



SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT

Mabus Report, Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force and Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council

**Prepared by the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
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INTRODUCTION

The Gulf region is vital to our nation and our economy, providing valuable natural resources, abundant seafood, extraordinary beaches, recreational activities and a rich cultural heritage. Its waters and coast are home to one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world, including over 15,000 species of sea life. Over 22 million Americans live in Gulf coastal communities. Despite this richness, the region's ecosystem has endured significant natural catastrophes over the past decade and other factors that have threatened the natural resources of the region. For example, the Gulf Coast region has experienced loss of critical wetland habitats, erosion of barrier islands and other coastal areas, imperiled fisheries, water quality degradation and significant coastal land loss due to natural forces, the alteration of hydrology and other human activities.

Against this backdrop of both abundance and decline, the explosion of the *Deepwater Horizon* rig on April 20, 2010, cost 11 men their lives and set into motion one of the largest environmental disasters in our nation's history. For months, thousands of people worked to stop the flow of oil from the wellhead and protect our shorelines, wildlife and coastal communities. At the same time we also looked to the future, understanding that an event of this magnitude would take the collective thinking and cooperation of the entire region to ensure that the Gulf recovered not only from the effects of the spill, but from natural and other catastrophes that threaten the natural resources of the region as well as the people who rely on those resources for their food, fun and livelihoods.

The people of the Gulf of Mexico are the backbone of the region, driving the economy and sustaining a rich heritage centuries in the making. This Gulf way of life is intrinsically linked to and dependent on the quality of our natural resources.

MOVING TOWARD RECOVERY

In recognition of both the severity of the spill as well as the challenges facing the region, on June 15, 2010, President Obama issued a clarion call to the people of the Gulf and the rest of the nation to commit to recovery of the region not only from the spill, but to address broader ecosystem challenges brought on by storms, development pressures and other stressors¹. He called on Ray Mabus, then Secretary of the Navy, to develop a long-term restoration plan for the Gulf Coast. The recommendations from that initial effort laid the groundwork for passing legislation to fund restoration efforts, as well as the development of strategies and plans



¹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-nation-bp-oil-spill>² Public input from the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) process or other activities directly related to addressing oil spill impacts is not included in this summary.

to guide the region toward a comprehensive approach to restoration that takes into account the environmental, economic and cultural value of the Gulf Coast region.

The people of the Gulf of Mexico are the backbone of the region, driving the economy and sustaining a rich heritage centuries in the making. This Gulf way of life is intrinsically linked to and dependent on the quality of our natural resources. That is why it is critical for the public to be involved in restoration. Without participation from a wide array of stakeholders, decision-makers miss out on significant value in the form of local knowledge, opportunities for collaboration and the ability for the public to invest in the long-term success of ecosystem restoration efforts.



The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) created this document to assist its members in incorporating public input into their decision-making process. The report summarizes the public input received from the following efforts and entities who have worked over the past four years to plan for and guide broad ecosystem restoration planning and decision-making.²

- *America's Gulf Coast: A Long Term Recovery Plan after the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill*³ (Mabus Report)
- *Gulf of Mexico Regional Ecosystem Restoration Strategy*⁴
- *Restoring the Gulf Coast's Ecosystem and Economy: Initial Comprehensive Plan*

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

1. To summarize public input received to date for review by decision-makers and the public.
2. To articulate where and how input received to date was incorporated.
3. If input was not yet incorporated, to ensure that the input is captured for consideration at another point in the restoration process.

The Council will continue to seek input from the public as it continues its work to plan for and implement large-scale ecosystem restoration projects across the Gulf region. Restoration work in the Gulf region will not be successful without genuine and meaningful input from the people in the region.

² Public input from the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) process or other activities directly related to addressing oil spill impacts is not included in this summary.

³ <http://www.epa.gov/gulfcoasttaskforce/pdfs/MabusReport.pdf>

⁴ http://www.epa.gov/gcertf/pdfs/GulfCoastReport_Full_12-04_508-1.pdf

AMERICA’S GULF COAST: A LONG TERM RECOVERY PLAN AFTER THE DEEPWATER HORIZON OIL SPILL⁵

Known informally as the Mabus Report, *America’s Gulf Coast: A Long Term Recovery Plan after the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill*, published in September of 2010, outlined recommendations and activities that would move the Gulf region toward recovery in the months following the oil spill. The



report focused on several areas, including the environment, the economy, and health and human services. This summary focuses on the environmental sections of the Mabus Report. One of the foundational recommendations of the report was for Congress to pass legislation that would dedicate a significant amount of any civil penalties recovered under the Clean Water Act from parties responsible for the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill to those directly impacted by the spill, to be managed by a Gulf

Coast Recovery Council.

The report also recommended the establishment of a Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force and a subsequent establishment of a Gulf Coast Recovery Council to coordinate the federal, state, local and tribal actions that will be taken, funded in part by eventual Clean Water Act fines. Page 8 of the Mabus report recommends that such a Council should “seek out participation from a wide array of stakeholder, involve the private and nonprofit sectors, be transparent and accountable to taxpayers, and maintain the confidence of the public.”

The following table summarizes the recommendations of the Mabus report related to the environmental recovery as well as the ecosystem restoration themes that came out of the town hall meetings Mabus and his staff conducted across the Gulf.

Recommendation/Theme	Status in 2014	Notes
Establish Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force	Created by Executive Order 13554 ⁶	Task Force dissolved after passage of RESTORE Act by Executive Order 13626 ⁷
Establish Gulf Recovery Council to guide restoration planning and implementation	Created by the RESTORE Act of 2012	
Dedicated restoration funding is critical. Without funding, a plan simply sits on a shelf.	Passage of RESTORE Act of 2012 dedicates certain penalties to Gulf Coast for recovery	
Scientific and technical	RESTORE Act commits	See RESTORE Act guidance

⁵ <http://www.epa.gov/gulfcoasttaskforce/pdfs/MabusReport.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/10/05/executive-order-gulf-coast-ecosystem-restoration-task-force>

⁷ <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-09-13/pdf/2012-22807.pdf>

knowledge should guide recovery planning and decision-making.	Council to use of Best Available Science to prioritize projects for implementation	re: use of Best Available Science
Plans to restore the Gulf Coast must come from the people of the Gulf Coast	The RESTORE Act directs the Council to prioritize projects contained in existing authorized plans	
What happens to the ecosystem of the Gulf affects the economy and welfare of the region.	The RESTORE Council's Comprehensive plan's goals and objectives recognize the link between the ecosystem and the economy.	

GULF COAST ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION TASK FORCE



On October 5, 2010, President Barack Obama issued Executive Order 13554, which established the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force “to coordinate intergovernmental responsibilities, planning, and exchange of information so as to better implement Gulf Coast ecosystem restoration and to facilitate appropriate accountability and support throughout the restoration process.”⁸

The primary charge of the Task Force was to create a unified, strategic approach to restore the region’s ecosystem. In October 2011, Task Force members published a strategy document (and accompanying science document) that articulated an overarching vision for restoration. The Task Force developed the strategy with the input of local partners, scientists, tribes and the public.

The foundation of the strategy document is four ecosystem restoration goals to facilitate long-term restoration:

- Restore and Conserve Habitat
- Restore Water Quality
- Replenish and protect living marine and coastal resources
- Enhance community resilience

The Task Force engaged local stakeholders, communities, the public and public officials throughout the region to ensure that they had the opportunity to share their views and needs to inform the work of the Task Force. From November 2010 to August 2011, the Task Force held multiple listening sessions to gather input to help inform the strategy document. The draft strategy document was

⁸ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/10/05/executive-order-gulf-coast-ecosystem-restoration-task-force>

released in October 2011 for public comment and review. Though no final strategy document was published due to the dissolution of the Task Force, a response to public comments is available online.⁹

GULF COAST ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION COUNCIL

In 2012, the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act (RESTORE Act) established the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for recovery. In Executive Order 16326, President Obama dissolved the Task Force and charged the Council with incorporating the Task Force’s work into their continuing work to guide restoration efforts in the region.

Entity	Task Force	Council
State of Texas	Yes	Yes
State of Louisiana	Yes*	Yes
State of Mississippi	Yes	Yes
State of Alabama	Yes	Yes
State of Florida	Yes	Yes
US Department of Homeland Security	No	Yes
US Environmental Protection Agency	Yes*	Yes
US Department of Commerce	Yes	Yes*
US Department of Agriculture	Yes	Yes
US Department of the Interior	Yes	Yes
US Department of Defense	Yes	Yes
US Department of Justice	Yes	No
US Department of Transportation	Yes	No
Office of Management and Budget	Yes	No
Council on Environmental Quality	Yes	No
Offices of Science and Technology Policy	Yes	No
Domestic Policy Council	Yes	No

Membership of Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force and Council. Asterisk () designates chair.*

The RESTORE Act envisions a regional approach to restoring the long-term health of the valuable natural resources and economy of the Gulf Coast region. The RESTORE Act dedicates 80 percent of any civil and administrative penalties paid under the Clean Water Act, after the date of enactment, by responsible parties in connection with the *Deepwater Horizon* spill to a Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund (Trust Fund). The Council has responsibilities with respect to 60 percent of the funds made available from the Trust Fund.¹⁰

One of the Council’s primary responsibilities is to develop a Comprehensive Plan to restore the ecosystem of the Gulf Coast region. The Initial Comprehensive Plan, finalized in August 2013, provides a framework to implement a coordinated, Gulf Coast

region-wide, ecosystem restoration effort in a way that restores, protects and revitalizes the Gulf Coast.

In developing the Plan, the Council reviewed the findings and recommendations of the Task Force’s *Gulf of Mexico Regional Ecosystem Restoration Strategy*. The Council initiated a robust public engagement process to receive initial input from diverse voices from across the region. The Council hosted 14 public meetings with over 2,300 attendees and established a web presence to accept public comments. The Council received over 41,000 public comments on the Draft Initial Comprehensive Plan.

⁹ <http://www.epa.gov/gulfcoasttaskforce/pdfs/Response-to-Public-Input.pdf>

¹⁰ For more information about the Restoration Trust Fund, visit www.restorethegulf.gov

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT FROM THE TASK FORCE AND COUNCIL (JUNE 2010-AUGUST 2013)

Summarizing tens of thousands of public comments from multiple processes at different points in time is necessarily an exercise in generalization. Nevertheless, consistent themes emerged after review of tens of thousands of public comments that shed light on the priorities of the public when it comes to planning, administering, implementing and tracking restoration efforts. The sections below summarize the input received by both the Task Force and the Council from June 2010 until August 2013.



In the process of creating a summary document, the Council has made every effort to capture the sentiments of input that appeared multiple times across processes and to be as inclusive as possible. Individual project ideas were not captured in this summary, but they were wrapped up into themes. For example, a comment suggesting the Task Force or Council build an oyster reef in Mobile Bay was counted towards the general priority of oyster reef restoration. The Council divided the input into the following basic categories:

Administration of Restoration Processes	Restoration Approach	Projects/Priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transparency• Input mechanisms• Coordination across processes• Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Science-based decision-making• Metrics for success• Monitoring and Tracking• Focus on natural systems and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People• Places• Coastal and Marine Wildlife

Administration of Restoration Processes

Priorities and recommendations in this section are related to the overall administration and business operation of a restoration body that is comprised of both states and federal agencies.

Recommendations and input suggest that transparent and collaborative processes are essential to the overall success of restoration implementation in an area as large and diverse as the Gulf Coast region.

Transparency	Input Mechanisms	Coordination	Collaboration
Management systems must be transparent	Establish a citizens advisory committee	Establish processes to coordinate with other restoration process to avoid duplication and to leverage funding	Collaborate with scientists, colleges and universities, community-based and nonprofit organizations, and Gulf residents. Utilize local knowledge wherever possible and take advantage of scientific and research capacity in the region.
Provide advance notice of meetings	Establish a defined process for public input; show how input was incorporated into decision-making process		Utilize existing plans and expertise to address priority needs
Provide translated documents and meeting materials in a timely manner	Establish a science advisory board		Conduct environmental education/outreach projects as well as education activities associated with ecosystem restoration projects
			Conduct projects that involve and engage volunteers

Restoration Approach

Priorities and recommendations in this section provide insight as to how the Council should utilize science as a foundation for project decision-making, implementation and tracking. Commenters recognized the complexity and scope of managing a large restoration effort and emphasized the importance of tracking and measuring success, or impact, of restoration projects to ensure that the money is spent on those projects most likely to improve the Gulf’s natural resources.

Science-based decision-making	Metrics for Success	Monitoring and Tracking	Focus on Systems and Processes
Demonstrate how best available science was used to select projects	Restoration plans must include goals, specific benchmarks and clear criteria for measuring success	Create a comprehensive database that tracks all restoration projects	Conduct projects that improve water quality
Prioritize projects that have multiple benefits/address multiples goals and objectives	Proposed projects should include a monitoring plan that will enable evaluation of its progress and ultimate success.	Monitor and measure the ongoing health of the ecosystem	All eligible projects, including those ecological projects with economic benefits projects need to result in net environmental gain
Prioritize projects that enhance resilience and adaptation of coastal and marine species with respect to climate change impacts	Provide technical, scientific, economic and social evaluation of project design	Adaptive management is integral to success of long-term restoration efforts	Projects that address ocean acidification
Prioritize projects that address underlying sources of environmental stress and seek long-term solutions to restoring natural processes			Projects that address hydrological processes

Projects and Priorities

This section synthesizes extensive input regarding projects and priority areas. Unsurprisingly, commenters who provided project-specific recommendations focused on projects and priorities in their state and/or community. As stated above, this summary does not include input regarding projects recommended in specific locations. Instead, if a project type or priority appeared multiple times, regardless of geographic location, it was included in the summary below.

People

Local Workers	Vulnerable Communities	Natural Resource-based industries
Consider a project's ability to impact local economies by hiring local workers and developing job training and workforce development programs that will allow locals to compete for jobs in a restoration economy.	Relocate living quarters of tribal members to areas where flooding is less likely to occur	Ecosystem projects that benefit industries that are reliant on natural resources: fisheries, maritime, tourism, outdoor recreation, etc.
	Conduct community resilience training programs	
	Projects that invest in distressed communities, enhance community resilience	

Places

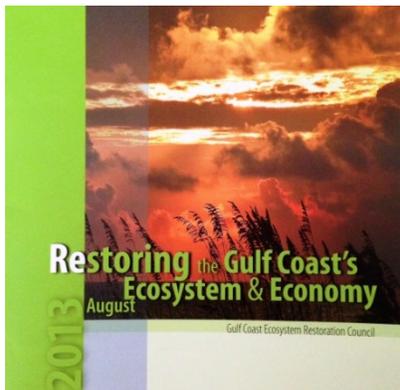
Vulnerable shorelines and coastal areas	Rivers, bays and estuaries	Marine environment	Barrier Islands	Critical Habitats
Build living shorelines	Secure freshwater inflows for the productivity of bays and estuaries	Restoration/ protection of marine environment/habitats	Barrier island restoration	Marsh and wetlands restoration
Beach and dune restoration	Build river diversions			Land acquisition
Restore and enhance natural protective systems/green infrastructure				Conservation easements
				Identify and prioritize high-quality land for conservation

Coastal and Marine Wildlife

Birds	Turtles	Marine Mammals	Fisheries	Other
Protection/enhancement of critical habitat/nesting areas	Protection/enhancement of critical habitat/nesting areas	Wildlife rescue and rehabilitation	Oyster reef restoration	Conduct monitoring and assessment of sentinel species
Wildlife rescue and rehabilitation	Wildlife rescue and rehabilitation		Frequent monitoring and data collection of fisheries	

Strategic habitat acquisition/management/protection	Strategic habitat acquisition/management/protection			
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RESTORE COUNCIL’S INCORPORATION OF PUBLIC INPUT



In 2012, the Council initiated a robust public engagement process to receive initial input from diverse voices from across the region. The Council hosted 14 public meetings with over 2,300 attendees and established a web presence to accept public comments. The Council received over 41,000 public comments on the Draft Initial Comprehensive Plan.

In the Plan, the Council makes several commitments related to decision-making that were widely reflected in the public input received, including:

- Commitment to science-based decision-making
- Commitment to a regional ecosystem-based approach
- Commitment to engagement, inclusion and transparency
- Commitment to leveraging resources and partnerships
- Commitment to delivering results and measuring impacts

The Plan did not include a project and program priority list that the Council will fund, referred to as the “Funded Priorities List” (FPL). The Council did not include this in the Initial Plan for several reasons. First, there is uncertainty related to the overall amount and availability of funds deposited in the Trust Fund. Second, the final procedures to guide Trust Fund expenditures had not yet been issued by the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

NEXT STEPS

In July 2014, the Council approved a proposal evaluation and selection process to select projects for inclusion on a draft FPL, which will be included as an addendum to the Initial Comprehensive Plan (approved in August 2013). This first FPL addendum will contain projects and programs that will be funded with available Transocean settlement funds. Future amendments to this FPL and the process by which projects are selected for inclusion will evolve over time as new information becomes available, adaptive management activities occur and as funding uncertainties are resolved. The Council anticipates that once the full amount ultimately to be paid into the Trust Fund is known,

future amendments to the FPL will include significantly larger projects and project lists that reflect the full amount available to be spent for restoration activities.

The Council will publish the process that will be used to vet and review projects online at www.restorethegulf.gov. All proposals submitted to the Council for consideration will be posted online.

Input regarding specific projects or priorities submitted to the Task Force or the Council in previous public meeting or commenting periods will be utilized to inform the development of the Draft FPL. The Council will review the recommendations made through the evaluation process and select proposals for funding to be included in the Draft FPL. The Council will publish for public review and comment that Draft FPL which will include projects and programs the Council intends to prioritize for funding.

At this time the Council will not be establishing a formal Science Advisory Board, though this option has not been ruled out for the future. The primary constraints associated with a formal board include: uncertainty regarding the ultimate value of funding available and the practical challenges of convening a board that is geographically diverse and contains the appropriate scientific expertise across multiple disciplines. In lieu of establishing a formal board, the Council has conducted or is committed to the following:

- Staff Science Coordinator position to facilitate coordination and collaboration across restoration processes and with science partners, including universities, agencies and nongovernmental organizations. On board since November 2014.
- Creation of an independent, external review panel for project proposals submitted to the Council. In the coming months, the Council will issue a call for volunteer external reviewers with scientific expertise to provide rigorous review of all projects that come before the Council for funding consideration.

Public engagement remains a key commitment of the Council throughout the process. The Council is committed to broad and diverse engagement from as many members of the public in the Gulf as possible.

At this time the Council will not be establishing a Citizens Advisory Committee. The Council is not precluding the establishment of a formal citizens advisory structure in the future, but, regardless of structure, the Council is committed to engaging the public to help shape our projects and future comprehensive plans.



Council members appreciate the time and effort of the many thousands of people who have provided their insight and expertise to inform restoration planning over the last four years. As we move closer to identifying projects for implementation, the Council commits to engaging and sharing information with the public and to articulate how that input informed final project decisions.

For more information about the RESTORE Council and its work, please visit www.restorethegulf.gov.

PHOTOGRAPHS ARE COURTESY OF THE FOLLOWING:

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