

**Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council  
Public Notice of Proposed Funding Priority List Amendment**

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) is seeking public comment on a proposal to amend its 2015 Initial Funded Priorities List (Initial FPL) to approve \$852,653 in implementation funding for the [Money Bayou Wetlands Restoration \(Implementation\) project](#) located in Gulf County, Florida. In addition, any previously approved RESTORE planning funds not necessary to complete final planning activities would also be available for use during restoration implementation.

Background on this proposed funding approval is provided below. Before voting on whether to approve this action, the Council is publishing this proposed FPL amendment for a 15-day public comment period beginning on November 1, 2022 and concluding at 11:59 pm (CST) on November 16, 2022. You may submit comments using one of the two methods below:

**By Email:** To [restorecouncil@restorethegulf.gov](mailto:restorecouncil@restorethegulf.gov)  
Email submission of comments ensures timely receipt.

**By U.S. Mail:** Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council  
Attn: Initial FPL Money Bayou Wetlands Restoration Amendment  
Comments  
500 Poydras Street, Suite 1117  
New Orleans, LA 70130  
Mail must be posted no later than November 15, 2022 to be included in this public comment period.

**Background:**

Pursuant to the *Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act of 2012* (33 U.S.C. § 1321(t) and *note*) (RESTORE Act), the Council is responsible for administering portions of *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill settlement funds for the purpose of restoring the environment and economy of the Gulf coast. The Council administers two funding programs, one of which is the Council-Selected Restoration Component, or “Bucket 2.” Under Bucket 2, the Council votes to approve Gulf ecosystem restoration projects and programs proposed by the Council members. Bucket 2 projects and programs approved for funding by the Council are included in what is referred to as a FPL.

FPLs include activities in two categories. Category 1 activities are approved for Bucket 2 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 (NEPA) and other applicable laws.

Category 2 activities are Council priorities for potential future funding, but are not currently approved for funding. As appropriate, the Council reviews the activities in Category 2 in order to determine whether to move the given activity to Category 1 and approve it for funding via a Council vote. Such funding approvals are done via amendments to the FPL containing the given project(s). FPL amendments are also required for other changes to listed projects (e.g., material changes in scope or cost, transfer of sponsorship to another Council member). The project that is the subject of this proposed FPL amendment is described below.

### **Money Bayou Wetlands Restoration (Implementation)**

The Council originally approved \$387,726 for the planning component for the Money Bayou Wetlands Restoration project, sponsored by the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), as part of the Council's Initial FPL as Category 1 funding. In addition, the Council budgeted \$852,653 for implementation of this project pending completion of required environmental compliance and subject to a Council vote to amend the Initial FPL. Project design and environmental compliance necessary for FPL amendment has now been completed. The Money Bayou Wetlands Restoration project is part of the Connecting Coastal Waters (CCW) initiative that NOAA leads with partners to restore the extent, functionality, and resiliency of Gulf Coast wetlands.

If approved, NOAA would work with partners to implement this project to restore a natural hydrology to approximately 1,000 acres of wetlands on the St. Joseph Bay State Buffer Preserve in Florida. During planning, portions of this project were scaled back to meet budgetary constraints while maintaining projected project benefits. Restoration would now include activities to restore natural sheet-flow and hydrologic connectivity of wetlands by filling over 1 mile of ditches; filling, and grading approximately 3,000 linear feet of elevated, unpaved roads; installing or repairing approximately 15 to 23 low-water road crossings; and replacing 1 culvert with a low water crossing. Heavy equipment would be used to excavate segments of elevated road to restore natural grade; the excavated material would be used to fill in adjacent ditches when possible. Previously proposed invasive species control and replanting of native vegetation will only be performed if remaining budget is sufficient to accommodate these tasks after primary hydrologic modifications are completed. A monitoring plan would be implemented before and after construction to support an adaptive management approach. NOAA would also work with partners to monitor restoration outcomes and conduct outreach activities to share restoration practices and engage stakeholders.

To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council is proposing to adopt the 2015 PEIS developed by NOAA's Restoration Center. Additional environmental compliance coordination has been completed for the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA), and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) in coordination with NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Florida Division of Historical Resources, and the Seminole Tribe of Florida – Tribal Historic Preservation Office. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection has also determined that the project meets the requirements for the State General Permit Aquatic Habitat

Restoration, Enhancement, and Creation Activities under Rule 62-331.225, F.A.C. pursuant to state assumption of the Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 program. The Council has reviewed the applicable environmental compliance documentation. To ensure compliance with ESA, MSA, NHPA, and other relevant laws, the Council would require that the sponsors of the project adhere to all applicable conditions listed in required permits and consultations.

[NOAA's Restoration Center 2015 PEIS](#) and all other [completed environmental compliance documentation](#) can be found in the Council's Initial FPL's Environmental Compliance Library.

*To learn more about the RESTORE Council visit us at [www.restorethegulf.gov](http://www.restorethegulf.gov) or send questions to [restorecouncil@restorethegulf.gov](mailto:restorecouncil@restorethegulf.gov).*