

**RESTORE Council Draft 2026 Funded Priorities List**  
**Responses to Comments**  
**June 2026**

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## Background

From November 20, 2025 to January 2, 2026, the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) sought public comment on proposed funding decisions for 19 projects and programs, collectively referred to as “activities,” to address ecosystem needs across the Gulf. The proposed funding for these activities is administered by the Council pursuant to the *Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act of 2012* (RESTORE Act) (33 USC §1321(t) and *note*). The proposed funding is from the RESTORE Act allocation administered by the Council under the Council-Selected Restoration Component, which funds ecosystem restoration activities across the Gulf. The Council approves projects and programs for Council-Selected Restoration Component funding in “Funded Priorities Lists” (FPLs).

During the public comment period, the Council provided two Opening Day Overview webinars on November 20, 2025. In order to give the public additional opportunities to learn about the proposed activities in specific geographic areas, the Council co-hosted the following public meetings with each of the Gulf Coast states during the public comment period:

- December 1 & 2, 2025 - Texas (in person)
- December 10, 2025 - Mississippi (virtual)
- December 11, 2025 - Louisiana (virtual)
- December 11, 2025 - Florida (virtual)
- December 17, 2025 - Alabama (in person)

The Council solicited verbal public comments during these meetings, and also accepted written comments via email and through the Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website. The Council has reviewed all comments received before the deadline.

The Council received comments from a total of 15,554 private citizens, businesses, agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other Gulf stakeholders. These include comments received during public meetings and one joint letter from the National Audubon Society with 15,459 signatures. The number of stakeholders engaged during the public comment period demonstrates continued awareness of Gulf restoration and interest in the actions and decisions being made by the Council, over fifteen years after the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. The ongoing involvement of stakeholders who live, work, and play in the Gulf region is critical to ensuring that oil spill penalty funds are used effectively. The Council appreciates those who participated in the public review and comment process, as well as those who have supported Gulf restoration activities for many years.

In order to respond to the observations and recommendations provided by Gulf stakeholders, the Council grouped comments and responses by theme. Within those themed groupings, individual comments were combined when the topic or recommendation was related. In other cases, the Council responded to individual comments as warranted by the nature of the comment.

Following review and consideration of the public comments received, the Council has decided to proceed to vote to approve the 2026 FPL. The final version of the 2026 FPL containing all comments and responses to comments is posted on the Council's website. The public was notified of both the Council vote and the availability of the final version of the 2026 FPL via emailed updates. If you are interested in receiving email updates from the Council, please visit the RESTORE website ([www.restorethegulf.gov](http://www.restorethegulf.gov)). Once there, you may subscribe to receive RESTORE updates that are sent out periodically on new and upcoming activities of the Council.

## Comments Received on the Draft 2026 FPL

### General Comments on 2026 FPL

**Comment:** The Council received many comments expressing general support for [2026 FPL](#). Many commenters also expressed support for the selection of activities that may provide large-scale ecosystem benefits to habitat, birds, wildlife, coastal resilience, and water quality.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the positive reception to 2026 FPL and encourages stakeholders to remain actively engaged in Council matters, including the implementation of 2026 FPL.

**Comment:** One commenter asked how the Restore Council assesses cumulative impacts of Council investments within a given ecological region or watershed and synergistic impact with other Deepwater Horizon restoration investments.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the commenter's interest in understanding how cumulative and synergistic impacts are assessed. The Council works collaboratively with Gulf States, federal agencies, and other Deepwater Horizon restoration partners to coordinate data collection, share monitoring and performance information, and align restoration planning efforts. These collaborations support the development of datasets and metrics that could be used for future analyses at watershed and regional scales, as well as to better communicate the collective outcomes of restoration investments across the Gulf. As restoration efforts advance, the Council will continue to strengthen coordination and data integration to support impact evaluation and effective communication of restoration progress and benefits.

**Comment:** A total of 13 commenters submitted a form letter drawing on their experience with the Exxon Valdez oil spill. The commenters recommend that the Council prioritize projects based on the risk of irreversible habitat loss and rank funding choices accordingly. The commenters also urged the Council to evaluate and select projects without regard to political or state boundaries, emphasizing that ecosystems transcend man-made borders and that funding should support the most critical restoration opportunities for the Gulf regardless of location. Another commenter applauded the successes of the Council and urged the Council's Chair and federal members to follow the RESTORE Act's restoration priorities to allocate funds, and to

prioritize FPL projects by mirroring the investment strategy of the Exxon Valdez Trustee Council.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the commenters' commitment to coastal ecosystems and their support for projects that address coastal habitats. The Council shares the recognition of the ecological, cultural, and economic importance of these natural resources and considers factors such as ecological function, restoration need, and long-term benefits when evaluating projects.

The Council's restoration approach is a collaborative, multi-jurisdictional framework established under the RESTORE Act. Council members from the Gulf States and federal agencies work together to evaluate projects for consistency with the RESTORE Act, its Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives, and ecosystem-based planning framework. This collaborative process allows the Council to consider regional priorities, scientific input, and Gulf-wide restoration goals while advancing coordinated, transparent, and effective restoration investments.

**Comment:** A total of 15,459 members of the National Audubon Society submitted a joint letter supporting the proposed 2026 FPL activities, specifically *Protecting and Restoring Waterbird Rookery Habitat Program* in Texas, *Colonial Waterbird Rookery Island Restoration* in Texas, *Chandeleur Islands Restoration Project* in Louisiana, *West End Dauphin Island, Alabama Renourishment and Resilience*, *Restoration of Grand Batture Island* in the Mississippi Sound (MS and AL), and *Enhance Coastal Resilience Through Beach and Dune Restoration, Escambia County* in Florida. The commenters indicated these activities will support many species of birds like Reddish Egrets and Brown Pelicans that rely on the Gulf Coast and that restoring these habitats will also increase coastal resilience against storms, flooding, and coastal erosion, providing critical buffer areas for our wildlife and coastal communities.

In 811 instances, individual members added their own personalized comments.

**Response:** The Council thanks the commenters for their support for the 2026 FPL activities, as well as the organizing required for such campaigns. The content of the unique comments added by individuals has been addressed in other comment summaries and associated responses, as appropriate.

**Comment:** One commenter stated that no taxpayer monies should be spent on the proposed ecosystem restoration and protection projects in the 2026 FPL. This commenter recommended that the responsible parties should have to pay for such activities, which should be limited to conservation and protection of habitat and wildlife.

**Response:** The Council's funding comes exclusively from a legal settlement with the parties responsible for the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill rather than from taxpayer funds. All Council investments under the Council-Selected Restoration Component, including the 2026 FPL, are dedicated to ecosystem restoration and protection activities such as land acquisition, wetland restoration, and water quality improvement.

**Comment:** One commenter encouraged the Council to put a greater emphasis toward promoting natural resource stewardship and environmental education in all parts of the Council's work. The commenter also encouraged the Council to utilize existing environmental organizations whose mission is to communicate environmental messages and to have these organizations participate and be informed so that they can assist in communicating about Council projects to the community.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the commenter's interest in promoting natural resource stewardship and environmental education in all parts of our work. Gulf coast restoration is at its core a collaborative effort, involving many different stakeholders, including federal agencies, state and local governments, NGO's, private organizations, academia, and individual citizens. As the Council continues to advance restoration efforts, it recognizes the importance of ensuring the public is informed about this meaningful work. The Council encourages environmental and community organizations to subscribe at [RESTORETheGulf.gov](https://RESTORETheGulf.gov) to receive updates and announcements related to RESTORE activities and welcomes the support of local organizations in spreading news of Council efforts.

**Comment:** The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) expressed support for the Council's efforts to leverage multiple sources of funding to implement critical projects and programs. NWF strongly encourages the Council to continue focusing on the RESTORE Act priority criteria and resource-leveraging to advance the most beneficial restoration outcomes for the Gulf. NWF also encouraged the Council to tell the story of restoration progress as previously funded projects are completed or underway, as doing so can provide an important foundation for future investment in these resources.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the support for its efforts to leverage funding in order to maximize the impact of Gulf Coast restoration investments. The Council is committed to this practice and will continue to seek leveraging opportunities across the Gulf Coast. The Council agrees with the significance of aligning Council-Selected Restoration Component investments with the RESTORE Act priority criteria. Finally, the Council fully concurs with the importance of informing the public about the outcomes of past and ongoing Council investments. In 2025, the Council published an overview of key accomplishments to date, [Reflections on Restoration](#). Going forward, the Council is committed to continuing to inform the public about the benefits of its ecosystem restoration investments.

**Comment:** One commenter noted the legal entity involved in the 2016 *Deepwater Horizon* Consent Decree is BP Exploration & Production Inc. not British Petroleum as referenced in the draft 2026 FPL.

**Response:** The Council acknowledges this correction and will make the appropriate edit to the final 2026 FPL.

**Comment:** One commenter encouraged a continued evolution of Council-Selected Restoration Component priorities to include landscape-scale restoration that advances long-term ecological

outcomes while also supporting use, stewardship, and nature-based economic activities expressly contemplated under the RESTORE Act, including workforce development, recreation, and the promotion of tourism tied to restored Gulf Coast ecosystems. This commenter further advised that ecosystem restoration should be integrated with nature-based recreation and tourism, education, interpretation, and stewardship and should support coastal workforce development at a regional or multi-community scales to help ensure that restored landscapes remain actively stewarded, publicly valued, and economically resilient over the full life of the Trust Fund.

**Response:** The Council agrees with both the importance of investing in landscape level restoration through the Council-Selected Restoration component and the compatibility of this work with other objectives such as nature-based tourism. The Council's Comprehensive Plan goals include the restoration, protection and enhancement of coastal habitat, water quality and quantity, living coastal and marine resources, community resilience, and the Gulf economy. Very often, these goals are interrelated, and the Council's activities often advance multiple restoration goals. While a healthy ecosystem provides benefits to coastal economies, the Comprehensive Plan economic goal only applies directly, as a selection criterion, to restoration investments funded under the RESTORE Act Spill Impact Component. The Council has advanced economic goals such as workforce development and tourism promotion directly through activities led by state members under the Spill Impact Component. For example, significant Council investment in workforce development has been made in Mississippi through multiple Spill Impact Component projects. In addition, the Council has funded a number of Council Selected Restoration Component activities that advance these goals as secondary benefits. For example, the State of Texas has made significant regional investment in nature-based tourism through its Spill Impact Component Nature-based Tourism Program and has supported tourism, education, and stewardship through public access components of its FPL investments in land acquisitions. The Council remains committed to continuing to advance the suite of goals in its Comprehensive Plan through investments in both of the RESTORE Act components that it administers.

**Comment:** One commenter recommended implementation-focused technical assistance that supports the long-term stewardship and operational sustainability of conserved and protected lands along with managed public access, education and interpretation, and stewardship.

**Response:** The Council recognizes the importance of funding for long-term stewardship of conserved land with managed public access and outreach, has invested in these activities, and will continue to support these priorities.

**Comment:** One commenter recommended supporting appropriately structured private-sector participation such as with seafood producers through industry associations, cooperatives, or local chapters that promote best practices, identify industry champions, and align economic activity with healthy and resilient Gulf ecosystems.

**Response:** The Council appreciates this suggestion and the importance of the seafood industry to coastal economies and coastal communities' way of life. The Council has partnered in the past with seafood producers, local oystermen, and private sector restoration professionals utilizing RESTORE Spill Impact Component funding. For example, the State of Alabama initiated the Alabama Seafood Marketing Program in which the Alabama Seafood Marketing Commission worked with the seafood industry to develop and market an Alabama seafood brand, worked with chefs to encourage the use of Alabama seafood, and worked to increase tourism by promoting a coastal experience that includes Alabama seafood in partnership with seafood producers. In Florida, RESTORE funding has been approved for the Suwannee Sound / Cedar Key Oyster Restoration project, in which Levy County will restore oyster reef habitat in partnership with the Cedar Key Oysterman's Association. In Mississippi, a number of workforce development projects have been funded by the Council to train students for careers in coastal restoration in partnership with private sector experts who provide hands-on expertise to these programs.

**Comment:** In recognition that RESTORE projects are uniquely positioned to demonstrate best practices at scale, one commenter encouraged the Council to support implementation-focused projects that intentionally share information across regions, states, and the Gulf through structured mechanisms to document and disseminate lessons learned, model plans, and implementation strategies that can accelerate delivery, reduce duplication, and improve outcomes across future projects.

**Response:** The Council thanks the commenter for this suggestion and agrees with the value of information sharing and advancing best practices. The Council's unique structure builds collaboration and information sharing among members into project planning and selection. Currently Council members strive to share progress and lessons learned more broadly through a variety of means, including annual restoration summits, online webinars and updates, and participation in restoration conferences. Going forward, the Council will continue to seek the most effective ways to communicate and disseminate lessons learned through Gulf restoration implementation.

**Comment:** One comment urged the Council to consider the most critical habitat needs under imminent threat of irreversible habitat loss as the primary criterion in the evaluation and selection of projects for funding in order to protect imperiled coastal habitats citing that areas under less immediate threat should receive lower priority or be addressed through alternative funding solutions.

**Response:** Council members consider, as appropriate, factors such as the risk of habitat loss during project and program development. This is done as part of the Council's broader effort to make decisions that are guided by best available science and the four priority criteria outlined in the RESTORE Act and referenced in the Council's Comprehensive Plan.

**Comment:** One commenter stated that political boundaries should not be a hindrance to funding quality restoration work as it is crucial to allocate funding to the top restoration options

for the Gulf and the nation, regardless of geographical location or level of political support. The commenter also stated that areas with lower human populations often serve as the last strongholds for wildlife, but these same locations often lack the political leverage necessary to secure funding.

**Response:** The Council prioritizes 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.” This is one of four priority criteria specifically outlined in the RESTORE Act that the Council must prioritize when selecting restoration activities for funding.

**Comment:** Four commenters affiliated with one organization opposed Council adoption of the January 4, 2021, Corps of Engineers decision document for Nationwide Permit (NWP) 58 in order to comply with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). These commenters requested an updated and comprehensive NEPA review specific to coastal Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana.

**Response:** As appropriate, the Council adopts existing NEPA documents prepared by Council member agencies in order to support the approval of funding for ecosystem restoration and protection projects and to help expedite project implementation. The Council has previously adopted the Corps of Engineers NEPA document NWP 58 in connection with a funding approval for an individual project; the Council is not proposing to adopt that document for the 2026 FPL. It is unclear what NEPA document the commenters are recommending that the Council update. The Council has no single NEPA document that covers coastal Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, nor is the Council proposing such a programmatic evaluation.

**Comment:** Three commenters affiliated with one organization opposed the Draft 2026 FPL noting concerns with limited public participation/input, access, transparency and accountability to the planning and decision-making process. These comments request an immediate moratorium be placed on the 2026 FPL and other FPLs until a comprehensive review of proposed funded projects is conducted, provided to the public and meaningful input incorporated.

**Response:** The Council recognizes the value of transparency and encourages stakeholder feedback in FPL development. The process of compiling a draft FPL consists of individual Council members developing proposals for specific restoration activities which are then submitted to the Council, as a body, for funding consideration. The method by which individual Council members engage the public in proposal development varies from member to member. As the Council considers which proposals to include in a new FPL, it takes public comment. On November 20, 2025 the Council released the draft list of projects and programs proposed for inclusion in the 2026 FPL for public review and comment. During this public review period, the Council held eight public meetings, including five virtual meetings and three in-person meetings. Content was recorded and placed on the Council website to facilitate review by members of the

public unable to participate in person. The Council will consider all input received during the public comment period prior to finalizing the 2026 FPL.

## Comments Regarding Specific Proposed Activities (Organized by Geographic Location)

### Texas

#### Texas General Comments

**Comment:** Multiple comments expressed general support for draft 2026 FPL, and in particular emphasized support for one or more of the four large-scale ecosystem restoration programs proposed in Texas.

**Response:** The Council appreciates these commenters' support of 2026 FPL and the large-scale ecosystem restoration proposed in Texas.

**Comment:** One commenter expressed interest in applying for funding to improve the quality of life for residents in Cameron County.

**Response:** As established in the RESTORE Act, only Council members may submit proposals for inclusion in a Funding Priority List. However, Council members frequently partner with other organizations to implement restoration activities. Projects selected by the State of Texas for implementation under proposed FPL programs may take place in Cameron County to the benefit of county residents.

**Comment:** Multiple commenters support restoration work at Texas Point. These comments encourage the State of Texas to restore Texas Point's Gulf-facing beach, its Sabine River shoreline, and its wetland habitats. Commenters strongly support use of RESTORE Council-Selected Restoration funds to conserve the wetlands at Texas Point and along the Texas Point National Wildlife Refuge shoreline through both the Texas Managing Wetlands Migration Corridors and Coastal Floodways Program and the Texas Oyster Reef Restoration Program recognizing that this would provide vital ecosystem benefits, erosion protection, and protection for vital industries and historically significant artifacts.

**Response:** The Council thanks these commenters for this project location suggestion.

## Protection and Restoring Waterbird Rookery Habitat

**Comment:** One commenter representing The Audubon Society expressed support for Texas's proposed efforts to protect and restore waterbird rookery islands and suggested prioritizing high value and vulnerable islands to create resilient hubs for birds and other wildlife noting that islands in and near Matagorda Bay are especially in need of protection.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the commenter's support for restoring and protecting waterbird rookery habitat. The State of Texas intends to prioritize its rookery projects based on best available science and demonstrated restoration need.

**Comment:** One commenter expressed strong support for this program that invests directly in the most vulnerable and most productive colonial waterbird nesting habitats in Texas. The commenter made multiple recommendations requesting the Council:

- Prioritize islands with documented population declines and high productivity potential.
- Integrate erosion control measures (e.g., breakwaters, sediment replenishment, vegetated shorelines, oyster reefs) to stabilize nesting areas and create complimentary habitat.
- Expand stewardship to enhance bird habitat at existing productive sites.
- Invest in long-term monitoring and adaptive management at bird islands to understand if and how restoration actions are affecting bird populations.
- Support innovative and pilot approach to colonial waterbird habitat creation and management.
- Prioritize sections of the Texas coast, like the Matagorda Bay region, that have seen significant declines in productive rookery islands and less investment in restoration to-date.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the strong support for this program and will consider the commenter's recommendations as the State of Texas develops and implements this vital program.

## Chenier Plain Ecosystem Restoration Program

**Comment:** Multiple comments were received strongly supporting the *Chenier Plain Ecosystem Restoration Program*. Support was offered for the program as a whole and for activities to protect the shoreline marshes and beach at Texas Point.

**Response:** The Council appreciates this support and looks forward to continuing to implement restoration projects in the Chenier Plain portion of the Texas coast.

**Comment:** One commenter expressed concerns about carbon capture and storage of carbon dioxide in offshore oil and gas wells instead of decommissioning these wells. The commenter also cited the value of the Cheniere Plain and suggested that carbon dioxide be disposed of in orphan wells in the Cheniere Plain instead of offshore.

**Response:** The Council has no jurisdiction regarding carbon capture and storage, and no such activities are being proposed in the 2026 FPL.

**Comment:** One commenter states that restoration of Chenier Plain shorelines in Jefferson, Orange, Chambers and Harris counties would have the greatest benefits resulting from synergy with both the Texas Managing Wetlands Migration Corridors and Natural Floodways and the Texas Oyster Reef Restoration Programs. The commenter also highlighted that the Texas Point National Wildlife Refuge Gulf beach is gone, and the Sabine Pass marsh is vanishing rapidly, stating that beneficial use of dredged material and oyster reef restoration to provide erosion protection through living shorelines is needed in these areas. Finally, the commenter also expressed the need for land acquisition of the tidal riverine hardwood wetlands for long-term floodway management at the watershed-coastal interface of the Sabine, Neches, and Taylor Rivers.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the commenter's suggestions and highlights of both the needs and strategies to accomplish restoration in the Chenier Plain region. The State of Texas looks to provide synergistic restoration benefits, where possible, across programs and restoration methodologies and has prioritized Chenier Plain restoration in the 2026 FPL.

### **Texas Managing Wetlands Migration Corridors and Natural Floodways Program, Texas Oyster Reef Restoration Program, and Restoring Waterbird Rookery Habitat**

**Comment:** One commenter expressed thanks for conducting public meetings on the 2026 FPL and offered support in particular for the Managing Wetlands Migration Corridors and Natural Floodways Program. This commenter cited the critical importance of protecting coastal prairie habitats in Texas through land acquisition as a technique that could contribute to this program and offered that a pipeline of potential land acquisition projects is ready and in need of additional funding.

**Response:** The Council appreciates this support, acknowledges the importance of protecting coastal prairie habitats, and looks forward to implementing this 2026 FPL program along with other RESTORE-funded habitat acquisition efforts. Coastal prairie is listed as a priority habitat for wetland corridors, and it is expected that the Texas Managing Wetlands Migration Corridors and Natural Floodways Program would consider protecting these.

**Comment:** Multiple commenters expressed support for Texas Managing Wetlands Migration Corridors and Natural Floodways Program, the Texas Oyster Reef Restoration Program, and the Restoring Waterbird Rookery Habitat Program and encouraged siting projects in a way that amplifies impact such as by restoring reef habitat to protect eroding wetland shorelines near restored waterbird rookeries.

**Response:** The Council appreciates this support along with the recommendation to site projects in close geographic proximity and supports using an ecosystem restoration approach that addresses multiple priorities thus amplifying conservation benefits.

**Comment:** One commenter pointed out that there are beneficial synergies among wetland management strategies and oyster reef restoration with Protecting and Restoring Waterbird Rookery Habitat Program outcomes, noting that many Texas shipping channels have lost their adjacent protective islands to erosion, and restoring these islands reduces navigations risks, enhances waterbird rookery habitat, and decreases erosional loss of inshore wetlands and community infrastructure. This commenter urged the Council to consider restoration of the lost islands adjacent to the Sabine-Neches Waterway (SNWW), where North Pleasure Island had protected community and industry infrastructure and Sydnese Island had protected the TPWD Lower Neches Wildlife Management Area wetlands.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the commenter's observations of the synergistic benefits of bird island restoration and the suggestion of restoring islands along the SNWW. Texas looks to provide synergistic restoration benefits where possible across programs and restoration methodologies during implementation of the 2026 FPL.

**Comment:** One commenter encouraged the State of Texas to utilize the Texas Wetland Action Mapping (Texas WAM) Plan and Tool developed by the Nature Conservancy to inform the Texas Managing Wetlands Migration Corridors and Natural Floodways program. The commenter noted that the Texas WAM identifies wetland migration corridors and natural floodways that allow coastal ecosystems to thrive, while also highlighting opportunities for restoration and improved management of existing wetlands.

**Response:** The Council appreciates being informed of the Texas WAM resource tool and will review it for potential applicability.

**Comment:** One commenter encouraged the State of Texas to utilize recommendations included in the *Oyster Restoration in the Gulf of Mexico* document developed by the Nature Conservancy to inform the proposed Texas Oyster Reef Restoration Program.

**Response:** The Council appreciates this comment. The State of Texas cited this document in their Texas Oyster Reef Restoration Program proposal and will attempt to incorporate these recommendations with planning and prioritization processes in Texas.

## Texas Water Quality

**Comment:** Multiple commenters urged the Council to provide greater support for restoration in the Texas Coastal Bend region and to prioritize water quality in Texas with an emphasis given to improving Baffin Bay's water quality. These commenters request the Council allocate a substantial portion of the Texas Managing Wetland Migration Corridors and Natural Floodways Program to septic, sewer, and stormwater investments to address hypoxia conditions on the Texas coast at Baffin Bay. The commenters further request that the Council advance Texas water quality projects from the federal agencies serving on the Council and allocate \$6 million to Baffin Bay water quality remaining from the balance of the FPL 4 to bring the total amount of the 2026 FPL from up from \$397 million to \$403.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the commenters' support for improving water quality in Texas, specifically within the Coastal Bend and Baffin Bay. There is currently an existing RESTORE Texas Water Quality Program approved by the Council for which approximately \$17.8 million in funding was allocated in a prior FPL, FPL3b in 2021. Of this budgeted total, the Council recently approved \$1M to implement a project directed to improving Baffin Bay water quality. At this time, the total \$403M available for the 2026 FPL has been proposed for other priority restoration work across the Gulf.

## Colonial Waterbird Rookery Island Restoration

**Comment:** Several comments were received in support of the *Colonial Waterbird Rookery Island Restoration* project.

**Response:** The Council thanks these commenters for their support for this project.

**Comment:** Several comments were received regarding recommendations for the *Colonial Waterbird Rookery Island Restoration* project including requests to ensure that restoration projects include community engagement and education to reduce human disturbance at created or restored sites. Commenters also requested that the project coordinate with coastwide conservation groups and state and federal agencies to align restoration with broader Gulf Coast conservation strategies and consider island management and stewardship in addition to new island creation. The commenters emphasized that there may be cost-effective options for enhancing existing non-productive sites in addition to creating new sites.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the recommendations and acknowledges that enhanced coordination with the community and conservation efforts would be beneficial to the overall benefits and outcomes of this project. The State of Texas engages various stakeholders and collaborates with projects that seek to support management and stewardship at Rookery Islands (for example the Colony Island Network Design and Implementation Project.)

**Comment:** One commenter expressed concern that while the *Colonial Waterbird Rookery Island Restoration* and the *Development of Indicators and Identification of Thresholds to Support Reef Restoration* projects both yield planning tools for prioritizing restoration, the projects are not considering positive externalities related to other adjacent ecological habitats or human societal benefits.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the commenter's perspective and notes that both the *Colonial Waterbird Rookery Island Restoration* and the *Development of Indicators and Identification of Thresholds to Support Reef Restoration* projects are grounded in ecosystem-based planning approaches that consider connections among adjacent habitats. These efforts are intended to inform restoration prioritization in ways that promote ecological co-benefits such as habitat connectivity, water quality, and resilience, while also supporting societal benefits including fisheries sustainability, coastal protection, and recreation, and will be used in conjunction with other data and expert knowledge to arrive at project recommendations. The Council will continue to emphasize integrated restoration planning and opportunities to incorporate additional ecological and human-use considerations as these tools are developed and applied.

## Wind Tidal Flats Phase 2

**Comment:** The Council received a comment regarding the overall allocation of funds among the Gulf States. The commenter recognized the synergistic benefits of the projects in Texas, but expressed the view that the weakest proposal for these funds is the *Wind-Tidal Flat Restoration Pilot, Phase 2*. The commenter based this position on a view that other state and federal funding sources may be available for this applied research.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the commenter's recognition of the synergistic benefits of the projects proposed in Texas. The *Wind-Tidal Flat Restoration Pilot, Phase 2* was included in the proposed FPL based on its alignment with Council goals, its potential to advance restoration science, and its relevance to broader Gulf ecosystem restoration efforts. While other state and federal funding sources may be available for applied research, Council consideration also reflects the project's ability to address identified restoration needs and inform future on-the-ground restoration actions. The Council will continue to evaluate funding priorities to ensure balanced, effective, and coordinated restoration investments across the Gulf region.

## Louisiana

### Restoration of Chandeleur Island

**Comment:** The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) expressed support for restoration of the Chandeleur Islands, noting that these islands provide a range of economic benefits to Louisiana and Mississippi. NWF discussed the value of these habitats with respect to seabirds and shorebirds, endangered Kemp's ridley and threatened loggerhead sea turtles, and a broad range of invertebrates, forage fish and marine mammals. NWF also noted that the islands serve as a first line of defense against storm surge for nearby communities. NWF pointed out that the rapid erosion at the southern end of the island could jeopardize the restoration work planned for New Harbor Island. For this reason, NWF encourages any future restoration planning to take into consideration the southern end of the island to help preserve the restoration work that will be done on New Harbor Island.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the NWF support for this project. The Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA), the project sponsor, recognizes the growing threat to New Harbor Island. To preserve the restoration work on the island, rock breakwaters will be constructed on the eastern side of New Harbor Island. Additionally, sand reservoirs and pocket marshes are designed on the western side of the southern end of Chandeleur Island. These features are designed to preserve the integrity of the southern portion of North Chandeleur Island and slow erosive impacts.

**Comment:** Restore the Mississippi River Delta (MRD), a coalition of national and regional nonprofit organizations interested in coastal Louisiana expressed support for the Council's prioritization of the *Chandeleur Islands Restoration Project* in the Pontchartrain Basin of Louisiana and Mississippi. MRD noted that these barrier islands provide a number of critical ecosystem services including storm and wave protection for local communities and habitat for important fish and wildlife species. MRD also recommended that the timing and design of the restoration be done in a way that prevents unintended impacts on at-risk resources, such as beach-nesting birds and sea turtles.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the MRD support for the *Chandeleur Islands Restoration Project*. The design and implementation of this project will take into consideration the potential for unintended impacts to wildlife and associated habitat. The CPRA will take all practicable measures to avoid any such unintended consequences. CPRA is working with our federal partners to identify potential impacts to nesting birds and sea turtles and develop best management practices (BMPs) to avoid those impacts. CPRA will ensure those BMPs are implemented.

**Comment:** The National Audubon Society expressed support for the restoration of the Chandeleur Islands. Audubon noted that restoring the Chandeleur Islands would safeguard important offshore bird habitats by enhancing nesting and foraging conditions for colonial waterbirds, as well as foraging habitat for migratory shorebirds. Audubon further noted that by slowing erosion and restoring island elevation, this investment would ensure the persistence of a globally important seabird stronghold within the Breton National Wildlife Refuge. Audubon emphasized the need for periodic nourishment cycles to improve long-term sediment supply for the islands. Audubon also recommends expanded seabird productivity monitoring, measures to address predator and human disturbance management through partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the integration of future storm intensity and sea-level rise scenarios in engineering models, and the use of nature-based breakwaters or reef modules to dissipate wave energy.

**Response:** The Council appreciates The National Audubon Society's support for this project. CPRA and its partners engineered the project with future sea level rise scenarios, anticipated hurricane impacts, and daily erosion rates considered. Sand reservoirs, feeder beaches, pocket marshes, and rock breakwaters on New Harbor Island have been integrated into the project to make it resilient in the face of uncertain future climatic conditions and to improve long term sediment supply. The Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group (TIG) has budgeted for future avian nesting monitoring however predator control is not planned. Mammalian predator impacts to birds is not a significant concern on the Chandeleur Islands. The island currently enjoys protection from anthropogenic threats through legislation as a federal national wildlife refuge and a national wilderness area.

**Comment:** The Nature Conservancy (TNC) offered strong support for the construction of new islands, restoration of existing islands, and inclusion of management and stewardship of rookery sites within this program area. TNC offered specific support for the restoration of the Chandeleur Islands, which are critical habitat for colonial waterbirds as well as sea turtles. TNC also emphasized the importance of incorporating management and stewardship to sustain this investment over time.

**Response:** The Council appreciates TNC's support for restoration of the Chandeleur Islands, and recognizes the value of long-term management and stewardship of coastal restoration investments. The Louisiana TIG has planned and budgeted for monitoring and maintenance of the project for 10 years.

## Mississippi

### Mississippi General Comments

**Comment:** Two commenters asked for more information on how the sites are selected and ways for organizations to submit our projects for consideration.

**Response:** The *Coastal and Nearshore Habitat Restoration and Development* Program focuses on habitat creation through the beneficial use of sediments and sourcing of materials to enhance coastal island habitats. Sites are selected in coordination with the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources and local entities by identifying the availability of beneficially sourced sediments and linking those sources to appropriate locations for placement and by assessing coastal erosion rates and historical shoreline data. At this time projects have not been selected for the *Coastal and Nearshore Habitat Restoration and Development* Program. New FPL project ideas can be provided to Mississippi through the MDEQ Project Portal (<https://restore.mdeq.ms.gov/IdeaPortal/>).

### Coastal Nearshore Habitat Restoration and Development Program

**Comment:** Multiple commenters recommended that Mississippi consider implementing projects within Cherokee Forest for this program, suggesting that the site offers a rare opportunity to restore multiple habitat types in one place including freshwater wetlands, riparian forest, and tidally influenced areas that connect directly to Bayou Chicot. Multiple comments raised the potential to implement the Cherokee Forest Relocation to Restoration (R2R) Plan in Pascagoula, Mississippi as a high-value opportunity to restore and enhance nearshore and tidally influenced habitats that contribute directly to the health of the Mississippi Sound.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the suggestion of this possible project site.

### Restoration of Grand Batture Island (jointly proposed by the States of Mississippi and Alabama)

**Comment:** Multiple commenters expressed strong support for the *Restoration of Grand Batture Island* project. One commenter praised the Council for collaboratively restoring an iconic landform that has been a priority for citizens, governments and resource professionals of both states for decades, noting that the island functionally bridges the divide between two states that share the estuarine abundance of the Mississippi Sound. Multiple commenters encouraged states to utilize funding for cross-border work and projects that advance shared outcomes such as those that will be achieved at Grand Batture Island. One commenter requested robust outreach and engagement during project planning to inform design so that the project can provide long-lasting benefits to the region.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the commenters' strong support for the planning and implementation of this restoration project showcasing states working collaboratively to achieve ecosystem scale restoration outcomes. The states of Mississippi and Alabama intend to solicit engagement of stakeholders during the planning phase of the project to inform design.

**Comment:** One commenter provided support and recommendations for the Grand Batture Island restoration project requesting that the states:

- Incorporate nature-based designs such as oyster breakwaters, sediment trapping features, dune vegetation stabilizations, and low-profile living sediment shoreline elements, for self-sustaining island growth;
- Utilize shorebird-first construction window outside the breeding season (April-August), and preconstruction colony surveys; and
- Coordinate and integrate with the State of Mississippi's coastal Nearshore Habitat Restoration Program to amplify sediment efficiency, species benefits, and hydrologic improvements.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the commenter's expressions of support and recommendations for this project.

## Alabama

### Upper Mobile Bay Beneficial Use Wetland Creation Site

**Comment:** Two commenters expressed support for the *Upper Mobile Bay Beneficial Use Wetland Creation Site* project's initiative to repurpose ship channel dredge material for tidal wetland creation. The commenters emphasized that this beneficial use strategy protects the bay's ecological health by acting as a natural filter for pollutants while safeguarding vital seagrasses, oyster reefs, and fisheries from the negative effects of open-water disposal. Furthermore, the comments underline the project's long-term value in enhancing regional coastal resilience and improving economic efficiencies for navigation-related industries in Alabama.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the support for restoration of upper Mobile Bay intertidal wetlands with beneficial use of dredge material and of the continuation of the Initial FPL *Upper Mobile Bay Beneficial Use Wetland Creation Site* project.

**Comment:** The Council received a comment in opposition to the *Upper Mobile Bay Beneficial Use Wetland Creation Site* stating the project Army Corps of Engineer permitting process has lacked transparency and has not adequately involved the public. While supporting the concept of wetland creation, the commenter asserted that superior

alternative sites exist and should have been evaluated rather than finalizing a decision on the current location. Lastly the commenter points out perceived errors in the current proposal, noting that statements regarding the status of the Environmental Assessment (EA) and the permit process are outdated or misleading.

**Response:** The Council has no role in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) permit process and defers to the Corps on the manner in which it conducted public input on this permit action. The Council has reviewed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation developed for this project, along with the record pertaining to coordination with other regulatory agencies and compliance with other applicable federal laws. The Council is adopting this NEPA documentation to support approval of implementation funding for this activity. In addition to any public input opportunities provided by the Corps of Engineers during the permit process, the Council has also provided an independent opportunity for public input on the proposed approval of funding for this project. The Council has considered and provided responses to all relevant public comments submitted during its public comment period.

### **West End Dauphin Island, Alabama Renourishment and Resilience Project**

**Comment:** Multiple comments expressed support for the sediment placement plan for the West End Dauphin Island Project which will support natural resource protection, habitat protection for listed species, community resilience and infrastructure protection along with the economic activity protected by the barrier island. One commenter highlighted the importance of this project as a restoration priority in the 2020 Alabama Barrier Island Restoration Assessment published by the United States Geological Survey and Army Corps of Engineers. Several commenters indicated the importance of this project for protecting the private property and community infrastructure of the island, while also ensuring the integrity of the ecological and nature-based economy of Mississippi Sound.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the broad support for sediment placement on the West End of Dauphin Island. The strategic placement of sediment should re-establish natural defenses to help mitigate the risk of breaching and reduce storm surge flooding, thereby providing protection to vital community infrastructure and the estuarine habitats of the Mississippi Sound. Furthermore, the restoration of beach and dune habitat is essential for nesting and foraging sites for migratory shorebirds and threatened species, such as the Piping Plover, supporting the ecological integrity of this key stopover along the Mississippi Flyway.

**Comment:** One comment opposed this project until current litigation is resolved. The commenter based this opposition on an asserted loss of property due to the establishment of the legal Mean High Tide Line based on the currently eroded shoreline. In addition, the commenter raised concerns that the project budget will exceed the amount of funding included in the FPL for the project.

**Response:** The Council acknowledges the commenter's concerns. The primary goal of this initiative is to restore barrier island habitat and dunes to provide regional resilience for not only the West end of Dauphin Island and adjacent private property, but also the Mississippi Sound and its associated natural resources. In support of Council decisions for developing proposals for funding, the Council is required, per the RESTORE Act, to use the best available science when developing project concepts and implementing projects. The recent 2020 Alabama Barrier Island Restoration Assessment utilized predictive modeling to evaluate a 'no-action' alternative, which indicated that the West End is imminently vulnerable to breaching and severe habitat loss. Because the island has been starved of sand for decades due to the disruption of natural sediment transport, the Council has determined that strategic sediment placement is necessary to re-establish the littoral drift and sustain the island's structural integrity.

The Council acknowledges the comment regarding ongoing litigation involving the State and the Town of Dauphin Island. The Council's statutory role in developing the FPL is to evaluate restoration proposals based on their ability to meet the goals and objectives of the RESTORE Act Comprehensive Plan and the use of best available science. The Council has no role in the referenced litigation and its decision on funding for this project is independent of any litigation.

## Florida

### Florida General Comments

**Comment:** One commenter expressed strong support for the 2026 FPL and advocates for the prioritization of dual-purpose infrastructure projects in Florida's coastal watersheds. Specifically, the commenter proposes an innovative maritime logistics system, AquaVi, which utilizes solar-electric technology to support the commercial fishing industry while providing off-grid energy for community hurricane recovery.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the support for the 2026 FPL and the interest in integrating ecosystem resilience with maritime logistics. The 2026 FPL prioritizes large-scale projects and programs that utilize best available science to restore and protect the natural resources, ecosystems, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast region. While the proposed activities in Florida focus on restoring habitat and water quality and quantity, the Council recognizes the value of innovative solutions that enhance community resilience and support local economies during disaster recovery.

### Florida Gulf Coast Tributaries Hydrologic Restoration Program

**Comment:** One commenter expressed continued support for the *Florida Gulf Coast Tributaries Hydrologic Restoration Program* because re-establishing natural flow patterns is essential for the long-term health of coastal watersheds and the bird

populations that rely on them. The commenter stated that by reversing the damage caused by canalization and stormwater runoff, the program will improve water quality and enhance foraging and nesting conditions for species like herons and egrets. Additionally, restoring these hydrologic connections strengthens coastal resilience against intense storms while protecting critical estuarine habitats from degradation.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the support for this hydrologic restoration program and agrees that restoring natural freshwater flow patterns and estuarine gradients provides important benefits to coastal watersheds and the avian populations they support. The extension of this program with the 2026 FPL will maintain a focus on linking benefits across a watershed to support the integrity of coastal ecosystems and the bird populations that rely on them.

## Gulfwide

### The Department of the Interior: Tribal Youth Conservation Corps

**Comment:** The Nature Conservancy (TNC) expressed strong support for youth and young adult conservation programs like the Tribal Youth Conservation Corps (TYCC). The comment indicated that in TNC's experience, these types of programs prepare young people for meaningful careers in conservation.

**Response:** The Council appreciates TNC's strong support for youth and young adult conservation programs like the Tribal Youth Conservation Corps.

### Environmental Protection Agency: Trash Free Waters Program Benefiting Communities in the Gulf Coast

**Comment:** One commenter expressed interest in ensuring that inland audiences far removed from the coast are better informed how their actions, such as those involving improper trash disposal, have negative effects on downstream watersheds. This commenter also recommended that the Council utilize organizations, such as but not limited to the Rio Grande Native Plant Society and Master Naturalists, whose mission includes conveying information to the public within communities they serve, to share RESTORE project information. The commenter believes this could help increase the geographic reach and effectiveness of the Council's public outreach and increase public environmental stewardship.

**Response:** The Council appreciates the commenter's suggestion and will evaluate whether upstream outreach should be incorporated for this project and how messages could be amplified by community organizations to increase awareness and environmental stewardship.