

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
Fiscal Year 2018
Annual Performance Report

March 2019

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Preface

Established by the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act of 2012, or the RESTORE Act, codified at 33 U.S.C. § 1321 (t), the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) is comprised of five Governors from the Gulf Coast States of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas (States), the Secretaries from the U.S. Departments of the Interior, Army, Commerce, Agriculture, and Homeland Security, and the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency currently serves as the Council's Chairperson. In cooperation with our restoration partners, the Council is striving to establish a benchmark for collaborative work while facilitating efficient and responsible implementation of large-scale restoration projects across the Gulf. The Council recognizes its unique and unprecedented opportunity to implement a restoration effort in a way that restores and protects the Gulf Coast environment, reinvigorates local economies and creates jobs in the region. Further, the Council is committed to working with Gulf communities and partners to invest in actions, projects, and programs that will ensure the long-term environmental health and economic prosperity of the Gulf Coast region.

The Council has oversight over the expenditure of 60% of the funds made available from the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund established by the RESTORE Act (Trust Fund). Under the Council-Selected Restoration Component of the RESTORE Act, 30% of available funding will be administered for Gulf-wide ecosystem restoration and protection according to a Comprehensive Plan developed by the Council. Another 30% will be allocated to the States under the Spill Impact Component according to a formula established by the Council through a regulation, and spent according to individual State Expenditure Plans (SEPs) to contribute to the overall economic and ecological recovery of the Gulf. The SEPs must adhere to four basic criteria and are subject to approval by the Council.

The Council has awarded approximately 40 ecosystem restoration projects and programs, totaling \$139.6 million to its members through the Initial Funded Priorities List under the Council-Selected Restoration Component to support an array of restoration activities across the Gulf Coast, including investments in habitat conservation, oyster restoration, water quality, planning, science and more. These investments, though substantial, represent only a portion of the total funding available to the Council in the coming years. The Council also approved State Expenditures Plans totaling approximately \$823 million for activities under the Spill Impact Component of the RESTORE Act. Over \$55 million has been awarded by the Council for these activities to date.

Foundational to the Council's success during 2018, funds were provided to its members through the Commitments and Planning Support Funded Priority List (CPS FPL) to enhance collaboration, planning and public engagement in support of future funding decisions under the Council-Selected Restoration Component of the RESTORE Act. In concomitance with the CPS FPL, an internal Council collaboration strategy was adopted by the Council as the foundation for the development of the 2020 and subsequent Funded Priority Lists.

This report is available on the internet at the [RESTORE Council Website](#).

1. Introduction

The Gulf Coast region is vital to our Nation and our economy, providing valuable energy resources, abundant seafood, extraordinary beaches and recreational activities, and a rich cultural heritage. Its waters and coasts are home to one of the most diverse environments in the world—including over 15,000 species of sea life. More than 22 million Americans live in Gulf coastal counties and parishes, working in crucial U.S. industries like commercial seafood, recreational fishing, tourism, and oil and gas production. The region also boasts of a significant shipping industry with 10 of America’s 15 largest ports accounting for nearly a trillion dollars in trade each year.

Despite the tremendous economic, social and ecological importance of the Gulf Coast region, the health of the region’s ecosystem has been significantly impacted, most recently by the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, as well as by chronic and acute harm caused by other past and ongoing human actions. Restoring an area as large and complex as the Gulf Coast region is a costly and multi-generational undertaking. Over the past several decades, the Gulf Coast region has experienced loss of critical wetlands, erosion of barrier islands, imperiled fisheries, water quality degradation leading to, among many other impacts, one of the world’s largest hypoxic zones every year, alteration of hydrology, and other cumulative environmental impacts. While hurricanes, subsidence and other natural forces are also key factors in land loss, this may be exacerbated by human actions which have greatly reduced ecosystem resilience and thus made coastal wetlands more vulnerable to these natural stressors.

The cumulative impacts of chronic (e.g., water quality, sea level rise) and acute (e.g., hurricanes and floods) stressors to the Gulf ecosystems have resulted in increased storm risk, land and habitat loss, depletion of natural resources, altered hydrology and compromised water quality and quantity, which are imperiling coastal communities’ natural defenses and ability to respond to natural and man-made disruptions. These problems not only endanger the natural systems but also the economic vitality of the Gulf Region.

In addition, the Gulf of Mexico experienced extensive and severe water quality and habitat impacts resulting from the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill including excess nutrients, altered sediment resources, pathogens, mercury, remaining *Deepwater Horizon* oil and other pollutants. Eight years after the spill, living coastal and marine systems still show signs of stress, such as depleted species populations and degraded habitats.

The Council is playing a key role in helping to ensure that the Gulf’s natural resources are sustainable and available for future generations. Use of the Gulf restoration funds represent a great responsibility. The ongoing involvement of the people who live, work and play in the Gulf region is critical to ensuring that these monies are used wisely and effectively.

The Council was formally established in 2015 as a new, independent Federal Agency with a clear mission to implement a long-term, comprehensive plan for the ecological and economic recovery of the Gulf Coast region. This document represents the Council’s submission of the Annual Performance Plan (APP) for Fiscal Year 2018. Unlike most federal agencies, the Council does not receive funds through the annual federal appropriations process (all funds are received through the Trust Fund (Trust Fund)); however the Council does appear in the Appendix to the President’s Budget.

1.1. The RESTORE Act

Spurred by the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, the RESTORE Act was signed into law on July 6, 2012. The RESTORE Act envisions a regional approach to restoring the long-term health of the valuable natural ecosystems and economy of the Gulf Coast region. The RESTORE Act dedicates 80 percent of civil and administrative penalties paid under the Clean Water Act, after the date of enactment, by responsible parties in connection with the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill to the Trust Fund for ecosystem restoration, economic recovery, and tourism promotion in the Gulf Coast region. This effort is in addition to the restoration of natural resources injured by the spill that is being accomplished through a separate Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) under the Oil Pollution Act. A third and related Gulf restoration effort is being administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation using funds from the settlement of criminal charges against BP and Transocean.

In addition to creating the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund, the RESTORE Act established the Council. The Council is currently chaired by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and includes the Governors of the States of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas and the Secretaries of the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Army, Homeland Security and the Interior, and the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

One of the Council's primary responsibilities is to develop a Comprehensive Plan to restore the ecosystem and the economy of the Gulf Coast region, and to update the Plan at least every five years. State Expenditure Plans, developed under the Spill Impact Component, are also submitted to the Council for approval in accordance with the RESTORE Act. Pursuant to the RESTORE Act, the Council approved the initial Comprehensive Plan in August 2013, which outlines an overarching framework for an integrated and coordinated approach for region-wide Gulf Coast restoration. The Council updated the Comprehensive Plan in December 2016 in recognition that future success depends upon collaboration among Council members, other Gulf restoration funding partners and the public. Collaboration is needed to break down potential bureaucratic stovepipes and leverage resources to ensure the greatest possible benefit from the Council's investments. Congress established the structure for this collaboration by creating a Council comprised of the States and six federal agencies.

The Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund

The RESTORE Act directs the Council to use the best available science and give highest priority to ecosystem projects and programs that meet one or more of the following four Priority Criteria. The Council will use these criteria to evaluate proposals and select the best projects and programs to achieve comprehensive ecosystem restoration.

- 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.
- 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.

- 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.
- 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.

The funds supporting the Council’s efforts are defined by the RESTORE Act, which divides funds made available from the Trust Fund into five components, colloquially referred to as “buckets,” and sets parameters for how these funds will be spent.

The Council is directly responsible for two of the five components, as follows:

- *Council-Selected Restoration Component*: 30 percent of the funds (plus 50 percent of interest earned) will be administered for ecosystem restoration and protection according to the Comprehensive Plan developed by the Council. The Council approved and published an Initial Comprehensive Plan in August 2013.
- *Spill Impact Component*: 30 percent of the funds are dedicated to the States based on a formula set forth in the RESTORE Act and established by the Council through a regulation. This allocation formula is based on a weighted allocation of the number of miles of shoreline of each State that experienced oiling as a result of the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill; the inverse proportion of distance from *Deepwater Horizon* drilling rig to the middle of oiled shoreline in each State; and the average coastal county population in each State as of the 2010 Census. Each State will be required to have a State Expenditure Plan (SEP) in place for the use of these funds. The SEPs must be consistent with the Goals and Objectives of the Comprehensive Plan and are subject to Council approval in accordance with criteria set forth in the RESTORE Act. More information regarding SEP guidelines can be found on the [RESTORE Council website](#).

On January 3, 2013, the United States announced that Transocean Deepwater Inc. and related entities had agreed to pay \$1 billion (plus interest) in civil penalties for violating the Clean Water Act in relation to their conduct in the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. In accordance with the consent decree, Transocean has paid all three of its installments of civil penalties plus interest to the U.S. Department of Justice. The U.S. Department of Justice has transferred 80 percent of these funds to Treasury for deposit into the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund, totaling \$816 million. On November 20, 2015 the federal court for the Eastern District Court of Louisiana ordered Anadarko Petroleum Corp. to pay a \$159.5 million civil fine; of this amount, \$128 million, including interest, has been deposited in the Trust Fund. Anadarko was the last defendant in the *Deepwater Horizon* spill Clean Water Act litigation.

On April 4, 2016, a federal court in New Orleans entered a consent decree resolving civil claims against BP arising from the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill ([United States vs. BXP et al.](#)). The resolution of civil claim totals for entities held responsible for the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill will yield more than \$20 billion, the largest civil penalties ever awarded under any environmental statute, and the largest recovery of damages for injuries to natural resources of The United States. Of these penalties, the RESTORE Act will provide \$5.33 billion (80 percent of \$6.659 billion) to the Trust Fund, based on the following: \$1 billion (plus interest) in civil penalties from Transocean Deepwater Inc. and related entities for violating the Clean Water Act in relation to their conduct in the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill;

\$159.5 million from a civil fine paid by Anadarko Petroleum Corporation; and \$5.5 billion (plus interest) from BP Exploration and Production, Inc. (BP) for a Clean Water Act civil penalty under the April 4, 2016 consent decree, payable over a fifteen-year period.

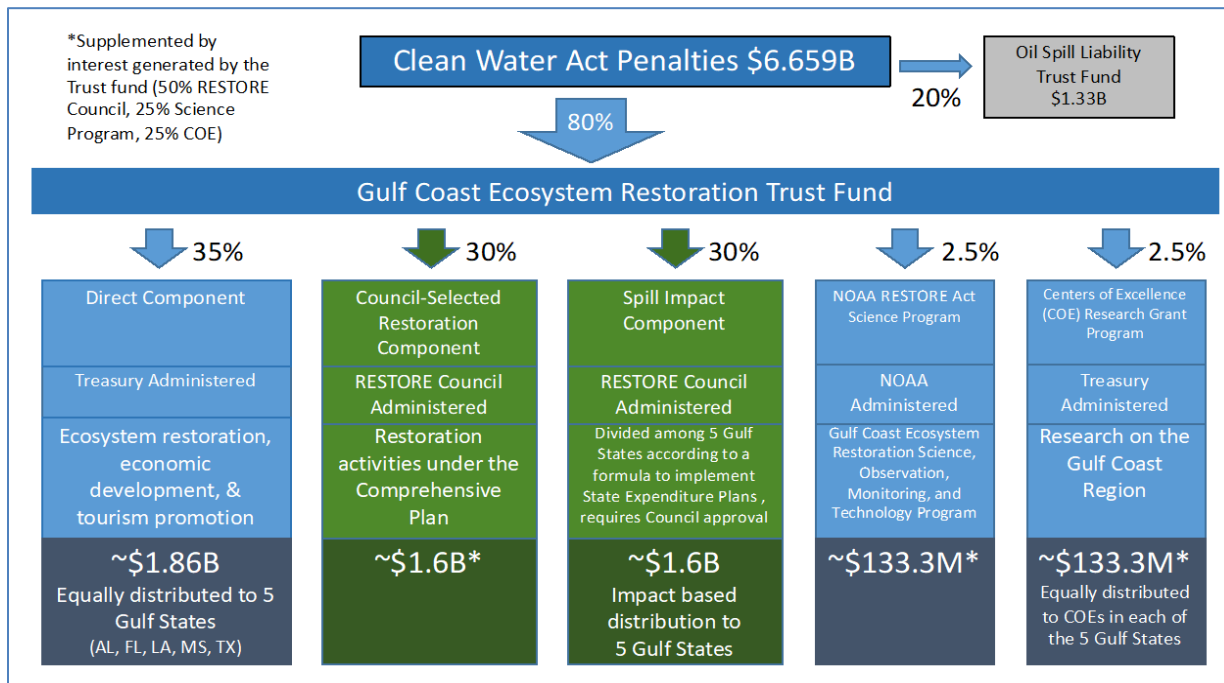


Figure 1. Allocation of the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund based on settlements with BP, Transocean and Anadarko; RESTORE Council oversight components are highlighted in green.

Council-Selected Restoration Component

The RESTORE Act requires creation of a funded priorities list (FPL) that includes the projects and programs the Council intends to fund through the Council-Selected Restoration Component. The Council completed its Initial FPL during the first quarter of fiscal year 2016 ([RESTORE Council's Initial Funded Priority List](#)) using a process that emphasized public input, transparency, coordination with other restoration programs, and rigorous science review.

Spill Impact Component

Spill Impact Component funds will be invested in projects, programs, and activities developed by the States and identified in approved State Expenditure Plans (SEPs). The RESTORE Act allocates 30 percent of the Trust Fund to the Gulf Coast States under a formula established by the Council through a regulation, and spent according to individual SEPs. Each State will develop one or more SEPs describing how it will disburse the amounts allocated to it under the Spill Impact Component. These projects and programs will be implemented through grants to the States in a manner that is consistent with the requirements of the RESTORE Act as well as the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan.

2. Strategic Goals

The task of restoring the Gulf environment is a multi-generational undertaking. A comprehensive approach to Gulf restoration must include the engagement of a wide and diverse array of stakeholders, including federal, state and local governments, Tribes, private businesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the general public. By working closely with our restoration partners, the Council believes it can make significant progress towards comprehensive Gulf restoration and provide substantial environmental and economic benefits to current and future generations.

A significant component in assisting the Council achieve ecosystem restoration of the Gulf is through its Comprehensive Plan. The Council updated its 2013 Initial Comprehensive Plan ([2013 Initial Comprehensive Plan](#)) during 2016 with the intention to provide strategic guidance that will help the Council more effectively address complex and critical challenges inherent to ecosystem restoration in the Gulf of Mexico by:

- Ensuring consistency with the Priority Criteria referenced in the Act;
- Reinforcing the Council's goals, objectives and commitments;
- Setting forth a Ten-Year Funding Strategy, including a Council vision for ecosystem restoration;
- Increasing collaboration among Council members and partner restoration programs;
- Refining the process for ensuring that the Council's decisions are informed by the best available science; and
- Improving the efficiency, effectiveness and transparency of Council actions.

Following an extensive public feedback effort, the Council approved the [2016 Comprehensive Plan Update](#) on December 16, 2016. The Comprehensive Plan Update takes a holistic approach to restoration recognizes the interconnected nature of coastal and marine ecosystems, a fundamental organizational principle of watersheds/estuaries, and the importance of addressing system-wide stressors that reduce ecosystem integrity. The Council's selections for the FPL were therefore based on a variety of factors, including the need to respond to widely-recognized ecological stressors, foundational investment needs, substantial public input, support for certain high-value areas, and socioeconomic and cultural considerations. Moving forward, the Council will work to use this holistic approach before, during, and after the proposal development, review, and selection processes in order to maximize project benefits and track outcomes.

To provide the overarching framework for an integrated and coordinated approach for region-wide Gulf Coast restoration and help guide the collective actions at the local, state, tribal and federal levels, the Council has adopted five Strategic Goals as follows in the 2013 Comprehensive Plan, recommitting to them (with the addition of Water Quantity to Strategic Goal 2) in the 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update:

- **Strategic Goal 1:** Restore and Conserve Habitat – Restore and conserve the health, diversity, and resilience of key coastal, estuarine, and marine habitats;
- **Strategic Goal 2:** Restore Water Quality and Quantity – Restore and protect water quality of the Gulf Coast region's fresh, estuarine, and marine waters;

- **Strategic Goal 3:** Replenish and Protect Living Coastal and Marine Resources – Restore and protect healthy, diverse, and sustainable living coastal and marine resources;
- **Strategic Goal 4:** Enhance Community Resilience – Build upon and sustain communities with capacity to adapt to short- and long-term changes;
- **Strategic Goal 5:** Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy – Enhance the sustainability and resiliency of the Gulf economy. The fifth goal focuses on reviving and supporting a sustainable Gulf economy to ensure that those expenditures by the Gulf Coast States authorized in the RESTORE Act under the Direct Component (administered by the Department of the Treasury) and the Spill Impact Component can be considered in the context of comprehensive restoration.

To achieve all five goals, the Council will support ecosystem restoration that can enhance local communities by giving people desirable places to live, work, and play, while creating opportunities for new and existing businesses of all sizes, especially those dependent on natural resources. In addition, the Council will support ecosystem restoration that builds local workforce capacity.

3. Strategic Objectives

The Council will select and fund projects and programs that restore and protect the natural resources, ecosystems, water quality, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast region. Projects and programs not within the scope of these Strategic Objectives for ecosystem restoration will not be funded under the Council-Selected Restoration Component. The Strategic Objectives are not listed in any particular order, and the Council does not anticipate that restoration efforts funded under the Council-Selected Restoration Component will be equally distributed among these objectives. Further, restoration projects and programs are likely to achieve multiple objectives simultaneously.

- **Strategic 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 savannahs, coastal prairies, submerged aquatic vegetation, oyster reefs, and shallow and deep water corals.
- **Strategic 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.
- **Strategic 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.
- **Strategic 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.
- **Strategic 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 non-structural, natural buffers against storms and flooding.

- **Strategic 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 actions for all ages.
- **Strategic Objective 7:** Objective Improve Science-Based Decision-Making Processes – Improve science-based decision-making processes used by the Council.
- **Management Focused Strategic Objective:** Organizational Excellence – Council staff will provide exceptional service to Council members, partner state and federal agencies, and public, private, and other stakeholders to support the Council’s efforts to achieve integrated and coordinated efforts for region-wide Gulf Coast restoration.

4. Performance Metrics for Individual Council-Funded Programs and Projects

The Council has currently identified 56 performance-level metrics for grants to states and Interagency Agreements (IAA) with the federal members funded through the Council-Funded Component (“Bucket 2”), and for grants funded under the Spill Impact Component (“Bucket 3”) of the RESTORE Act. These metrics are used to monitor and evaluate the efficacy of projects and programs in meeting mission goals and objectives of the Council and track annual performance. For each of the performance metrics, the associated Strategic Objective supported by that metric is provided, along with the supporting activity/outcomes, metric description, and the overarching concomitant approach to support ecosystem restoration.

5. Performance Goals and Indicators: Results for Fiscal Year 2018

The Council’s 2018 Annual Performance Plan (APP) described the specific actions the Council planned to take during fiscal year 2018 in furtherance of its long-term effort to restore the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem as laid out by the Council’s 2013 and Updated 2016 Comprehensive Plan which serves as its strategic framework.

5.1. Performance Goal 1: Promote a Gulf-Wide Comprehensive Approach to Restoration

The Council is moving forward with an integrated and coordinated approach to Gulf Coast restoration. This approach strives to both restore the Gulf Coast region’s environment and, at the same time, revitalize the region’s economy because the Council recognizes that ecosystem restoration investments may also improve economic prosperity and quality of life. In addition, this approach

acknowledges that coordinated action with other partners is important to successfully restore and sustain the health of the Gulf Coast region. This coordination is particularly important because diverse funding sources and decision-making bodies are simultaneously investing in Gulf Coast restoration.

Performance Indicator 1:

Promote gulf-wide restoration efforts on a watershed-estuary scale rather than random acts of restoration through examination of stressors and environmental drivers with Council members, the NGO community, interested stakeholders and public during fiscal year 2018. The Council will consider the extent to which projects will substantially improve the restoration or conservation of key watersheds without regard to political boundaries, or that provide foundational support for future efforts towards gulf-wide restoration.

On December 9, 2015, the Council voted to approve the Initial FPL. The Initial FPL is organized around ten key watersheds/estuaries across the Gulf to concentrate and leverage available funds to address critical ecosystem needs in high priority locations (Figure 2). The Council identified activities for the Initial FPL that would either complement each other or have synergistic effects with other restoration projects. Taking a holistic approach to restoration recognizes the interconnected nature of coastal and marine ecosystems, a fundamental organizational principle of watersheds/estuaries, and the importance of addressing system-wide stressors that reduce ecosystem integrity. The Council's selections for the Initial FPL were therefore based on a variety of factors, including the need to respond to widely-recognized ecological stressors, foundational investment needs, substantial public input, support for certain high-value areas, and socioeconomic and cultural considerations. Moving forward, the Council will work to use this holistic approach in order to maximize project benefits and track outcomes.

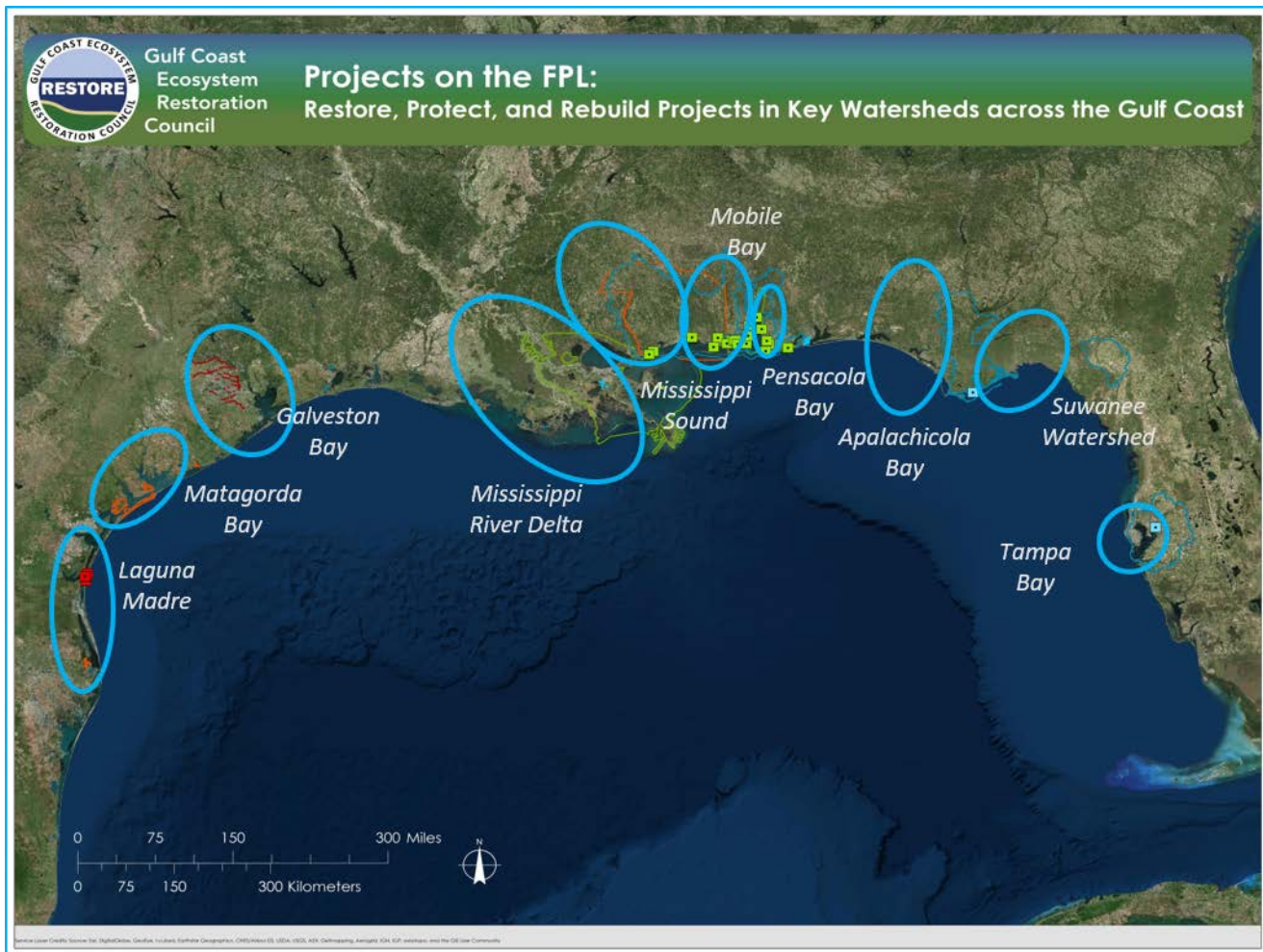


Figure 2. Ten key watershed/estuaries identified in the Initial Funded Priorities List.

The Council determined that a watershed/estuary approach would be an effective tool for guiding the selection of projects and programs in a way that advances comprehensive restoration. By identifying and focusing on watersheds, the Council was able to make difficult funding decisions in a way that leverages limited restoration resources for maximum effectiveness, while also supporting planning, science and other activities that can set the stage for future success. All activities in the Initial FPL came from the original member submissions. In some cases, the activities are a component or smaller increment of an original submission. Many stakeholders cautioned the Council against distributing the available funds in a way that supports disconnected (although beneficial) restoration projects; the Council was asked not to engage in “random acts of restoration.” The Council shares that perspective and believes that focusing on key watersheds and other foundational activities will ensure that the funds are spent in a way that contributes to comprehensive Gulf restoration.

The Council approved the Comprehensive Plan Update on December 16, 2016. The Comprehensive Plan Update takes a holistic approach to restoration recognizes the interconnected nature of coastal and marine ecosystems, a fundamental organizational principle of watersheds/estuaries, and the importance of addressing system-wide stressors that reduce ecosystem integrity.

As part of the Comprehensive Plan Update, the Council recognized that a clear and concise vision statement can help direct and shape future funding decisions. The Council believes that its vision statement for the Ten-Year Funding Strategy should include reference to both the desired environmental outcome and the process used to get there. Furthermore, the Council will build upon the tremendous restoration experience, science expertise, and other capabilities of its diverse membership of state and federal agencies. The Council's collective wisdom is greater than the sum of its individual parts.

The Council sought to capture this sentiment as well as other key elements as it developed the following vision statement:

A healthy and productive Gulf ecosystem achieved through collaboration on strategic restoration projects and programs.

During Fiscal Year 2018, the Council has continued to fund the projects and programs approved in the Initial FPL. The following section provides progress report summaries for the twenty-three projects funded during Fiscal Years 2016 and 2017, totaling \$89,463,243, along with links to additional information (including the projected duration of each project). A summary of the fifteen projects from FPL 1 funded during Fiscal Year 2018 is found under the section: Performance Goal 2 Council-Selected Restoration Performance Excellence, Performance Indicators 4 and 5 (below). It is important to note that Project Start Dates may be earlier than the award date in those instances where work commenced prior to the award being finalized.

Project Title: [Matagorda Bay System Priority Landscape Conservation](#)

Council Member(s): State of Texas

FAIN: GNTCP17TX0009

Award Date: 12/27/2016

Project Start Date: 04/28/2016

Project End Date: 11/30/2019

Award Amount: \$6,012,000

Project Title: [Bahia Grande Coastal Corridor](#)

Council Member(s): State of Texas

FAIN: GNTCP17TX0010

Award Date: 11/28/2016

Project Start Date: 04/28/2016

Project End Date: 08/31/2019

Award Amount: \$4,378,500

Project Title: Gulf of Mexico Habitat Restoration via Conservation Corps Partnerships/Youth Conservation Corps (BIA)

Council Member(s): Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs

FAIN: IAACP16DI0002

Award Date: 5/10/2016

Project Start Date: 05/15/2016

Project End Date: 12/30/2018

Award Amount: \$500,000

Project Title: West Grand Terre Beach Nourishment and Stabilization (Planning)

Council Member(s): State of Louisiana, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA)

FAIN: GNTCP16LA0024

Award Date: 9/28/2016

Project Start Date: 10/6/2016

Project End Date: 6/19/2019

Award Amount: \$7,259,216

Project Title: Biloxi Marsh Living Shoreline (Planning)

Council Member(s): State of Louisiana, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA)

FAIN: GNTCP17LA0025

Award Date: 10/31/2016

Project Start Date: 11/01/2016

Project End Date: 5/31/2019

Award Amount: \$3,220,460

Project Title: Golden Triangle Marsh Creation (Planning)

Council Member(s): State of Louisiana, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA)

FAIN: GNTCP17LA0013

Award Date: 10/26/2016

Project Start Date: 11/01/2016

Project End Date: 5/1/2020

Award Amount: \$4,347,733

Project Title: [Enhancing Opportunities for Beneficial Use of Dredge Sediments \(Planning\)](#)

Council Member(s): State of Mississippi, Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ)

FAIN: GNTCP17MS0022

Award Date: 11/16/2016

Project Start Date: 12/01/2016

Project End Date: 11/30/2019

Award Amount: \$2,178,847

Project Title: [Sea Grant Education and Outreach](#)

Council Member(s): State of Mississippi, Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ)

FAIN: GNTCP17MS0020

Award Date: 11/16/2016

Project Start Date: 12/01/2016

Project End Date: 11/30/2019

Award Amount: \$750,000

Project Title: [Baseline Flow, Gage Analysis & On-Line Tool to Support Restoration](#)

Council Member(s): Department of Interior, US Geological Survey (USGS)

FAIN: IAACP17DI0001

Award Date: 11/21/2016

Project Start Date: 12/01/2016

Project End Date: 11/30/2023

Award Amount: \$5,549,800

Project Title: [Pensacola Bay Living Shoreline - Phase 1 \(Planning\)](#)

Council Member(s): State of Florida, Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

FAIN: GNTCP17FL0040

Award Date: 12/15/2016

Project Start Date: 01/01/2017

Project End Date: 03/31/2019

Award Amount: \$231,314

Project Title: [Bayou DuLarge Ridge, Marsh and Hydrologic Restoration \(Planning\)](#)

Council Member(s): U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

FAIN: IAACP17DA0007

Award Date: 02/23/2017

Project Start Date: 02/23/2017

Project End Date: 12/31/2019

Award Amount: \$5,162,084

Project Title: [Apalachicola Bay Oyster Restoration \(Implementation\)](#)

Council Member(s): State of Florida, Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

FAIN: GNTCP17FL0039

Award Date: 03/30/2017

Project Start Date: 04/01/2017

Project End Date: 07/01/2020

Award Amount: \$4,680,000

Project Title: [Bayou Chico Contaminated Sediment Removal-Planning, Design and Permitting](#)

Council Member(s): State of Florida, Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

FAIN: GNTCP17FL0018

Award Date: 04/13/2017

Project Start Date: 04/14/2017

Project End Date: 01/15/2020

Award Amount: \$356,850

Project Title: [Mobile Bay National Estuary Program - Planning](#)

Council Member(s): Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

FAIN: IAACP17EP0028

Award Date: 05/23/2017

Project Start Date: 06/01/2017

Project End Date: 09/30/2019

Award Amount: \$358,000

Project Title: [Beach Haven – Joint Stormwater & Wastewater Improvement Project Phase II](#)

Council Member(s): State of Florida, Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

FAIN: GNTCP17FL0026

Award Date: 06/14/2017

Project Start Date: 06/15/2017

Project End Date: 12/31/2022

Award Amount: \$5,967,000

Project Title: [Council Monitoring & Assessment Program Development \(2 Interagency Agreements\)](#)

Council Member(s): Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Department of Interior, US Geological Survey (USGS)

FAIN: IAACP17DC0038

Award Date: 06/14/2017

Project Start Date: 06/15/2017

Project End Date: 06/14/2020

Award Amount: \$1,700,000

FAIN: IAACP17DI0006

Award Date: 03/08/2017

Project Start Date: 03/08/2017

Project End Date: 06/14/2020

Award Amount: \$1,700,000

Project Title: [Gulf of Mexico Habitat Restoration via Conservation Corps Partnership](#)

Council Member(s): Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

FAIN: IAACP17DC0030

Award Date: 06/14/2017

Project Start Date: 06/15/2017

Project End Date: 09/30/2020

Award Amount: \$7,500,000

Project Title: [Strategic Conservation Assessment of Gulf Coast Landscapes](#)

Council Member(s): Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)

FAIN: IAACP17DI0005

Award Date: 06/20/2017

Project Start Date: 06/20/2017

Project End Date: 04/30/2020

Award Amount: \$1,842,583

Project Title: [Tate's Hell Strategy 1](#)

Council Member(s): U.S. Department of Agriculture, US Forest Service (USFS) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

FAIN: IAACP17DA0041

Award Date: 06/20/2017

Project Start Date: 06/20/2017

Project End Date: 10/15/2022

Award Amount: \$7,000,000

Project Title: [Apalachicola Watershed Agriculture Water Quality Improvements](#)

Council Member(s): State of Florida, Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

FAIN: GNTCP17FL0008

Award Date: 07/10/2017

Project Start Date: 07/10/2017

Project End Date: 07/10/2022

Award Amount: \$2,219,856

Project Title: [Suwannee River Partnership Irrigation Water Enhancement Program \(Implementation\)](#)

Council Member(s): State of Florida, Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

FAIN: GNTCP17FL0015

Award Date: 08/22/2017

Project Start Date: 08/25/2017

Project End Date: 08/25/2022

Award Amount: \$2,884,000

Project Title: [Mississippi River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp \(Planning\)](#)

Council Member(s): State of Louisiana

FAIN: GNTCP17LA0044

Award Date: 9/13/2017

Project Start Date: 09/22/2017

Project End Date: 9/21/2020

Award Amount: \$14,190,000

Performance Indicator 2:

Promote coordination and collaboration among members and other restoration efforts of Gulf restoration to maximize the Council’s “return on investment.”

The following are elements of this Performance indicator:

- a) *This will be accomplished by strengthened partnerships, identifying leveraging expertise and opportunities toward encouraging projects that comprise a holistic approach to ecosystem-wide restoration through development of a Council Collaboration Strategy by the end of fiscal year 2017.*
- b) *Facilitate coordination, collaboration, and connection of Gulf Restoration Activities - coordination and collaboration among members and our restoration partners, critical to the success of Gulf restoration, through regular meetings with the state and Gulf wide Technical Implementation Groups of the Natural Resource Damage Assessment, and Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund to find inter-program efficiencies through fiscal year 2018.*
- c) *Facilitate dialogue among Gulf restoration partners by identifying potential gaps that limit our collective ability to achieve large-scale restoration and by serving as the connector between funding sources through regional and state collaboration meetings sponsored by the Council during fiscal years 2018.*

The 2016 [Comprehensive Plan Update](#), developed from a comprehensive evaluation of the Initial FPL process emphasizes the importance of coordination and collaboration among the Council members and with other programs in order to leverage resources and maximize the effectiveness of available restoration funding. During 2018, the Council approved the Funded Priorities List: Comprehensive Plan Commitment and Planning Support (CPS FPL). A major challenge to Gulf-wide ecosystem restoration is

coordinating efforts within each state, among Council members, among stakeholders, and across the Gulf restoration efforts. Prior to the CPS FPL, there was no designated funding stream to support Council member efforts to plan and coordinate restoration activities under the Council-Selected Restoration Component. Historically, Council members had to rely upon general, tax-generated or appropriated funds to support their work on matters such as FPL development and the Comprehensive Plan update.

The CPS FPL funding provides the necessary resources for Council members to stimulate and encourage the coordination and collaboration necessary to achieve the commitments of the Comprehensive Plan. Specifically, the CPS FPL funding will provide funds necessary for members to:

- Strengthen ecosystem restoration proposals for future FPL(s) under the Council-Selected Restoration Component;
- Enhance the efficiency of future FPL development processes; and
- Facilitate long-term planning and leveraging efforts across funding streams.

The CPS FPL is intended to ensure the Council members have the resources needed to develop highly effective projects and programs for future funding under the Council-Selected Restoration Component. Under the CPS FPL, each of the eleven Council members may apply for up to \$500,000 per year for up to three years and up to \$300,000 per year for two years thereafter. This equals up to \$23.1 million, or 1.44% of the total funds available (not including interest) in the Council-Selected Restoration Component. As with the Initial FPL, the CPS FPL includes a clause that incentivizes savings and efficiency by enabling the Council to apply unused planning funds to projects and programs sponsored by the member that achieves the savings.

The Council believes that investing a relatively small amount of resources in planning can ensure that restoration projects selected for funding will yield greater ecosystem benefits in the future. The Council will review the effectiveness of this CPS FPL funding at year four and consider whether extending planning and commitment support efforts beyond the five-year period is needed to continue to meet the Comprehensive Plan commitments.

In approving the CPS FPL, the Council provided the opportunity for its members to receive the necessary funds to enhance collaboration, coordination, public engagement and use of best available science in developing and selecting restoration projects. Council members began using these CPS FPL funds to support the collaboration and other planning activities needed to develop effective project and program proposals for the next round of funding decisions, which is scheduled to take place in early 2020. Nine CPS awards providing \$18.7 million over the next five years, were awarded to members in 2018 for CPS activities.

5.2. Performance Goal 2: Council-Selected Restoration Performance Excellence

The RESTORE Act requires creation of a funded priorities list (FPL) that includes the projects and programs the Council intends to fund through the Council-Selected Restoration Component. The Council completed its Initial FPL during the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2016 ([RESTORE Council's Initial](#)

[Funded Priority List](#)) using a process that emphasized public input, transparency, coordination with other restoration programs, and rigorous science review.

Performance Indicator 1:

Draft improved Grant and Interagency Agreement Submission Guidelines to facilitate the development of effective and coordinated proposals by evaluating the efficacy of concepts, lessons learned and best practices for potential inclusion in the next FPL development process.

In fiscal year 2018, Council staff continued the development of improved Grant and Interagency Agreement Submission Guidelines to facilitate the development of effective and coordinated proposals by evaluating the efficacy of concepts, lessons learned and best practices through execution of a 360 evaluation of the Council’s Restoration Assistance and Awards Management System. This effort included both Council Staff (reviewers and processors) and federal and state RESTORE Council members (applicants) to garner a complete evaluation of all aspects of grant and Interagency Agreement submissions. At this time, the next scheduled Funded Priority List will be developed during FY2019 and finalized in FY2020. Submission Guidelines will continue to evolve with concurrence of the Council until the next funding availability announcement is made, likely in mid-2019.

Performance Indicator 2:

Update and improve the process for applying best available science to FPL proposals by the end of fiscal year 2018 to ensure Council decisions are informed by the best scientific information available which will include updating the review process questions, continuing the use of external science reviewers, and exploring the use of one or more science review panels.

Under the RESTORE Act, proposals and grant/interagency agreement (IAA) applications for Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council)-Selected Restoration Component funds and Spill Impact Component funds must be based on and conducted according to “best available science” (BAS). BAS is defined in the RESTORE Act as science that “maximizes the quality, objectivity, and integrity of information, including statistical information; uses peer-reviewed and publicly available data; and clearly documents and communicates risks and uncertainties in the scientific basis for such projects” (see 33 U.S.C. 1321(a)(27)). The Council supports a process for external independent scientific review of project proposals and applicable project and program grant/IAA applications to address this requirement. Following the identification by Council Science Staff of the need for BAS review, each proposal/application is independently reviewed by at least three external expert science reviewers. In general, one reviewer is from the Gulf state most directly linked to the proposal/application, and the other two are from another state in the Gulf of Mexico region (the states of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas), or from outside of the Gulf of Mexico region.

In 2018, the Council engaged in a variety of activities that promote enhanced application of BAS at all stages of project/program development, including:

- a) Best Available Science Reviews. *The Council's Initial Funded Priorities List utilized voluntary, confidential and external mail-in reviews to ensure all proposals were developed using Best Available Science. To follow through with the Council's comprehensive plan commitments to revise this process for Funded Priority List 3, Council staff developed an updated BAS Review Process that incorporates an internal BAS Proposal Review Panel in addition to external mail-in reviews. This panel, comprised of technical experts from each Council-member agency, will also review proposal application materials, including the external mail-in reviews.*
- b) Monitoring Progress, Success, & Performance. *In its Comprehensive Plans, the Council has committed to delivering results, measuring impacts, and implementing/improving adaptive management. Ongoing coordination around science and monitoring has already reaped tangible benefits such as: alignment of overlapping tasks across entities, shared work products, and plans for future leveraging of shared resources.*

Funded under the initial FPL, the Council Monitoring and Assessment Program (CMAP) is a network of diverse experts who collaborate around Gulf-wide regional monitoring to measure impacts of investments in restoration. The Council Monitoring and Assessment Workgroup (CMAWG), comprised of technical staff from each Council member agency, is partially supported by CMAP funds and will largely be responsible for developing monitoring standards and protocol recommendations for RESTORE Council approval. In 2018, Council Staff and CMAWG members updated the Observational Data Plan Guidance to assist projects and programs in providing the Council with a plan for data collection and compilation. Data will be used to evaluate if funded projects are meeting or exceeding project goals and restoration targets.

- c) Enhanced Access to Information through Data Systems. *Data collected for Council-funded activities can only be useful for reporting and evaluation if users are able to find the data, assess its utility, and understand how it was generated. To enhance current and future use of data, Council staff and partners developed the Council Metadata Records Library and Information Network (MERLIN) in 2018. MERLIN is an online metadata records tool developed in partnership with US Geological Survey and NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information. MERLIN houses metadata-- records that describe information about data. The development of this tool supports the Council's 2018 approval of the use of the ISO 19115 metadata standard for all Council funded projects to promote consistency in the data collection for Council-funded activities.*

Performance Indicator 3: Advance efficiency of the Environmental Compliance processes to support Council actions.

The following are elements of this Performance Indicator:

- a) *In support of evaluating the efficacy of moving Category 2 projects under the Initial FPL to Category 1. Evaluate and propose effective processes for the determination of environmental compliance of Category 2 projects for funding consideration by the Council.*
- b) *Participate in interagency regulatory efficiency team to collaborate with partners, share efficiency tools/practices, and enhance efficiency and effectiveness of Council environmental*

compliance. Identify, develop and/or adopt tools and approaches to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of Council environmental compliance.

In addition to approving funds for specific projects and programs, the Initial FPL also lists activities the Council has identified as priorities for potential future funding. This category of activities (referred to as Category 2 activities) are projects and programs the Council believes have merit, but which were not ready for implementation funding because the requisite environmental compliance had not been completed. The Council set aside a pool of available funds for potential use on Category 2 activities, pending Council approval. The Council also approved planning funds to address the environmental laws applicable to these Category 2 activities. Once these laws have been addressed for a Category 2 activity, the Council can vote to approve funding for that activity through an amendment to the Initial FPL. Such a vote only occurs after public comments have been considered by the Council.

The Council is committed to efficient, effective and transparent environmental compliance processes for its activities, including those in Category 2. With major federal regulatory agencies among its members, the Council was well positioned to efficiently address the environmental compliance needs for Category 2 projects in 2018. By reviewing and adopting existing environmental clearances developed by member agencies, the Council has been able to approve implementation funding for one Category 2 project- in 2018.

Project title: [Robinson Preserve Wetlands Restoration](#)

Location: Florida

Sponsor: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Funding approved: \$1,790,546

The RESTORE Council is an active member of the Gulf Coast Interagency Environmental Restoration Working Group's (GCIERWG), which was formed to help achieve more effective and efficient environmental reviews of Gulf ecosystem restoration projects. Improved environmental reviews should then result in more timely restoration implementation. Formed in recognition of the critical need for increased regulatory collaboration through early and consistent interagency coordination and prioritization of restoration work across funding streams, GCIERWG coordinates through standing monthly interagency conference calls and is currently led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) assisted by Council staff. Until this fiscal year the workgroup was comprised of only federal members including representation from the U.S. Departments of Army, Agriculture, Commerce, the Interior, and the Environmental Protection Agency. In mid-2018, the Gulf states were invited to participate in GCIERWG to increase the group's utility and inclusiveness moving forward.

In 2018, GCIERWG continued two interagency regulatory clearinghouse pilots (the [Pensacola Bay Living Shoreline – Phase 1 project](#) sponsored by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection) and the [Golden Triangle Marsh Creation project](#) sponsored by the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana. These pilot efforts are demonstrating both the utility and efficiency of early, field-level collaborative technical review during restoration project planning. Both Florida and Louisiana have expressed that the assistance of GCIERWG proved to be very valuable, and they have an interest in working to potentially expand this pilot approach. Also in 2018, NOAA elected to dedicate a

portion of its upcoming CPS FPL funding over the next several years to work with GCIERWG to identify, refine and utilize tools and approaches to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and transparency of environmental compliance to accelerate achievement of ecosystem benefits.

Performance Indicator 4:

Programmatic Review of Grant and Interagency Agreements. The programmatic component of the Council staff will review all grant and Interagency Agreement applications for funding under the Initial FPL meeting timelines established by the RESTORE Act, Council Guidelines and the Notice of Funds Availability. This will include review of submissions for best available science and environmental compliance with NEPA and other environmental federal regulations; and

Performance Indicator 5:

Compliance Review of Grant and Interagency Agreements. The grants and compliance component of the Council staff will review all grant and Interagency Agreement applications for funding under the Initial FPL meeting timelines established by the RESTORE Act, Council Guidelines and the Notice of Funds Availability. The review will ensure compliance with all administrative and regulatory requirements under the RESTORE Act, Part 200, the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, and other federal regulatory requirements.

Foundational to funding of projects and programs selected under the Initial FPL, staff of the RESTORE Council worked with the members who submitted applications during fiscal year 2018 (state members through grants and Interagency Agreements with federal members) to ensure compliance with programmatic (Performance Indicator 4) and federal compliance reviews (Performance Indicator 5). As a result of the completion of these programmatic and compliance reviews during 2018, the Council awarded funds for fifteen Initial FPL projects, totaling \$34.21 million. The Initial FPL activities awarded funds in 2018 are listed below, along with links to additional information (including the projected duration of each activity). These projects and programs support planning, implementation and science activities that will provide on-the-ground ecological benefits to key Gulf watersheds, develop shovel-ready projects, and help build a strong science foundation for future decision-making. It is important to note that Project Start Dates may be earlier than the award date in those instances where work commenced prior to the award being finalized.

Project Title: Bayou Greenways (Planning and Implementation)

Council Member(s): State of Texas

FAIN: GNTCP18TX0011

Award Date: 10/24/17

Project Start Date: 04/28/2016

Project End Date: 11/30/2019

Award Amount: \$7,109,000

Project Title: [Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program \(GCCRP\) \(Planning & Implementation\) - Mississippi](#)

Council Member(s): U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service

FAIN: GNTCP18DA0014

Award Date: 02/15/2018

Project Start Date: 1/5/2018

Project End Date: 2/3/2023

Award Amount: \$1,500,000

Project Title: [Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program \(GCCRP\) \(Planning & Implementation\) - Alabama](#)

Council Member(s): U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service

FAIN: GNTCP18DA0016

Award Date: 01/05/2018

Project Start Date: 2/15/2018

Project End Date: 9/30/2026

Award Amount: \$1,500,000

Project Title: [Tampa Bay National Estuary Program \(Implementation\)](#)

Council Member(s): Environmental Protection Agency

FAIN: IAACP18EP0017

Award Date: 02/22/2018

Project Start Date: 2/22/2018

Project End Date: 1/31/2023

Award Amount: \$1,544,960

Project Title: [Lowermost Mississippi River Management Program \(Planning\)](#)

Council Member(s): State of Louisiana, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority

FAIN: GNTCP18LA0035

Award Date: 04/18/2018

Project Start Date: 3/6/2018

Project End Date: 9/30/2021

Award Amount: \$9,300,000

Project Title: [Palm River Restoration Project Phase II, East McKay Bay \(Implementation\)](#)

Council Member(s): State of Florida, Department of Environmental Protection

FAIN: GNTCP18FL0047

Award Date: 04/02/2018

Project Start Date: 4/2/2018

Project End Date: 10/31/2021

Award Amount: \$856,430

Project Title: [Plug Abandoned Oil and Gas Wells \(Implementation\)](#)

Council Member(s): Department of Interior, National Park Service

FAIN: IAACP18DI0003

Award Date: 04/25/2018

Project Start Date: 04/25/2018

Project End Date: 04/01/2019

Award Amount: \$1,317,567

Project Title: [Gulf of Mexico Estuary Program \(GMEP\) \(Planning\)](#)

Council Member(s): Environmental Protection Agency

FAIN: IAACP18EP0027

Award Date: 06/25/2018

Project Start Date: 6/25/2018

Project End Date: 4/30/2023

Award Amount: \$2,200,000

Project Title: [Alabama Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Restoration and Monitoring Program \(Implementation\)](#)

Council Member(s): State of Alabama

FAIN: GNTCP18AL0068

Award Date: 09/21/2018

Project Start Date: 7/30/2018

Project End Date: 9/30/2023

Award Amount: \$875,000

Project Title: [Texas Beneficial Use/Marsh Restoration](#)

Council Member(s): State of Texas

FAIN: GNTCP18TX0012

Award Date: 07/27/2018

Project Start Date: 7/31/2018

Project End Date: 5/31/2020

Award Amount: \$968,000

Project Title: [Robinson Preserve Wetlands Restoration \(Implementation\)](#)

Council Member(s): Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency

FAIN: IAACP18DC0033

Award Date: 08/17/2018

Project Start Date: 8/17/2018

Project End Date: 9/30/2023

Award Amount: \$1,790,546

Project Title: [Marsh Restoration in Fish River, Weeks Bay, Oyster Bay & Meadows Tract \(Planning\) - Fish River and Weeks Bay Marsh](#)

Council Member(s): Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency

FAIN: IAACP18DC0034

Award Date: 08/17/2018

Project Start Date: 8/17/2018

Project End Date: 7/31/2020

Award Amount: \$333,651

Project Title: Marsh Restoration in Fish River, Weeks Bay, Oyster Bay & Meadows Tract (Planning) - Meadows Tract

Council Member(s): Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency

FAIN: IAACP18DC0051

Award Date: 08/17/2018

Project Start Date: 8/17/2018

Project End Date: 7/31/2020

Award Amount: \$309,651

Project Title: NOAA Marsh Restoration in Fish River, Weeks Bay, Oyster Bay & Meadows Tract (Planning) - Oyster Bay

Council Member(s): Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency

FAIN: IAACP18DC0052

Award Date: 08/17/2018

Project Start Date: 8/17/2018

Project End Date: 7/31/2020

Award Amount: \$264,651

Project Title: Coastal Alabama Comprehensive Watershed Restoration Planning Project (Planning)

Council Member(s): State of Alabama

FAIN: GNTCP18AL0066

Award Date: 09/10/2018

Project Start Date: 9/14/2018

Project End Date: 9/13/2022

Award Amount: \$4,342,500

5.3. Performance Goal 3: Spill Impact Component Performance Excellence

Spill Impact Component funds will be invested in projects, programs, and activities developed by the States and identified in approved State Expenditure Plans (SEPs). The RESTORE Act allocates 30 percent of the Trust Fund to the Gulf Coast States under a formula established by the Council through a regulation, and spent according to individual SEPs. Each State will develop one or more SEPs describing how it will disburse the amounts allocated to it under the Spill Impact Component. These projects and

programs will be implemented through grants to the States in a manner that is consistent with the requirements of the RESTORE Act as well as the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan.

Performance Indicator 1:

Timely review (e.g., 60-day review for SEPs) of State Expenditure Plans while ensuring public comment was duly considered and other Council Member input is addressed.

The following are elements of this performance Indicator:

- a) *Programmatic Staff Review of Grant and Interagency Agreements. The programmatic component of the Council staff will review all grant and Interagency Agreement applications for funding under the SEP processes, meeting timelines established by Council Standard Operating Procedures. This will include review of submissions for best available science and environmental compliance with NEPA and other environmental federal regulations.*
- b) *Compliance Staff Review of Grant and Interagency Agreements. The grants and compliance component of the Council staff will review all grant and Interagency Agreement applications for funding under each state's SEP, meeting timelines established by the RESTORE Act, Council Guidelines and the Notice of Funds Availability. The review will ensure compliance with all administrative and regulatory requirements under the RESTORE Act, 2 C.F.R. Part 200 Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, and other federal regulatory requirements.*

Foundational to funding of projects and programs selected under the Spill Impact Component of the RESTORE Act, staff of the RESTORE Council worked with the state members who submitted State Expenditure Plan and associated grant applications during fiscal year 2018 to ensure compliance with programmatic (Performance Indicator 1a) and federal compliance reviews (Performance Indicator 1b). As a result of the completion of these programmatic and compliance reviews during 2018, the Council approved SEPs for Louisiana and Mississippi; the Florida SEP; and planning SEPs for Texas, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. (Planning SEPs are used to fund the development of SEPs.) The Council has also approved a Stand-Up SEP for Florida, which funds administrative activities for implementation of the Florida SEP. These SEP approvals total \$822,799,088, which is approximately 51 percent of the total funding available to the Gulf States under the Spill Impact Component.

Once a SEP is approved, funding for activities in the SEP is disbursed to the respective State via Council grants when the requisite funds become available in the Trust Fund and upon application by the State. As part of the grant process, all activities for which funding is sought are carefully reviewed to ensure consistency with the approved SEP and compliance with the RESTORE Act and all other applicable requirements. Funding for implementation activities is disbursed to the State after verification of compliance with all applicable federal environmental and other laws. Funding for planning activities in the SEP will be disbursed after verification of a direct relationship to the Spill Impact Component criteria.

In 2018, the Council awarded \$35.6 million in grant funding for implementation of approved SEPs. These 2018 grant awards are detailed below:

Project Title: Mississippi Gulf Coast Water Quality Improvement Program

Council Member(s): State of Mississippi

FAIN: GNTSP18MS0058

Award Date: 09/21/2018

Project Start Date: 3/15/2018

Project End Date: 7/31/2023

Award Amount: \$14,326,789

Project Title: Houma Navigation Canal Lock Complex (Planning)

Council Member(s): State of Louisiana

FAIN: GNTSP18LA0049

Award Date: 04/13/2018

Project Start Date: 3/19/2018

Project End Date: 5/29/2020

Award Amount: \$18,520,214

Project Title: Compatibility, Coordination and Restoration Planning

Council Member(s): State of Mississippi

FAIN: GNTSP18MS0048

Award Date: 07/04/2018

Project Start Date: 4/13/2017

Project End Date: 4/30/2022

Award Amount: \$1,299,806

Project Title: Laboratory to Support Mississippi Gulf Coast Water Quality Improvement Program

Council Member(s): State of Mississippi

FAIN: GNTSP18MS0053

Award Date: 09/07/2018

Project Start Date: 9/7/2018

Project End Date: 7/31/2020

Award Amount: \$1,451,147

5.4. Performance Goal 4: Operational Excellence

Maintain an administrative infrastructure that supports team work, collaboration, synergy between functional areas and overall operational excellence to provide excellent services, programs and outcomes to the Gulf Coast region.

Performance Indicator 1:

Effective Oversight of Grant and Interagency Agreement Post-Award Cash Disbursement Processes. Grant and IAA drawdowns will be reviewed for compliance with award terms and conditions, and assessed for consistency with the progress achieved and milestones met.

All grants to state Council members and Interagency Agreements from federal Council members underwent thorough post-award cash disbursement processes for the awards completed during this reporting period (see the following sections of this report: **Council-Selected Restoration Performance Excellence** and **Spill Impact Component Performance Excellence**: Effective and efficient implementation and administration of the Spill Impact Program to achieve the goals of the Act). All grants and IAAs were reviewed for compliance with all award terms and conditions.

The Council has awarded over \$219 million through 57 grants and interagency agreements under the Council-Selected Restoration and Spill Impact Components of the RESTORE Act. In May 2016, the Council signed its first Council-Selected Restoration Component federal interagency agreement award to the Department of Interior for the first stage of an \$8 million Youth Conservation Corps Gulf-wide habitat restoration project, and in September 2016, the Council made its first grant award to Louisiana for a \$7.26 million West Grand Terre Beach restoration project. The Council will continue to award and administer grants and interagency agreements in both components to achieve the goals and objectives of the Council-Selected Restoration and Spill Impact Components of the Act. Council staff also conduct grants management activities, including technical and financial oversight, for all grants and interagency agreements. During FY 2018 conducted informal meetings with four of the five states to inform them of the Council's ERM roles/responsibilities and how that also impacts/involves them. Staff also conducted Organizational Self-Assessment (OSA), Organizational Internal Controls Review (OICR), and Project Financial reviews in Florida and Louisiana to help ensure those states are in compliance with Federal Regulations and RESTORE Grant requirements. Requisite financial and program reports were reviewed by Council grants and program staff for completeness, accuracy and tracking with scheduled performance metrics.

Performance Indicator 2:

Oversight of Objective and Quantifiable Metrics in Each Grant and IAA. These metrics will gauge the success of the project or program and a description of the methodology for quantifying results for each metric and monitoring the achievement of the metrics.

The application will be reviewed to confirm the justification of why the metrics were selected and to assess the proposed scientific monitoring for adequacy, and relevancy to the proposed project or program.

The Council has currently identified 56 performance-level metrics for grants to states and IAAs with the federal members funded through the Council-Funded Component of the RESTORE Act. These metrics ([RESTORE Council Project Metrics](#)) will be used to monitor and evaluate the efficacy of projects and programs in meeting mission goals and objectives of the Council and track annual performance.

All projects funded by the Council are required to monitor the performance of the award toward ecosystem restoration. The Council has currently identified 56 performance-level metrics (https://restorethegulf.gov/sites/default/files/GO-Res_metrics_initial_20180510.pdf) for grants to states and Interagency Agreements (IAA) with the federal members funded through the Council-Selected Restoration Component (aka “Bucket 2”), and for grants funded under the Spill Impact Component (aka “Bucket 3”) of the RESTORE Act. These metrics are used to monitor and evaluate the efficacy of projects and programs in meeting mission goals and objectives of the Council and track annual performance. The FLP 1 projects funded during 2016 and 2017 (listed above) are already achieving results as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Performance-level metrics results from projects funded under the Initial FPL.

Metric Category	Metric Measure	Value
Outreach/Education/Technical Assistance	Number of individuals reached by outreach, training, or technical assistance activities	263
	Number of users engaged online	345
	Number of subgrants/agreements to disseminate education and outreach materials	5
Building institutional capacity	Number of participants that successfully completed training	258
Economic benefits	Number of jobs created - temporary jobs	75
	Number of local contracts	1
	Percentage of program funding to existing local organization(s)	17.5%
Land Acquisition	Acres Acquired in fee	7242.9 acres
	Miles Acquired	8 miles
	Acres under improved management	5164 acres

Improved management practices	Miles under improved management	8 miles
Land restoration	Acres restored	1481.48 acres
Marine habitat restoration	Acres restored - Oysters habitat	317 acres
Removal of Invasive species	Acres restored	57.1 acres
Wetland restoration	Acres restored	398.1 acres
Research	Number of studies used to inform management	6

Performance Indicator 3:

Ensure all Applicant/Recipient Guidance Materials are updated. The Council will publish comprehensive guidance to inform potential applicants of the statutory and administrative requirements for proposals, SEPs, grant applications and IAA applications.

The Council published, and continuously updates, a library of documents (found at [RESTORE Council Grant Resources](#)) to assist grant and IAA applicants from the Council membership. This information is divided into the following categories:

- Guidance Materials
 - [Recipient Proposal and Award Guide for Grant Recipients and Federal Interagency Agreement Servicing Agencies](#) [PDF 162pp 1.1Mb]
 - [RAAMS Users' Guide](#) [PDF 41pp. 1.1Mb]
 - [Uniform Guidance \(2 C.F.R. Part 200\)](#) (link is external)
 - [Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions](#) [PDF 55pp 502Kb]
 - [Interagency Agreement Standard Terms and Conditions](#) [PDF 18pp 199Kb]
- Application Documents
 - [RAAMS Application Required Documents List](#) [PDF 3pp. 119Kb]
 - [RAAMS Authorization Letter Template](#) [DOCX 5pp. 136Kb]
 - [RAAMS Data Elements Spreadsheet](#) [XLSX 15Kb]
 - Forms
 - [RESTORE Council Applicant Certifications and Assurances](#) [PDF 8pp. 456Kb]
 - [Disclosure of Lobbying Activities Form \(SF-LLL\)](#) [PDF 2pp. 29Kb]
 - Organizational Self-Assessment
 - [Instructions for the Organizational Self-Assessment](#) [PDF 4pp 258Kb]
 - [Organizational Self-Assessment Worksheet](#) [MSWord 12pp 82Kb]
 - [Internal Control Compliance Document List \(Addendum to organizational self-assessment\)](#) [PDF 2pp 78Kb]

- Project Information Templates
 - [Abstract and Executive Summary Templates](#) [MSWord 1pp 18Kb]
 - [Project Narrative Template](#) [MSWord 4pp 22Kb]
 - Metrics
 - [Initial Project/Program Metrics](#) [PDF 10pp 109Kb]
 - [Metrics Template](#)
 - [Milestones Template](#) [MSWord 1pp 20Kb]
 - Observational Data Plans and Data Management Plans
 - [Observational Data Plan Guidance](#) [PDF 27pp 37Kb]
 - [Observational Data Plan Checklist](#)
 - [Preliminary Observational Data Management Plan Guidance](#) [PDF 12pp 180Kb]
 - Observational Data Management Plan Checklists
 - [Foundational Questions](#)
 - [Data Specific Questions](#)
 - [Observational Data Plan and Data Management Plan Frequently Asked Questions](#) [PDF 3pp 89Kb]
 - [Environmental Compliance Checklist](#) [DOCX 2pp. 7Kb]
 - GIS File Submission
 - [GIS Submission Instructions](#)[PDF 1pp. 86Kb]
 - [GIS Submission Template](#) [ZIP 51Kb]
- Budget Templates
 - [Budget Narrative Template](#) [MSWord 20pp 69Kb]
 - [Subrecipient Budget Template](#) [XLSX 16Kb]
 - [Instructions for Calculating Allowable Indirect Costs under the three percent \(3%\) cap for administrative costs](#) [PDF 4pp 146Kb]
 - [3% Administrative Cost Spreadsheet](#) [MSExcel 30Kb]
 - [Cash Forecasting Example](#) [MSExcel]
- Award Documentation
 - Interagency Agreements
 - [General Terms and Conditions 7600A](#) [PDF 4pp 180Kb]
 - [Order Requirements and Funding 7600B](#) [PDF 5pp 667Kb]
 - Grants Agreements
 - [Financial Assistance Award 7700](#) [PDF 2pp 111Kb]

Performance Indicator 4:

Ensure all RAAMS System Guidance and Technical Resources are current.

The Council continuously updates the RAAMS User Guide and other supporting technical resources. The Council has also developed internal standard operating procedures to be used in conjunction with the RAAMS System Guidance and associated documentation, and with the Grants Manual.

5.5. Enhancing Efficiency of the Grant System

In December 2015, the Council deployed its automated grants management system, the Restoration Assistance and Agreements Management System (RAAMS), and began implementing its grants and IAA program concurrent with the approval of the Initial FPL. The Council is committed to ensuring that the process used for awarding and disbursing funds is as efficient as possible, while also providing the oversight needed for sound fiscal management. As it did with the Initial FPL, after a year of experience the Council initiated a thorough review of its application, disbursement and post-award oversight processes to identify and implement system changes that will lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness.

The RAAMS system is designed to provide information to meet the Council's federal reporting and data management requirements, including requirements mandated by the following:

- GPRM Modernization Act (P.L. 111-352)
- OMB guidance (2 C.F.R. §200.328)
- RESTORE Act (33 U.S.C. §1321(t)(2)(C)(vii)(VII)(dd))
- Digital Accountability and Transparency Act (S.994; i.e., Data Act of 2014)
- OMB Memorandum (9 May 2013): Open Data Policy -Managing Information as an Asset
- White House (22 February 2013) Office of Science and Technology Policy Memorandum.

The system also tracks the following application/award requirements:

- Organizational Assessment
 - One-time requirement; updated annually
 - §200.205 Risk Posed by Applicant; §200.302 Financial Management; §200.303 Internal Controls
- Milestones (see Performance Metrics for Council-Funded Programs and Projects section below)/Functional Budget
 - §200.301 Performance Measurement
- Outcome Metrics
 - §200.301 Performance Measurement; §200.210 Information Contained in a Federal Award
- Cash Forecast
 - Informs Trust Fund investment strategy; OMB outlay forecast

The Council published a library of documents ([RESTORE Council Grant Resources](#)) to assist grant and IAA applicants from the Council membership (see section: Operational Excellence, Performance Indicator 3).

In early FY2018, the Council was notified by Altum that they were ending the Easygrants (RAAMS) support after October 2021. The Council staff immediately stood up a Grants System Acquisition Task Force to develop requirements, which in addition to the evaluation mentioned above, was used to provide a recommendation to the Council on options for a path forward to meet our federal reporting and data management requirements (also listed above). The purpose of the Task Force was to evaluate and identify the best options for replacement of the current RAAMS electronic grants system through

the use of a multidisciplinary team of current recipients, grants specialists, and RAAMS administrators. This intensive process was followed to find an alternative system to recommend to the Council. The Council accepted the Task Force's recommendation and Council staff are moving forward with implementation.

5.6. Performance Goal 5: Management Excellence:

Council staff will provide exceptional service to the Council members and their accompanying state and federal agencies, as well to the many stakeholders associated with restoration of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem by meeting programmatic, administrative and customer service objectives.

Performance Indicator 1:

Requisite Reports Submitted in Timely Manner.

During fiscal year 2018, the Council submitted the following reports in a timely manner:

- Annual Performance Plan;
- Council's Annual Financial Report (AFR)
- Annual Performance Report (APR)
- Annual Report to Congress

Performance Indicator 2:

OIG Audit Findings and Recommendations Addressed in a Timely Manner

All Council operations required by the RESTORE Act are monitored and audited by the Department of Treasury OIG and audit recommendations promptly implemented.

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council mission is to effectively manage and execute the Council's RESTORE Act responsibilities with a primary focus of overseeing Trust Fund expenditures in implementation of the Comprehensive Plan and State Expenditure Plans. To provide proper oversight, the U.S. Treasury and other Federal entities audit the Council's programs, financial management and administrative functions to ensure compliance with federal regulatory requirements. The following graphic (Figure 3) provides a summary of audits that were completed (N=17, all with no action), audits in progress (N=2), and audits planned for fiscal year 2019 (N=7).

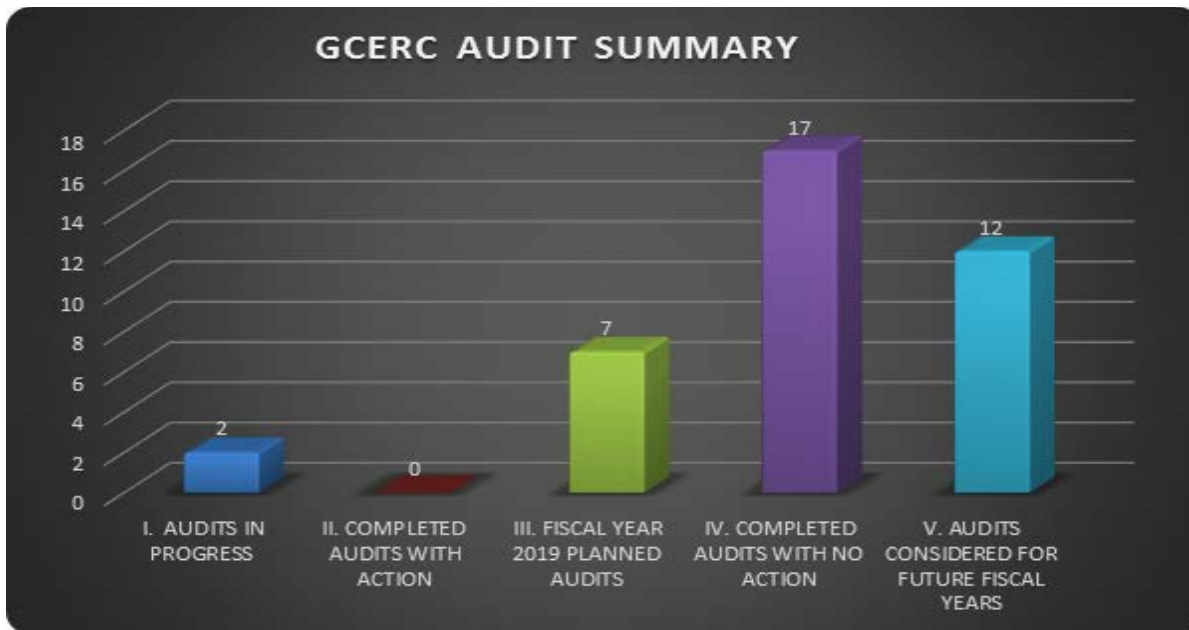


Figure 3. Summary of audits that were completed, audits in progress and future audits planned.

The audits have revealed the following information:

- The Council has undergone 25 Audits since 2014 including two in progress. The majority of the audits are from Treasury OIG;
- The Council is in compliance with all Federal Statutory and Regulatory requirements;
- Results from our Annual Audit of Financial Statements show that the Council has adequate financial internal controls and processes in place with Financial Statements accurately reflecting the Council’s Financial Position, in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America;
- A certified independent public accountant (IPA), working under OIG supervision, issued an unmodified opinion on the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council fiscal years 2018 and 2017 financial statements. The audit did not identify any matters involving internal control and its operation to be considered material weaknesses in internal control over financial reporting. No instances of reportable noncompliance with laws, regulations, contracts, and grant agreements tested were identified. All Financial Statement audits since the Council inception have received unmodified (clean) opinions.

Performance Indicator 3:

Organizational Risk Assessed and Risk Mitigation Factors Employed.

- Fully implement the organizational risk assessment recommendations by the end of calendar year 2017 by meeting all OMB Circular A-123 requirements and developing and documenting tactical level risk mitigation activities.*
- Continually review and update administrative and financial policies and procedures.*

- c) *Continue to develop and integrate Enterprise Risk Management practices into the Agencies day to day decision-making and management practices. This will enhance the Agencies ability to minimize risk resulting in more effective and efficient fiscal and administrative operations. The goal is to better align the Agencies resources to ensure compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and controls.*

During fiscal year 2016 the Council completed an enterprise risk management (ERM) analysis and risk profile, and in fiscal year 2018 the Council continued implementation of the ERM program to ensure that the Council mitigates high risk areas identified through that analysis. Internal controls have been and continue to be a major consideration in the development and continued refinement of the Council's policies and procedures and automated systems. Administrative, finance, accounting, grants and interagency agreement policies and procedures have been developed and documented and continue to be refined. Post-award grants management and oversight procedures have been developed to mitigate the risk of improper payments and address risks identified in the enterprise-wide risk assessment, while also developing information that will enhance the Council's ability to forecast cash requirements and manage its awards in order to ensure positive outcomes.

Completed activities under Management Excellence for 2018 relate to the results of the Risk Assessment and center on risk mitigation strategies that collectively represent actions considered necessary to reduce the impact and likelihood of risks negatively affecting Council reputation and operations. These recommendations provide specifics on responding to strategic, operational, compliance, and financial and reporting risks. Key recommendations to reduce reputational and operational risk to Council from mismanagement or misuse of funds include:

- Expanding Audit Committee function to include Enterprise Risk Management;
- Creating an Enterprise Risk Management staff function;
- Aligning mission objectives with Council partners to optimize outcomes;
- Developing a contingency plan to meet surge requirements; and
- Acquiring sufficient information technology resources to support operations.

To address these key recommendations, the Council moved forward with the following actions in 2018:

- Hired a GS 13 enterprise risk management to staff the ERM program. Accomplishments include:
 - Updated the Risk Profile and Critical Risk Mitigation Plan;
 - Completed the 17 Principles of Internal Control Checklist to demonstrate how the Council meets the requirements outlined in the Green Book and OMB Circular A-123;
 - Updated the Council Risk Profile and Critical Risk Mitigation Plan;
 - Conducted testing of Internal Controls to help ensure the Council is in compliance with OMB Circular A-123, Green Book Principles, and the Council policies/procedures;
 - Conducted testing of RAAMS/Financial Reporting and RAAMS/Amendments on grants;
 - Continually review and update Council policies and procedures through recommendations to staff and/or management; and
 - Collaborated with Treasury RESTORE Act Compliance (TRAC) team to leverage our separate, but similar, ERM efforts.
- Acquired the technology resources to
 - Established a VPN in order to access secure Government websites key to operations;

- Met all FISMA requirements and achieve a level of moderate risk;
- Obtained a "managing risk rating" for FISMA, and our FISMA audit showed we have an "effective" Information Assurance program;
- Implemented an enhanced Intrusion Detection System on agency network;
- Implemented software management process; and
- Increased Cyber-security awareness on assets through implementation of a security software solution

The Council also has a rigorous budget process. A zero-based budget for operations funding is developed each year, and is rigorously reviewed by the Council Steering Committee. The Council votes for approval of the budget every August, after which an apportionment is submitted to OMB for its review and approval. The Department of the Treasury's Administrative Resources Center (ARC) provides finance and budget services to the Council. Financial Statements, the Status of Funds, and other financial reports are produced by ARC each month, reviewed and approved by the CFO, and reported to Treasury and OMB. The annual financial statements are included in the Annual Financial Report and published on the Council website.

Performance Indicator 4:

360 Review of the Council's grant and automated system RAAMS

- a) Recommendations from the 360 Review result in more efficient processes and procedures thus reducing the time to apply for and award grants and IAAs.*

In September 2017, the commercial owner of Easygrants (the COTS software underlying RAAMS) announced they will no longer support the program beyond a reasonable transition period to select and move to a new system. In response, the Council established a Task Force to develop system requirements and explore replacement options. The Task Force considered both federal shared service and commercial off-the-shelf grants management systems and recommended the Council's needs would best be met by a federal shared service provider. Upon the Task Force's recommendation, the Council approved entering into an Interagency Agreement with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to conduct an analysis of GrantSolutions, a federal shared service provider, to determine key data and components of Council programs and processes that fit within Grant Solutions and gaps needing solutions. HHS Grant Solutions completed the Fit/Gap Analysis Summary and Transition Plan in August 2018.

The Council made a final "unified solution" systems selection and funding decision at the November 28-29 2019 Steering Committee meeting, with an anticipated implementation and migration to the new systems no later than September 30, 2019. The unified solution includes the selection of GrantSolutions as the grant management system and the development of the Program Information Platform for Ecosystem Restoration (PIPER). The Council is taking advantage of this opportunity to reengineer processes and streamline award processing and management while maintaining the existing rigorous financial and compliance controls and does not expect any impact to its operations during the transition period or as a result of a migration of its data.