Priority & Commitment To Plan Evaluation

Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

PROPOSAL TITLE

Connecting Coastal Waters: Restoring Coastal Wetland Hydrology

PROPORAL NUMBER

DOC-1

LOCATION

Multiple Gulf Coastal Counties/Parishes

SPONSOR(S)

Department of Commerce

TYPE OF FUNDING REQUESTED (Planning, Technical Assistance, Implementation)

Planning/Technical Assistance/Implementation

REVIEWED BY:

Ebonye T. Allen

DATE:

6 February 2015

A. Comprehensive Plan Goals

Of the goals addressed by the proposal, which is the single primary goal?
Proposals should discuss how the proposed activity is designed to address the primary goal.
Check one:

- (●) Restore and Conserve Habitat – Restore and conserve the health, diversity and resilience of key coastal, estuarine and marine habitats.
- ( ) Restore Water Quality – Restore and protect water quality of the Gulf Coast region's fresh, estuarine and marine waters.
- ( ) Replenish and Protect Living Coastal and Marine Resources – Restore and protect healthy, diverse and sustainable living coastal and marine resources.
- ( ) Enhance Community Resilience – Build upon and sustain communities with capacity to adapt to short- and long-term changes.
- ( ) Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy – Enhance the sustainability and resiliency of the Gulf economy.

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, the NOAA led initiative will use an ecosystem based approach to focus on the goal of restoring and conserving the health, diversity and resilience of coastal, estuarine and marine habitats. This proposal requests funding over 3 years to 1) implement 11 proposed coastal wetland hydrology restoration projects in partnership with each Gulf State to restore coastal wetland types with the greatest regional losses; 2) leverage place-based collaborations to achieve measurable benefits for coastal wetlands; and 3) deliver science and tools, including an inventory of coastal wetland hydrology restoration projects.

B. Comprehensive Plan Objectives

Proposals must clearly identify which objectives the proposal will address

1. Restore, Enhance, and Protect Habitats

- [x] YES
- [ ] NO
- [ ] Not articulated
- [ ] N/A

2. Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources

- [x] YES
- [ ] NO
- [ ] Not articulated
- [ ] N/A

3. Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources

- [x] YES
- [ ] NO
- [ ] Not articulated
- [ ] N/A

4. Restore and Enhance Natural Processes and Shorelines

- [x] YES
- [ ] NO
- [ ] Not articulated
- [ ] N/A

Notes:

8. Of these objectives which is the single primary objective the proposal addresses?

Check one:

- (●) Restore, Enhance, and Protect Habitats
- ( ) Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources
- ( ) Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources
- ( ) Restore and Enhance Natural Processes and Shorelines
- ( ) Promote Community Resilience
- ( ) Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education
- ( ) Improve Science-Based Decision-Making Processes

C. RESTORE Act and Comprehensive Plan Priority Criteria

All proposals must explain if the proposal addresses one or more of the priority criteria as established by the RESTORE Act and Initial Comprehensive Plan and, if so, how.

1. This project is 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.

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

2. This is a large-scale project/program that is 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.

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

3. This project is 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.

(●) YES ( ) NO

4. This project will 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.

(●) YES ( ) NO

5. Promote Community Resilience

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

6. Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated ( ) N/A

Notes:

The proposal submission anticipates restoration of coastal wetlands across the Gulf Coast region by restoring natural hydrology for over 22,000 acres of coastal wetlands. The proposed projects plan to restore coastal wetland hydrology through actions that remove or modify anthropogenic barriers that are restricting the volume, velocity, exchange, temperature, and salinity of coastal waters and impacting large coastal areas.

D. Comprehensive Plan Commitments

All proposals must demonstrate how the proposal will achieve any or all of the commitments in the Comprehensive Plan. The commitments in the Comprehensive Plan are as follows:

Does the proposal articulate how it will achieve the following commitments in the comprehensive plan?

1. Science-based Decision-Making

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The proposal submission indicates that for each project, a team will be assembled to apply best available science, local knowledge, and a multi-disciplinary approach. The project team will evaluate proposed restoration strategies to address site specific data and requirements and will coordinate with state and federal regulatory agencies to incorporate their input at the earliest stages of project implementation. Engineering studies, modeling if necessary, and a final design will be completed and approved by a professional engineer. A monitoring and evaluation plan will also be developed for each project to inform adaptive management and document progress toward achieving restoration project goals and objectives.

2. Regional Ecosystem-based Approach to Restoration

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The proposal will use an ecosystem based approach to focus on the goal of restoring and conserving the health, diversity and resilience of coastal, estuarine and marine habitats. Further contribution to a regional approach to reverse the loss of coastal wetlands is anticipated by providing a science-based inventory of coastal wetland hydrology restoration projects that make the greatest contribution to restoring and protecting the Gulf Coast.

3. Engagement, Inclusion, and Transparency

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The proposal anticipates conducting outreach, education, stewardship, and training activities with proposed restoration projects and the inventory of coastal wetland hydrology restoration opportunities. Interactive workshops are planned to identify restoration opportunities within focal landscapes. Workshops will engage professionals and stakeholders with expertise and local area knowledge to identify coastal wetland restoration needs and projects.

4. Leveraging Resources and Partnerships

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, partners include state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, universities, and industry partners. Each of the proposed restoration projects leverages previous efforts and resources.

5. Delivering Results and Measuring Impacts

(●) YES ( ) NO

Notes:

As detailed in the proposal, the project plans to use standard monitoring protocols to measure outcomes and each project will report results based on an approved monitoring plan that details specific parameters, collection methods, and quality assurance and quality control procedures. Data collected under this proposal will undergo verification to ensure the quality, utility, and integrity of information collected. NOAA will report data once it has been through quality assurance and control procedures. NOAA will also integrate individual project results to report the outcomes and impacts of the proposal submission the following region-wide goals: 1) restore hydrology to benefit and restore over 22,000 acres of wetland and estuarine

E. Meeting Commitments and Tracking and Measuring Progress

1. Does the proposal articulate how it will meet and achieve its commitments?

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

2. Does the proposal have a plan for tracking and measuring progress?

(●) YES ( ) NO

Notes:

The proposal submission anticipates achieving the following metrics: 1) restore hydrology to benefit and restore over 22,000 acres of wetland and estuarine habitats; 2) engage local community organizations and provide opportunities for 250 participants during community events held for restoration projects; and 3) identify coastal wetland hydrology restoration projects within each of the Gulf's 37 estuarine drainage areas. As described in the proposal submission, each proposed restoration project will set site-specific, science-based objectives with partners that will be assessed through an approved monitoring and adaptive management plan.

F. Proposal Emphasis Areas

Does the submission describe how the proposed project or program addresses the following four considerations:

1. Is the proposed activity **foundational** in the sense that the project or program forms an initial core step (or steps) in addressing a significant ecosystem issue, and can future activities be tiered to substantially increase the benefits?

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The proposal submission anticipates that the projects and partnerships described form the core steps to address the loss of Gulf Coast wetlands. The submission also anticipates a science-based, collaborative process to identify future coastal wetland restoration projects that can be tiered to those included in this proposal and provide synergy across jurisdictional boundaries.

2. Will the proposed activity be **sustainable** over time?

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The proposal submission anticipates projects will restore coastal wetland hydrology through actions that remove or modify anthropogenic barriers that restrict the volume, velocity, exchange, temperature, and salinity of coastal waters. Projects plan to apply a range of proven techniques based on either a passive or active design strategy to address restoration needs. Passive design strategies entail a one-time action resulting in a self-sustaining system with little long-term intervention. Active design strategies entail more intensive construction activities and are typically characterized by the active operation of structures and long term maintenance needed to achieve project goals. Additionally, the proposal indicates projects will be

3. Is the proposed activity **likely to succeed**?

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The proposal submission focuses on the restoration of coastal wetland hydrology. As indicated in the submission, the proposed projects will build on existing restoration plans, priorities, and partnerships. The proposal submission indicates that projects were developed in consultation with local experts using existing environmental plans and assessments that provide the data and information needed for successful implementation. The submission indicates that all projects will undergo robust planning, engineering and design, permitting, and monitoring to ensure success.

4. Does the proposed activity **benefit** the human **community**?
(examples of benefits may include, but are not limited to: how a project will utilize local workers, how a project will benefit geographically or socially vulnerable communities, how a project will benefit the natural resources critical to natural-resource dependent industries such as fisheries, tourism, etc.)

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The proposal submissions indicates that one of the benefits to the human community is the utilization of local workers on the eleven restoration projects proposed. The submission also indicates the proposal will benefit vulnerable communities and natural–resource dependent industries by restoring and enhancing ecosystem services provided by coastal wetlands, such as improving water quality, providing buffers against storms, reducing flooding, and supporting fish and wildlife.