

# RESTORE Council

## Observational Data Plan Guidelines

### 2021 Release



#### Monitoring Our Impacts: Data Collection and Management

Over its lifetime, the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (RESTORE Council or Council) will invest over \$3 billion dollars in Gulf Coast ecosystem and economic restoration activities. These investments will not only advance the Council’s goal of comprehensive Gulf restoration, but also result in diverse scientific and economic data observations which can be used to demonstrate the benefits of Council investments.

The RESTORE Council recognizes the importance of comprehensive planning for the collection and compilation of data that can be compared across projects. Comparable data enables reporting at multiple scales, including project- and program-specific scales, as well as potential future larger-scale assessments across the Gulf.

To facilitate consistent data collection and management, RESTORE Council projects/programs are required to develop an Observational Data Plan (ODP) as part of the Council’s financial award process.

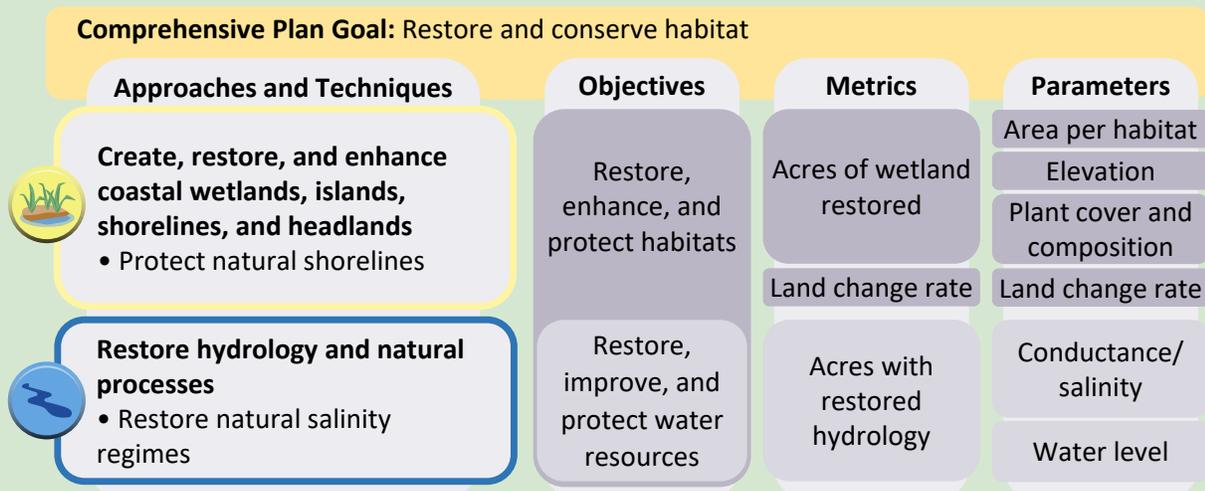
#### What is an Observational Data Plan?

ODPs are a tool developed for projects and programs administered by the RESTORE Council, and ensure that an activity’s observational data (e.g., monitoring data) is collected and managed in such a way that it can be used to:

- Assess if the project was constructed as designed
- Evaluate if the project has achieved, or is on track to achieve, its specific goals and objectives
- Understand why the project has, or has not, performed as anticipated
- Inform potential adaptive management actions to enhance performance
- Improve future projects
- Conduct further analyses

ODPs also help ensure that data will be made accessible to the Council and the public. Instructions and recommendations for developing an effective ODP are listed in the Council’s ODP Guidelines.

#### Project-Scale Monitoring



An ODP should describe how progress will be tracked for each of the selected RESTORE Council Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives. Using an example project, the figure above illustrates how selected objectives would be supported by collecting appropriate observational data. In the figure, the restoration approaches and techniques are aligned on rows with the objectives they are employed to support, and with metrics for tracking benefits to those objectives. Each metric row aligns with one or more parameters for which data will be collected to enable assessment and reporting.

# Observational Data Plan Guidelines Version 2.0

## Elements of an ODP

### Program or project information

General information, such as the location, timeline, budget for data management, and points of contact.

### Goals and Objectives

Description of the RESTORE Council Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives, as well as project- or program-specific goals or objectives.

### Metrics

Metrics and numeric targets identified for each Comprehensive Plan objective associated with a project or program.

### Parameters

One or more measurable parameters identified to support each metric, for which numeric targets are also identified.

### Methodological Details

Descriptions of how data will be collected, including information on specific protocols, equipment, etc.

### Data Management

Information on how data will be stored, archived, and made available to the public and Council.

## What are the ODP Guidelines?

The ODP Guidelines provide guidance to grant recipients on the development of an ODP, including detailed instructions for completing and submitting an ODP form, and recommendations on appropriate metrics, parameters, monitoring methodologies, guidance on data quality assurance/quality control (QA/QC), and data management procedures.

## What is new in this update?

The updated ODP Guidelines build on the previous guidance by:

- Providing monitoring guidance specific to each of the restoration techniques identified by the Council
- Recommending appropriate metrics and parameters for each of the potential objectives a project or program may identify
- Incorporating information on which parameters are most frequently used by existing monitoring programs for particular habitats across the Gulf
- Describing the data collection methods used most often for each of the recommended parameters
- Providing guidance on post-award reporting for data collection and management activities
- Providing a streamlined, electronic ODP template that better supports recipients in filling out and submitting ODP information
- Providing guidance and recommendations for data management

The guidance provided in this update will help ensure consistency in the collection of robust and comparable data across funded projects and programs.

## How was the update developed?

The recommendations provided in this guidance build off of existing monitoring guidance documents and reports, including the 2017 Natural Resource Damage Assessment Monitoring and Adaptive Management Manual, as well as the Council Monitoring and Assessment Program 2020 Reports.

## What's Next? Continuing Collaboration to Meet Monitoring Commitments

The ODP Guidelines will be periodically reviewed and updated by the RESTORE Council staff in coordination with the Council Monitoring and Assessment Workgroup (CMAWG). The CMAWG is a collaborative workgroup with scientific experts who represent all RESTORE Council Member agencies (five states; six federal agencies). This workgroup meets regularly, and provides recommendations to the Council regarding monitoring guidelines, monitoring plan formats, and use of Best Available Science.



## How Can I learn More?

The updated [ODP Guidelines](#) and information about the Council's use of [Best Available Science](#) are available on the Council's website.

For the most current news from the Council, subscribe to [RESTORE Eblast](#) email updates.

Visit: <https://restorethegulf.gov> or  
Email us at: [RestoreCouncil@restorethegulf.gov](mailto:RestoreCouncil@restorethegulf.gov)