

**Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
Public Meeting for Draft Initial Funded Priorities List**

Corpus Christi, TX – Aug. 20, 2015

Principals:

Commissioner Toby Baker – Texas Governor’s Representative
Justin Ehrenwerth - RESTORE Council
Teresa Christopher – Department of Commerce
Libby Washburn – Department of the Interior
John Bowie – Environmental Protection Agency
Tomas Dominguez – U.S. Department of Agriculture
Robbie Kroger – State of Mississippi

Additional Support:

Kendra Parson, RESTORE Council
Alyssa Dausman, RESTORE Council
Tara Drissell, TX DEQ
Stephen Tatum, TX DEQ
Richard Seiler, TX DEQ
Ben Milakofsky, DOI
Darrell Echols, DOI NPS

The meeting started at 6:45 p.m. and lasted approximately an hour and a half. There were approximately 60 people in attendance, not including Council representatives, staff and support.

Introductory remarks:

Commissioner Baker – It has taken many years to get where we are tonight. We had to build a new federal agency and grants process. This is the first meeting to take public comment on the draft Initial Funded Priorities List (draft FPL). I would like to ask everyone on stage to introduce themselves and then have the Council’s Executive Director, Justin Ehrenwerth provide an overview of the draft FPL.

Teresa Christopher, Department of Commerce: Good evening, I’ve met many of you. My boss Secretary Pritzker is the chair of the Council, and we lead the steering committee. This draft FPL is our initial stab at it and look forward to hearing your feedback.

Libby Washburn, Department of The Interior: I’m happy to be here and to be in TX for our first public meeting.

John Bowie, Environmental Protection Agency: I’m glad to be here

Tomas Dominguez, U.S. Department of Agriculture: I am the USDA designee today. I am based here and know many of you in the room; I look forward to hearing from you this evening.

The public comment began at 7:15 p.m. and lasted about an hour and a half.

Public comments (11 speakers):

- Mr. Gorza, Cameron County Commissioner: Thankful for the Council choosing to meet in Corpus Christi. Thankful for Bahia Grande project being included in the draft FPL. Urbanization is becoming another big stressor for the County. In the 1930's, the Brownsville Channel was constructed which cut off tidal flow to the Bahia Grande. The Bahia Grande quickly transitioned from a wetland to a desert, causing significant blowing sand problems for nearby Port Isabel resulting in school kids not being able to play outside and transformers and air conditioning equipment failing at the school and in town. Proud that US Fish and Wildlife and TX Parks and Wildlife have partnered to move this project forward. Appreciate being part of the decision-making. Look forward to the Council's leadership.
- Mr. Vega, Mayor for City of Port Isabel and Parks Director for Cameron County: Also thankful for the Bahia Grande project being included in the draft FPL. A lot of partners have made some significant strides on the Bahia Grande area, but some major work still remains. This project will help tremendously.
- Mr. Fikes, National Wildlife Federation: National Wildlife Foundation (NWF) is still reviewing and will submit formal comments, but believes the draft FPL includes many strong projects. NWF appreciated the science reviews and the Council addressing those science comments in the draft FPL. NWF appreciated the graphic mapping display and the watershed focus approach developed and utilized for the draft FPL. He did note that there are other estuaries/bays across the Gulf region that should be included in this FPL or future ones. Finally, he encouraged the Council to consider funding projects that will address and hopefully answer freshwater inflow issues that the estuaries and bays are experiencing (e.g. – Matagorda Bay / Galveston Bay).
- Ms. Smith, International Crane Foundation: Ms. Smith is a biologist and has lived and worked in the coastal bend region all her career, predominantly focusing on the whooping crane. Happy to see conservation projects on the draft FPL in the coastal bend region. Strategic conservation planning and implementation in the San Antonio Bay and Copano Bay area is crucial. Likewise, freshwater inflows are very important. Ms. Smith has worked very closely with Ray Allen and the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program over the years and values the collaborative partnership CBBEP provides to the region.
- Ms. Macha, Gulf Restoration Network: Gulf Restoration Network (GRN) is still reviewing and will likely submit comments on the draft FPL. Jordan really liked the Council's focused effort to leverage with other funding sources. It's important to include coordinated monitoring and funding for long-term monitoring. She said accountability is very important and the Council and its members need to be diligent. She also encouraged the Council to engage the

public and conduct a 360 review of the project solicitation, evaluation, selection process to strengthen and enhance it before the next FPL is developed.

- Ms. Bailey Lewis, City of Corpus Christi: Noted City of Corpus Christi is very appreciative the Council included projects on the draft FPL focused in the region. No particulars.
- Mr. Hosey, The Corps Network: John was glad to see Council included volunteer initiatives on the draft FPL. Deepwater Horizon and hurricanes affect the local economy and job forces. Volunteer and jobs programs can go a long way toward addressing those impacts.
- Mr. Smith, American Youth Works (AYW) – Texas Conservation Corps (TXCC): AYW has been around for about 30 years; 20 years working TXCC. Volunteer and jobs programs are beneficial - same general message as John Hosey.
- Ms. Keller, Texas Conservation Corps at American Youth Works: Volunteer and jobs programs are beneficial - same general message as John Hosey and Park Smith.
- Mr. Richardson, Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce and Orange County: Tim thanked the Council for their work in developing the draft FPL. Tim made three points to the Council on behalf of his clients (Commissioners and Judges of the Southeast Texas counties) – 1) They really liked the Beach Haven (“sanitary sewer and septic tank removal”) project in Pensacola, FL and wish more would be done like that across the Gulf; 2) The Council always needs a strong Federal Chair to maintain focus on natural resources and as a check on the states; and 3) They want to see 55 projects, not 50, point being they want Homeland Security (CG) to submit projects also, because those counties across the Gulf with a lot of defense-related and community security operations deserve projects too.
- Mr. Odom, City of Port Lavaca Economic Development: Really appreciated the focus on funding conservation projects in the draft FPL.

Summary:

The meeting attendees expressed the following comments throughout the meeting:

- The comments were all positive with a few suggestions encouraging the Council to consider going forward. Such as considering other watersheds, how future draft FPL will be developed, being included in a 360 review.
- Most are happy with the draft FPL and pleased with the projects proposed in Texas.
- Appreciate the science review, and response to reviews, and watershed approach.

- Would like to see a plan for how to revise the Initial Comprehensive Plan moving forward.
- See importance of analyzing freshwater inflows in TX, in addition to water quality.