Priority & Commitment To Plan Evaluation

Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

PROPOSAL TITLE

Strategic Land Protection, Conservation, and Enhancement of Priority Gulf Coast Landscapes

PROPORAL NUMBER

MS-1

LOCATION

Conservation actions will be implemented across the landscapes within the Gulf Coast Region (AL, FL, MS, TX, LA)

SPONSOR(S)

Mississippi

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

Planning and Implementation

REVIEWED BY:

Kristen Laursen

DATE:

February 21, 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:

All other RESTORE Goals are listed as Secondary Goals.

The proposal states that it aims to address the focus areas of habitat and water quality, as well address other RESTORE goals of protecting living resources and enhancing community resilience. The proposal states that by proposing a land conservation and protection strategy, the participants strategically engage multiple facets of land protection and conservation across the Gulf that address significant conservation priorities and have tangible and multiple long-term benefits for the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem.

B. Comprehensive Plan Objectives

Proposals must clearly identify which objectives the proposal will address

1. Restore, Enhance, and Protect Habitats

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

2. Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources

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

3. Protect and Restore Living Coastal and Marine Resources

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

4. Restore and Enhance Natural Processes and Shorelines

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

Notes:

Also listed in the proposal as secondary objectives:
- Promote Community Resilience
- Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education
- Improve Science-Based Decision-Making Processes

The proposal lists its objectives as the following:
1. Protect priority lands, through fee-simple and conservation easement programs throughout the Gulf of Mexico.

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 sponsor (Mississippi) notes that land protection and conservation is the single common priority project and program existing on Gulf State management plans. The conservation legacy of state fish and wildlife agencies, federal land management agencies, NGOs and private land stewards have provided a strong foundation to help protect and restore the ecological richness of the Gulf of Mexico region. Mississippi further notes that land conservation is an important restoration tool that: 1) is projected to make a significant contribution to restoring and protecting natural resources of the Gulf; 2) has a large spatial scale of influence that will substantially contribute to Gulf-wide ecosystem restoration in multiple ecoregions; and 3) will foundationally restore the long-term resiliency of multiple ecosystems across the Gulf, and 4) has been emphasized in

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:

Mississippi notes that undertaking a strategic conservation assessment to prioritize lands for acquisition and management throughout the MS Gulf Coast allows long and short term risks to be quantified by accounting for specific threats (e.g., urbanization, climate change) in the conservation strategy and by considering potential negative consequences of action (or no action) in the spatial analysis and temporal optimization of priorities. This objective distinctly commits to a science-based decision making process that will engage stakeholders, and leverage existing efforts, towards regional based approach to restoration of the Gulf.

2. Regional Ecosystem-based Approach to Restoration

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

3. Engagement, Inclusion, and Transparency

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

Mississippi notes that as a result of due diligence through multiple state, federal, and NGO led efforts, there are several areas within each state that have already been ranked as priority conservation areas. These priority areas as well as criteria have been established through significant public engagement which emphasizes the commitment to engagement, inclusion, and transparency through the public, and vetting the need for land protection, conservation, and enhancement.

4. Leveraging Resources and Partnerships

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The proposal notes that efforts of Gulf-wide, multi-agency restoration organizations will be leveraged and engaged to create a strategic land acquisition assessment to establish future land holdings that would be foundational in the preservation of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem within each state.

Mississippi further states that the objectives and actions within the objectives all have aspects of leveraging resources and partnerships. The proposal recognizes and highlights multiple partnerships to indicate that the greater sum of contributions is better for the future of the Gulf of Mexico. Leveraging resources commits to maximizing efficiencies of conservation dollars, and both ensure that participants get things right when implementing foundational and sustainable aspects of land protection

5. Delivering Results and Measuring Impacts

(●) YES ( ) NO

Notes:

The sponsor notes that Objective #4 (utilize monitoring to understand effects of land conservation on habitat characteristics) is dedicated to measuring impacts through monitoring.

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 states that the monitoring portion of the proposed work will be undertaken via the following six tasks which will be developed via stakeholder input (and tied explicitly with Objective #3 - Create a strategic conservation assessment framework for future land acquisition prioritization through collaborative conservation planning and design): (1) Status and trends evaluation; (2) Assimilation of existing data; (3) Data acquisition; (4) Synthesis; (5) Adaptive management; and (6) Data management. Mississippi further notes that for tracking and measuring progress Action items 3, 4 and 5 look at discerning and measuring progress.

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:

Mississippi notes that land protection and conservation is foundational to underpinning and securing the future of the Gulf of Mexico. By protecting upstream habitats, ecosystem services delivery is enhanced downstream and begins to address water quality and quantity. Habitat connectivity and fragmentation are also addressed foundationally through land protection and conservation.

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

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

Mississippi states that land protection and conservation of lands through fee simple acquisition and conservation easement are sustainable because they are place in conservation status in perpetuity. A conservation easement (also called a conservation servitude in Louisiana) is a voluntary, legally binding agreement with willing land holders that allows the owner to manage the land in a way that benefits habitats and species of concern and are intended to last into perpetuity.

The proposal notes that strategic land conservation at large landscape scales can begin to tackle issues such as land and

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

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The sponsor notes that land protection tools such as fee simple acquisition and conservation easements have been successfully implemented across the Gulf region by dedicated land conservation institutions for the benefit of many diverse resources (e.g. threatened and endangered species or critical habitats; community benefits). Land protection and conservation measures are simple endeavors with high likelihood of success because of very low risk with implementation.

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 notes that economic benefit or "conservation capital" of land conservation initiatives are well-documented in the literature and are generally acknowledged in terms of tourism and outdoor recreation, agriculture, freshwater resources, promotion of a clean and plentiful supply of water, positive effects on coastal counties and resources, reduction in air pollution, prevention of flood damage, climate change mitigation, preservation of the infrastructure and history, and reduction of service costs compared to residential development. Protecting open spaces have tangible community benefits by creating an offset to protect community infrastructure, creating open spaces that provide areas for people to witness and learn about their natural environment, and provide opportunities for low impact recreational activity such as observation of birds, wildlife, fishing,