continue the Gulf Coast Conservation Corps Program.

Comment: Two commenters noted that specific data and/or information regarding the program's past benefits was not provided in order to know whether additional funds are needed to meet the goals of the program. Two commenters further stated their belief that projects funded through this program were already funded through other means and would have been successfully completed without additional funds provided through the GCCC Program.

Response: While the public notice on the Council's website did not include data regarding past benefits, the [Gulf Coast Conservation Corps webinar](#) provided during the first day of the public comment period did provide some details. This webinar was recorded and is posted to the Council's website for viewing. In summary, the program has been implemented through two components: The GulfCorps program and the Tribal Youth program. The program was designed to train young adults to help execute priority habitat restoration projects in each of the five Gulf States, in partnership with existing programs and local communities. Youth provide on-the-ground labor to enhance benefits to existing restoration and conservation projects and programs in the Gulf of Mexico while receiving valuable job skills training.

The GulfCorps program, currently in the third and final year of funding, partners with existing conservation corps in the Gulf to implement projects. Thus far, the GulfCorps program has implemented more than 60 projects, benefitting over 5,700 acres of habitat, including over 2,300 acres of upland conservation, 1,800 acres of invasive species treated, and 965 acres of marsh and beach enhancement. In addition to the ecosystem restoration accomplishments, this program has proven successful in providing young adults with skills needed to become gainfully employed after their time with the Gulf Corps program. In the first two years of the program, 120 members met the program's objectives of attending the GulfCorps training; completing one project skill, one soft/professional development skill, and one certification training; and completing 320 hours of work. This past year, the GulfCorps program had a 94% job placement rate of the 80 participants who met objectives whose post-service plans were known, or a 76% placement rate assuming the unknowns did not secure employment.

The Tribal Youth program was also funded for 3 years through the Initial FPL. This funding recently expired. Five federally-recognized Tribes participated. Adult mentors guided crews of teenage youth on culturally significant restoration projects. Through the program, 239 teenagers were employed to conduct restoration activities on approximately 995 acres of habitat. In addition to these statistics, the youth who

participated in these programs have benefited in ways that data cannot capture. If you would like more information regarding the benefits of this program please contact the Council at RestoreCouncil@RestoreTheGulf.gov.

Comment: Two commenters indicated their strong advocacy of and the need for local capacity building using RESTORE funds and that the GCCC Program is not accomplishing this. One commenter also stated that it is their understanding that RESTORE funds are intended to be used in targeted historically underserved communities for planning and technical assistance.

Response: The Council agrees that building local capacity is important and this is one of the reasons it has and continues to support the GCCC Program to provide on-the-job training that young adults may use to enter into the workforce. After less than three years of operation, the majority of the young adults who have completed this program have been hired into career-path positions. The Tribal Youth component of the GCCC program is designed to target historically underserved Tribal communities. While the GulfCorps component of the GCCC Program is not specifically designed to do so, it has helped numerous historically underserved and at-risk youth, many of whom have publicly [shared their stories](#). Based on the need for this type of work and the positive results this program has realized in providing both ecosystem benefits and jobs training, the Council is proposing this amendment while considering whether to include longer-term funding through its inclusion in FPL 3b. The Council realizes that additional steps could be taken to support local capacity building and historically underserved communities. The number of youth benefitting from this program contributes to both supporting underserved communities and the need to build local capacity.

Comment: One commenter expressed concerns about the transparency and difficulty in tracking the allocation of settlement funds. This commenter also recommended that the Council assess its FPL process and provide opportunities for meaningful input from the public on projects and process to date.

Response: The funding provided from the various settlements from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill presents an unprecedented opportunity to restore Gulf ecosystem conditions and functions and represent some of the most substantial investments in landscape-level restoration in U.S. history. However, given the multiple entities responsible for managing those funds, it can be challenging to track how all the settlement funds are being used. One tool that may help with this is the [Deepwater Horizon Project Tracker](#). This tool was developed to track funded restoration, research, and recovery projects resulting from the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and is continually updated by funders.

The RESTORE Council is responsible for administering funds in two of the five “buckets” as defined by the RESTORE Act. In its [2016 Comprehensive Plan Update](#), the Council committed to increasing transparency and collaboration among its members, funding partners, and the public with respect to funding decisions. The 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update is designed to ensure future Council investments address the highest priority restoration needs of the Gulf. Additionally, in September 2019, the Council released its first [Planning Framework](#) (2019 Planning Framework) as a way to increase transparency in its funding priorities. It is intended to serve as a “bridge” between the broad goals and objectives set forth in the Comprehensive Plan and specific projects and programs approved for funding in FPLs, as well as bridging funding decisions between FPLs. The Council continues to find ways of meeting its commitments to increased transparency and collaboration. If you are interested in more information please visit our [website](#). Once there, you may also subscribe to receive RESTORE Eblasts that are sent out periodically to update you on new and upcoming activities by the RESTORE Council. Eblasts are used to inform you of opportunities to review draft materials and engage in public meetings, and any additional informational webinars such as this one as we proceed in the development of FPL 3b.

Record of Comments Received

1. Comments Received During Public Webinar

1.1. Anna Beeman, Environmental Law Institute

- Do you mind describing in detail how the funding is allocated? I read that it is coming from the CPS Grants but would like to know whether the funding comes from a certain state or federal agency, CPS, or taking a portion from each grant, etc.

2. Comments Received via Digital Submission

2.1. Rob Walthall, CLIMB Community Development Corporation

- To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing this email in support of amending FPL1. The program that I currently manage is in year 3 of operation under the current FPL. This program has directly touched the lives of over 25 young adults at least 5 of whom have moved forward with employment that has career prospective of working in environmentalism. The young people we work with have gained great knowledge becoming chainsaw certified, woodland fire fighters, general employment skills and valuable life skills provided by the program.

An extension of 16 months and the additional funding would give us the ability to retain the talent currently in place. This would help in continuity of work, having skilled leadership, and not the least important keeping our young people employed productive members of society. The RESTORE Council has shown great faith in the young adults so far, we should not let this falter. I have two young ladies both college graduates with degrees in biology and microbiology. One was working as a waitress the other was unemployed. They have both cited the difficulty finding work in their fields of study. Outside of the environmental impact that our program and the other Gulf Corps Programs have, the largest impact is on the young people. Seeing them succeed in a field, move on to new and exciting opportunities is what really makes this job worth it for me personally.

Knowing that we can continue the work that has been started and the size of the impact made larger over years of project and personal work motivates me, and many of the young people I work with.

I hope that serious consideration is given to this amendment.

Respectfully,

Rob Walthall
Program Manager, Conservation
CLIMB Community Development Corporation
1526 Mills Ave
Gulfport, MS 39501
(O)228.864.6677
(F)228.864.6979
rwalthall@climbcdc.org

2.2. Derek Sanford, Armand Bayou Nature Center

- To whom it may concern,

As a former member of the Texas Conservation Corps, I hold a special place in my heart for all those who have taken part in restoration corps of all types. Furthermore, as a sponsor who is now at the receiving end of the invaluable efforts of said corps, I wish to convey with the utmost sincerity, the importance of these programs, not only to the recipients of the work provided, but to the individuals who may gain from the life changing experiences provided by these organizations. I wish to impress upon the reader of these words, the necessity of the continuation of these programs, such as the Gulf Corps.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Derek Sanford
Stewardship Program Coordinator @ Armand Bayou Nature Center

2.3. Ricci Simmons, Galveston Bay Foundation

- Dear RESTORE Council,

I am submitting the following official comments on behalf of the Galveston Bay Foundation. As our mission is to preserve and enhance Galveston Bay as a healthy and productive place for generations to come, partnerships to protect and restore habitats and to provide access to these lands and waters are critical.

The GulfCorps has been working with the Galveston Bay Foundation (GBF) for 2 consecutive years successfully building boardwalk and nurseries, restoring wildlife habitat, revitalizing old trails, and clearing new trails. Each crew is a pleasure to work with and has exhibited merit and productivity on every assignment they're tasked with.

Today, GBF protects over 8,000 acres of coastal habitat and is expected to gain 5,000 by the end of 2020. We are counting on the continued partnership with the GulfCorps Program to help us achieve our goals in conservation and land stewardship. Furthermore, this program has gained much success and momentum and needs to sustain the growth and development of young adults advancing in conservation careers. We hope you consider amending FPL1 and look forward to working with this program again on our upcoming property management needs.

Sincerely,

Ricci Simmons

Ricci Simmons
Conservation Stewardship Technician
Galveston Bay Foundation
P: 281-332-3381 ext. 224 | F: 832-284-4982
1100 Hercules Avenue, Suite 200, Houston, TX, 77058
galvbay.org

2.4. Joe Gersen, Student Conservation Association

- Dear Restore Council Staff-

Please see the attached public comment for the Gulf Coast Conservation Corps amendment from the Student Conservation Association. The Student Conservation Association fully supports the amendment and requests that the Council continues to support this vital program.

Thank you,

Joe

Joe Gersen
Senior Director Government Affairs
Student Conservation Association
4601 North Fairfax Drive, Suite 900
Arlington, VA 22203
P: 703.842.4238
C: 202.276.1885
jgersen@theSCA.org
www.thesca.org

ATTACHED TEXT:

February 5, 2020
Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
Attn: GCCC Amendment Comments
500 Poydras Street, Suite 1117
New Orleans, LA 70130

Dear Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council,

It is the pleasure of the Student Conservation Association (SCA) to write this letter in full support of the Gulf of Mexico Habitat Restoration via Conservation Corps Partnerships amendment.

The mission of SCA is to build the next generation of conservation and community leaders and inspire life-long stewardship through hands-on service to the land. As the largest force of youth conservation volunteers in the nation, SCA has protected fragile habitats, perpetuated endangered species, built hiking trails, and helped sustain public lands all across America since 1957.

SCA has had the privilege of being a partner of NOAA and The Nature Conservancy helping implement the GulfCorps program in Alabama. The SCA crews map and remove invasive species; plant native marsh and sand dune vegetation, restore rare pitcher plant bogs, and conduct trail and boardwalk maintenance on public lands for federal, state, and nonprofit partners. Since GulfCorps began, SCA GulfCorps crews have impacted over 2,000 acres of coastal habitats on 10 projects in Alabama.

In addition to forging a more resilient and sustainable Gulf Coast, SCA GulfCorps members also gain the job-marketable training, skills, and experience necessary to advance their careers and secure future employment in the region's restoration economy and in conservation in general. Thus far, upon graduating from the program, 74% of SCA's GulfCorps members have secured jobs in the restoration economy. Some GulfCorps members have continued their education and/or vocational training within the environmental field or returned to the GulfCorps as team leaders, where they assumed a supervisory and teaching role in support of new Corps members.

In addition to managing the Alabama GulfCorps teams, SCA also leads a comprehensive orientation for all GulfCorps teams. The orientation includes modules on the history of the spill and its impact on the coastal ecosystem, conservation and restoration skills, being a supportive teammate and successful corps member, leadership, job readiness skills, data collection, and outdoor risk management. To date, over 250 GulfCorps participants have participated in an SCA led orientation to begin their GulfCorps season.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Gulf of Mexico Habitat Restoration via Conservation Corps Partnerships amendment. The Student Conservation Association fully supports the amendment and requests that the Council continues to support this vital program.

Sincerely,

Kathy Bonavist
Interim President and CEO
Student Conservation Association
Student Conservation Association National Office: 4245 North Fairfax Drive, Suite 825
Arlington, VA 22203 703.524.2441 thesca.org

2.5. Jody Karr, American Youthworks Conservation Corps

- RESTORE Council Members,

I'm writing to express my appreciation for your vote of confidence in the GulfCorps Program, and my hope that you will decide to amend FPL1, providing a 16 month extension of time and additional funding. With support from the RESTORE Council, Conservation Corps programs in each of the Gulf Coast states have been able to build capacity to engage more local young people in critical coastal restoration work. As director of the Texas Conservation Corps and Louisiana Conservation Corps programs, I can speak to the fact that we have made a deep investment in staffing and infrastructure to meet the increasing need for more trained young adults with hands-on conservation experience to join the workforce. The extension of time and funding from the Council will be a significant help in maintaining the momentum we've been building.

Jody Karr
Conservation Corps Director
AYW Conservation Corps
Texas Conservation Corps
Louisiana Conservation Corps
512-983-9946

2.6. Jeff DeQuattro, The Nature Conservancy

- Thank you so much Jody!

Jeff DeQuattro
Director of Restoration & GulfCorps Program Director
The Nature Conservancy
Gulf of Mexico Whole Systems

118 N. Royal Street, Suite 500
Mobile, Alabama 36602 USA
jdequattro@tnc.org
251.348.0872 cell
Nature.org

FORWARDED TEXT:

RESTORE Council Members,

I'm writing to express my appreciation for your vote of confidence in the GulfCorps Program, and my hope that you will decide to amend FPL1, providing a 16 month extension of time and additional funding. With support from the RESTORE Council, Conservation Corps programs in each of the Gulf Coast states have been able to build capacity to engage more local young people in critical coastal restoration work. As director of the Texas Conservation Corps and Louisiana Conservation Corps programs, I can speak to the fact that we have made a deep investment in staffing and infrastructure to meet the increasing need for more trained young adults with hands-on conservation experience to join the workforce. The extension of time and funding from the Council will be a significant help in maintaining the momentum we've been building.

Jody Karr
Conservation Corps Director
AYW Conservation Corps
Texas Conservation Corps
Louisiana Conservation Corps
512-983-9946

2.7 Anna Bryant, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

- My name is Anna Bryant. I am the Park Manager for Meaher State Park in Spanish Fort, AL. I have been here for 2 ½ years and I know I have the best job ever. To be able to share our state parks with this group is important... no matter where they are from.

To say that this program is amazing and is doing amazing things not only for those doing the work but for those of us receiving this hard-working group doesn't even begin to scratch the surface... To extend at least 16 more months could more than benefit those who are just starting with the program but would allow those who are back for a 2nd or even a 3rd year to expand their knowledge base.

I was part of the pilot program that initially started in MS. The folks I met and the time I shared with them was magical to say the least. Teaching them how to paddle when most

of them barely knew how to swim was a joy. To see the confidence it gave them even when they rolled over in to the water... to get up and try again. Nothing can replace that.

We are a small park with a staff of 5 and the 2 projects the Corp has helped us with already couldn't have been done by my staff alone. We would still only be halfway done with the first project... our 600' boardwalk.

This program is an asset. The skills they have learned give experience that no high school or college class can do. Hands on, practice, repetition... This year I was able to coordinate a carpentry skills training with help from another state park employee as well as host the training at my park. Carpentry is a skill that requires hands on experience. And the training offered that.

Each group that has participated in our project this year has given much to the lasting opportunity of future fisher people. Our fishing pier, like our boardwalk desperately needed replacing of not only the deck boards but handrails as well. And it looks amazing! Can't wait to see the finished product.

Anna Bryant
Park Administrator I
Meaher State Park
5200 Battleship Pkwy. E
Spanish Fort, AL 36527
251.626.5529 Main
251.504.8570 Cell
Anna.Bryant@dcnr.alabama.gov
<https://www.alapark.com/parks/meaher-state-park>

2.8. Patrick Barnes, BFA Environmental/Limitless Vistas, Inc

- Restore Council,

This note is to express our very strong and enthusiastic support for the extension of funding during the 16-month gap period between GulfCorps 1.0 and GulfCorps 2.0. As a professional geologist, an environmental justice/community advocate and founder of both BFA Environmental and Limitless Vistas, I've long seen the need for meaningful engagement of our young people in the great outdoors as a means to build awareness, job skills, community capacity and resiliency. Beginning in 1995, I've personally been approaching federal and state environmental resource managers in the southeast to propose various means of engaging vulnerable young adults in restoration work.

The GulfCorps Program without a doubt represents the currently most evolved state of response to the unquestionable need to connect the dots between, young adult job

training, local community engagement, environmental awareness, and ecosystem restoration. All done in a way that increases our local capacity to respond to disasters. Any interruption of funding will be a significant loss in the momentum of meaningful inclusion we so desperately need in the region. LVI and the young people we serve rely heavily on the GulfCorps funding as do our sister Corps programs throughout the region. Therefore, we strongly support the amendment of the 2015 Funded Priorities List to include essential gap funding for the GulfCorps program.

Please let me know if you need me to elaborate further on my support.

Patrick A. B. Barnes, P.G.
Founder/CEO
BFA Environmental/
Limitless Vistas, Inc
1215 Prytania Street, Suite 103
New Orleans, Louisiana 7013

2.9. Jackie Antalan, Operation Homecare

- Dear Council Members,

As the Gulf Coast Ecosystems Restoration Council (Council) you have proposed to provide an additional \$2M to extend the Gulf Coast Conservation Corp program (GulfCorps). The Council states that the GulfCorps has been “successful in meeting RESTORE Council goals to restore and conserve habitat.....through the completion of priority restoration projects throughout the Gulf.” Yet, the amendment does not provide any details, data and/or information to establish goal accomplished would not have been successful without the GulfCorps program. Again, data and/or information to support any increase to fund these projects has not been provided to date. So fundamentally, based on information provided in the amendment, we have assumed that the GCCC funding supplemented approved/funded projects. The amendment does not justify the allocation of additional funding we therefore strongly oppose any additional funding to extend this program.

We advocated and continue to amplify the dire need for Local Capacity Building and Local Hire utilizing on-the-job training. We are saddened that our capacity building advocacy and efforts have been redefined by manufactured consensus. We continue to be disappointed in the limited investment in directly impacted Black coastal communities. Numerous community-based organizations have many innovative resiliency and sustainability concepts that are consistent with the Council's goals that are systematically being excluded. Over the past five (5) years we have tried over and over to engage and be engaged in this current process unsuccessfully.

We strongly recommend unused allocated funds be returned to Treasury and used in targeted historically underserved communities for planning and technical assistance as intended to ensure inclusion of directly impacted individuals, families and communities. We are requesting serious consideration of these comments and recommendations.

Sincerely,
Jackie Antalan
Individually and as Director of Outreach & Programs

2.10. C. Deas

- Dear Council Members,

I strongly oppose the approval of the proposed additional \$2M to extend the "Gulf Corps" program for approximately 16 months. The Black community that I work in strongly advocated for Local Capacity Building (LCB) utilizing training during the development of the RESTORE Act and I am very disappointed in the limited investment and redefinition of LCB. Over \$7M has been invested in projects that would have been completed successfully without GCCC.

Generally our community members support the GCCC mission, but the greater priority is the need for Sustainable Targeted Local Capacity Building which is not being accomplished under the Gulf Coast Conservation Corp Program.

We recommend that the Council not approve additional funding and allow the current contract run its course.

Best,
C. Deas

2.11. Holden Foley, Conservation Corps of the Forgotten and Emerald Coasts

- Dear Restore Council Members,

My name is Holden Foley and I am the Director of Restoration for the Conservation Corps of the Forgotten and Emerald Coasts in Northwest Florida.

I grew up in Franklin County, Florida. We are a small rural area in North Florida. 87% of our county is protected lands, mostly National Forest, State Forest and a National Estuarine Reserve. About 11,000 people live in 348,800 acres, making it one of the

Florida's largest counties, but least populated. We have one red light, if that helps you complete the picture.

I would like to think I was a normal kid.... but my childhood was not perfect. My parents were separated and I lived with my Dad. He was really strict. We did not spend a lot of time together. I spent most of my time doing chores or with my grandpa, working in his garden. That is where I learned to love working outside and building things. I wasn't allowed to go anywhere or to play with other kids or to have a childhood.... period. I worked. I started tonging oysters in Apalachicola Bay when I was nine years old to help my dad pay the bills, times were rough.

My last year of junior high I started playing football. That is where I started learning about leadership and teamwork. I started as wide receiver and defensive end. I was team captain that year and helped lead my teammates through the first winning season in our school's history. That was a pretty big deal in our little county. As good as sports were for me, my dad did not support it. He expected me to work. That is when things changed for me.

At 16 I moved in with my mom. I continued playing sports and I started doing construction work. Life was going great. The only problem was there was nothing, and still is nothing, for teenagers in Franklin County to do in their free time. We would just "hang-out" and that is where my challenges started. Between the ages of 16 and 18, I worked hard. The money I made went towards my truck, but also towards alcohol and marijuana. I did not make good decisions. I got into trouble doing what kids in Franklin County do. The moment I turned 18 and became an adult, it caught up with me. I ran into trouble with the law. Other than my mom and step dad, I didn't have anyone else looking out for me. I now know I should have listened to them. There I was: 18 and in jail with a bunch of characters; alcoholics and drug addicts mostly. This was probably the most uncomfortable I have ever been, but I learned from it. I learned to stand up for myself, I learned to make things happen for myself, and most importantly, I learned that I wanted my life to be different, to be better. When I finished my time, I went back to work. Work was what I knew. I was determined to be successful, I just didn't have a clear path.

During my probation, I worked in the construction field; building houses, decks, and doing odd jobs. I just finally got tired of putting in seven days a week and getting nowhere. I made good money, but I wanted something more. I wanted my work to have more meaning. That was when I met Joe Taylor. He offered me the opportunity to participate in a pilot project for the Conservation Corps. I accepted his offer and that's when my life really started to change. The Corps wasn't like anything I had ever done. We worked Monday through Thursday in the field. On Fridays we learned soft skills, like anger management techniques, budgeting, and healthy coping skills. We also went to county and city commission meetings where Joe would encourage us to stand up and voice our opinion. This is when I really started stepping out of my comfort zone. I never

saw myself as a leader, just another member of the crew. But Joe saw something different. He asked me to be crew leader for the next project. I was curious as to where it would lead me - I accepted his offer. Life was getting better, but still wasn't perfect. My wife and I had to move out of the house we were in and found ourselves homeless because there were no affordable places to rent. We looked for over a year, but never found anything. Our situation wasn't unique: most of our crew was homeless, too.

I kept going to trainings, stacking my credentials and certifications. At the same time, I became more involved with our disaster response programs and our Emergency Operations Center certified me to teach first aid and CPR. I became the leader for our CERT programs. One of my favorite experiences was our team's response to Hurricane Matthew in Flagler County where we cleared trees off of Senior Citizen's houses. I enjoyed the work, helping the seniors, and the bond that formed within our crew. I stay committed to the Corps because I see how young people, many of them just like me - can benefit from this program.

Now, I have been with the Corps for five years and I have served as a GulfCorps member for three of those years. I have learned so much and have been able to build my resume and management experience. I enjoy the work we do with our partners and I know we are doing good things for our environment.

GulfCorps helps local young people like myself develop skills in environmental conservation and restoration. I want to make this my career. I have watched the GulfCorps program change peoples lives for the better. including mine. Please consider the approval of this amendment. I would appreciate the opportunity to take what GulfCorps has done for me, and pass it on to my current and future crew members. We are the Conservation Corps of the Forgotten and Emerald Coasts and I pledge that we will be a great investment.

Holden Foley, Director of Restoration
Conservation Corps of the Forgotten and Emerald Coasts
85 School Road, Eastpoint, FL 32328

2.12. E. Holmes

- Dear Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council Members,

I continue to be concerned about the transparency and process to track the allocation of the Billions of dollars BP had to pay to settle its legal obligations.

I oppose the Council's proposal to approve an additional \$2M to continue the GCCC program for approximately 16 months longer than was originally approved

in the Initial FPL. This once in a lifetime funding source must be managed to provide direct benefit to impacted coastal communities. The Council proposal did not provide specific cost benefits and/or detailed risk that justify any additional funding.

I strongly recommend that the Council assess its FPL process, provide review and assessment opportunities with meaningful input from the public on projects and process to date.

Respectfully,
E. Holmes

2.13. Davis Calametti, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

- Hello,

I have attached a letter for the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council regarding the upcoming amendment vote.

Thanks,

Davis Calametti
ADCNR -- Weeks Bay Reserve
11300 US Hwy 98
Fairhope, AL 36532
(251) 651-2313

ATTACHED TEXT:

February 14, 2020
Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
Attn: GCCC Amendment Comments
500 Poydras St, Suite 1117
New Orleans, LA 70130

Dear Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council,
I believe the Gulf Corps Program is vital to the furtherance of conservation awareness among current and future generations. This program is groundbreaking in its efforts to connect young people to the natural world and open their eyes to careers in conservation, forestry, land management, and restoration of natural habitats. As a Gulf Corps alum, I can say from personal experience that this program achieves its goals and

more. I was hired right out of college during year two of Gulf Corps 1.0. I had no relevant work experience, little knowledge of conservation biology, and only the labor skills I had acquired through weekly chores and summer jobs over my twenty-three years. Gulf Corps allowed me to develop my work skills to a professional level, enabled me to apply my education to solve real world problems, and provided me with additional knowledge to educate others about the importance of conservation and the consequences of ignoring it.

Through Gulf Corps I earned certifications such as wilderness first aid, wildland chainsaw safety, and wildland fire safety, just to name a few. I made professional connections that will come into play for the duration of my career in conservation. I learned that a group of like-minded individuals can accomplish a great deal in a short time when provided with the guidance and support to do so. The experience, skills, and certifications I received during my time with Gulf Corps put me on the map professionally and reinforced my resume to a competitive level. I am now a full-time employee with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources at the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. Had it not been for Gulf Corps, I would have had neither the experience nor the skills to come into the biologist aide position that I currently hold. I can't tell you how happy I am to be employed in my field of study and how satisfying it is helping to preserve the wetlands of the Weeks Bay watershed.

Until recent decades, it was unknown to us just how crucial wetlands and other natural habitats are in maintaining the ecological balance that allows life to flourish on our planet, and how fragile that balance is. With the climate change debate emerging as a dominant factor in today's politics, it is now more important than ever that Gulf Corps and similar programs be allowed to continue influencing the lives of young people in positive ways. Please vote to amend FPL1 and give the Gulf Corps Program the best possible chance for success during its fourth and fifth years of operation. I hope that in time, many other Gulf Corps alumni will share in the same success that I have achieved. Thank you for your consideration and for the vote of confidence in the Gulf Corps Program.

Sincerely,
John Davis Calametti
Biologist Aide
ADCNR – Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

2.14. Joe Taylor, Conservation Corps of the Forgotten and Emerald Coasts

- Please see the attached letter in support of the amendment to extend FPL1.

Thank you, Joe Taylor

Executive Director
Franklin's Promise Coalition
Conservation Corps of the Forgotten and Emerald Coasts
85 School Road, Eastpoint, Florida 32320

ATTACHED TEXT:

February 14, 2020

Dear Restore Council Members,

As the Executive Director of Franklin's Promise Coalition, based out of Eastpoint, Florida, I would like to encourage your support of the amendment to FPL 1 for an increase of 1.7 million dollars to bridge the capacity of GulfCorps programs in the five Gulf states.

Franklin's Promise Coalition is a 20 year old community based non-profit which addresses unmet needs and gaps in services in communities across Northwest Florida. Since 2012, our focus has been to address multigenerational poverty through the intentional engagement of the most vulnerable community members in coastal communities between Pensacola and Tallahassee. In 2014, The Nature Conservancy, The Corps Network, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation invested in our organization and with support from City, County and State governments, the Conservation Corps of the Forgotten and Emerald Coasts was established. We were a pilot for the current GulfCorps programs funded by FPL 1. Since that time, over 160 young adults have been trained, earning over 470 industry certifications, completing over 140 conservation/construction projects, and responding to 5 natural disasters. Currently we operate the 3 Florida GulfCorps crews.

The GulfCorps program has built significant capacity in our organization and in our Conservation Corps allowing us to leverage resources from our regional workforce development board, land management partners, local school districts, as well as sponsors, foundations and private contributors. These leveraged resources have provided for us to add additional trainings for crew members, to respond to regional disasters, and to increase our educational services. In August 2016, ED Corps began as the academic component of the conservation Corps with the mission of providing an opportunity for members to complete their high school diplomas. The focus is to support vulnerable students to complete high school, graduate on time, and if they desire, to join the Conservation Corps as a career training program. In 2019, Our conservation corps program was approved as an Opportunity Youth Service Initiative (OYSI) Americorps program through the Corps Network. OYSI has allowed us to provide education awards for crew members to further their education and certifications.

Because of GulfCorps, our conservation corps programs have greatly contributed to the project partners resource management goals across the region. Sadly, without some continued support, our programs are not completely sustainable. The approval of the proposed amendment will maintain basic capacity levels for our crews, allowing us to continue to build partnerships and secure resources to be self-sufficient in the future. Lastly, our members come from the local communities where we complete project work. They are the children and grandchildren of the people who were most impacted by the BP Oil Spill.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please consider the positive impact your favorable decision for the amendment will have on the natural resources, the crew members, and the communities in the Gulf region.

Joe Taylor,
Executive Director
Franklin's Promise Coalition
Conservation Corps of the Forgotten and Emerald Coasts
85 School Road, Eastpoint, Florida 32328

2.15. Connie Whitaker, Weeks Bay Foundation

- Please find attached letter from the Weeks Bay Foundation. If you need anything else, please let me know.

Regards,

Connie Whitaker
Executive Director
Weeks Bay Foundation
11401 U.S. Hwy. 98
Fairhope, AL 36532
Office: 251-990-5004
Fax: 251-990-9273
www.weeksbay.org

ATTACHED TEXT:

February 14, 2020

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to you as the director of the Weeks Bay Foundation and a project partner for the GulfCorps program. We would like to express our strong support for the GulfCorps initiative and encourage you to consider funding the program, through NOAA, with an additional \$1.7 million dollars.

The Weeks Bay Foundation is a small land trust in south Alabama. We protect land throughout the two coastal counties and support the research and educational programs of the Weeks Bay Reserve. With a staff of only three, fieldwork and restoration projects can be difficult to achieve. For the last 3 years, the GulfCorps program has been instrumental in helping us enhance many of our properties. I will share examples from two below.

Our Juniper preserve contains a sensitive pitcher plant/longleaf pine habitat that is home to white topped pitcher plants and white fringed orchids. The GulfCorps program has allowed us to extend the open understory by removing competing shrubs and vines. This has increased the viable area for the pitcher plant and orchid populations. Since the GulfCorps team finished, we have seen white fringed orchids in the newly restored area. The Rio Vista and Rangeline properties are slated to be preserves, open to the public in the winter of 2020. The GulfCorps teams have spent hundreds of hours on these tracts. They have mechanically removed and chemically treated invasive plants. They have planted native trees and installed boundary fencing. They have also completed the grant related monitoring for the properties. Without the assistance of the Alabama GulfCorps teams, the Weeks Bay Foundation would not have been able to complete any of these restoration projects.

Working with the crews is always a pleasure. The teams come prepared with their own tools, safety training, and personal protective equipment. They have excellent management from their supervisors and are accommodating to last minute changes in schedules and duties. Throughout the last few years, we have watched crew members become crew leaders and then transition on to new jobs in the conservation field. With the skills that the participants learn during their time with GulfCorps, they are prepared to enter the workforce as reliable and effective employees.

We hope that RESTORE will consider the value of this program and fund the GulfCorps program for an additional \$1.7 million through the amended FPL 1. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Connie Whitaker
Executive Director