

**Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
Public Meeting for Draft Comprehensive Plan Update**

Five Rivers, Delta Center, Spanish Fort, Alabama – Sept. 20, 2016

Principals:

Justin Ehrenwerth (Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council), Homer Wilkes (USDA), Patti Powell (AL), Hank Burch (AL), Mark Wyatt (MS), Ben Scaggs (EPA), Jessica Kondel (DOC), Debbie Devore (DOI)

Additional Support:

Alyssa Dausman, Ann Weaver, Jean Cowan, Jessica Henkel, John Bowie, Kathy Hicks

The meeting started at 6:00 p.m. and lasted approximately 50 minutes. There were approximately 32 people in attendance, not including Council representatives, staff and support.

Introductory remarks:

Remarks were made by: Patti Powell, Director of Alabama State Land Division.

Justin Ehrenwerth provided a PowerPoint overview of the draft Comprehensive Plan Update.

The public comment began at 6:30 p.m. and lasted about 20 minutes.

Public comments (5 speakers):

Casi Calloway, Director of Mobile Baykeeper;

Incredibly grateful you are here, and grateful the Comprehensive Plan Update was done so quickly. You have worked magic to update the plan prior to the election in November. My comments revolve more around questions. Water quantity is a phenomenal addition, but how do you deal with water quantity issues within 25 miles of the coast when so many of those issues are upstream? Personally support the inclusion of building flow-through bridges along the Causeway that would allow for more fresh and saltwater exchanges between the Delta and Mobile Bay. Thank you for the constant feedback and collaboration. I love that you are working with all three sources of funding and trying to put all those pieces together, and on the whole, what the Council is working to do as a staff and team. Alabama is very lucky to have the NRCS as the central point for all three funding sources, and we support having them collaborate and connect together as much as they can. We appreciate what you're doing in making sure that the public's thoughts and concerns are in there. The concern we always have is the addition of the economic piece to Pot 2. We ask that you make sure the state expenditure plans also match all 5 goals of the Comprehensive Plan. We have always worried about the economic component the Federal Restore Council is charged with overshadowing what we agree is the most important, the environment. Please make sure to go back to states to ensure they meet the standards of both Bucket 2

and Bucket 3. Urge the Council to showcase that every project we put together is going to have a significant economic impact.

Kara Lankford, Interim Director, Ocean Conservancy;

Thank you for getting the updates released long before the required release date. We know it was a lot of hard work and recognize that the council put in good diligence (and the staff as well) to get the update done. We applaud commitment to region-wide planning which is critical to ecosystem health, and the commitment to maximizing the measurement of positive impacts of projects through improved project submission guidelines. Also support the importance given in the plan to collaboration and coordination. Whole heartedly support a project review panel that looks across projects, coordinates with other project review teams, including the NRDA Monitoring and Adaptive Management Cross-TIG working group to assess cumulative benefits and identify and adapt projects across funding streams.

Jill Mastrototaro, Policy Specialist, The National Wildlife Federation;

The NWF wants to applaud the council and its staff to its commitment to prioritize the plan and update it prior to the scheduled required release date. Overall, very pleased with the contents of the plan update, it is a strong draft blueprint to guide the Council in the future. We appreciate the dedication to large-scale projects that are viable for long-term sustainable health, particularly in the Mobile Bay and Mississippi Sound. We urge the Council to look at future FPLs that coordinate planning and partnership opportunities. For example, the USDA announcement today of \$328 million three-year restoration strategy as a continuation of NRCS's Gulf of Mexico Initiative (GOMI). Regarding project synergies: We support an integrated proposal review and selection process, we support a panel to assess how project and panels could interact, and urge the Council to include external expertise on the panel. The Council has acknowledged the call to a firm commitment of collaboration. We look forward to the meetings and workshops in months to come. We hope the council will communicate the next steps and outcomes from those workshops to demonstrate how this cross-agency collaboration is developing and moving forward. We also appreciate the webinars the Council has been providing, they are a good outreach tool. In terms of coordination, I'd like to compliment the states of AL and MS for attending other Council meetings in the region. I also wanted to highlight a quite memorable quote from page 1 of the Comprehensive Plan Update – "The task of restoring the gulf environment is a multi-generational undertaking" – The last 6 years of work that many people in this room, and outside this room, have done to guide the process forward is only the beginning of this effort. The Council is poised to take the long view of restoration.

Jackie Antalan, Director of Outreach and Programs, Operation Home Care, Inc (AL & MS);

So excited that USDA has taken the lead of the Council for several reasons, including that fact that they are concerned with citizen engagement and involvement. You all have a track

record of having to address discrepancies, and having to form committees to address underserved directly impacted communities. With USDA as the lead this will not be so difficult, as they have experience working with small black farmers and underserved communities. I'm appealing to the Council to take advantage of that. To the State of Alabama: We had low expectations and you met them. We are still very gung-ho about this once in a lifetime opportunity for including real, unincorporated, directly impacted communities that are bearing a lot of the impact from the spill and needs this ecosystem restoration. This opportunity has never been here before, and will not be here again. We are very excited about the collaborative partnerships. The intersection of agencies is important to achieve cumulative positive impacts as opposed to the cumulative negative impacts that our community has been experiencing. We hope that the priority criteria in the plan are considered a living document and not set in stone. We're here and available for input and engagement. Thank you. We're looking forward to this process which we believe is much better than the first. We know this is a living organism and look forward to the Council being flexible in this process.

Thao Vu, Director, Mississippi Coalition for Vietnamese-American Fisher Folks and Families

Thank you to the Council for taking proactive steps, including translating the Fact Sheet and the Draft Comprehensive Plan to Vietnamese. I know that the Council has given the public 45 days to comment on the Draft Comprehensive Plan. I'm here to ask for an extended deadline. Requesting 2 extra weeks to review because it will take additional time for us to get the document into the Vietnamese community's hands, and for them to actually submit their comments in time. This is my key recommendation and request at this time. Another key thing is that it is shrimping season all over the Gulf states, and we have not had enough time to go down to the docks and disseminate all of this information. We also look forward to the picture of coming meetings.