# Priority & Commitment To Plan Evaluation

## Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

**PROPOSAL TITLE**

Bahia Grande Coastal Corridor

**PROPORAL NUMBER**

TX-1

**LOCATION**

Adjacent to the Lagua Madre and between Bahia Grande and the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife refuge in South Texas

**SPONSOR(S)**

Texas

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

Implementation

**REVIEWED BY:**

Ebonye T. Allen

**DATE:**

4 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 Bahia Grande Coastal Corridor Project (BGCC) will help to complete a protected corridor linking the Laguna Madre region of the South Texas and Northern Mexico Gulf Coast. By acquiring approximately 6,000 acres of land using RESTORE Act funds, the project would add to a 105,000-acre corridor of conservation lands that includes the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Boca Chica State Park and the Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR. This corridor also connects over 2 million acres of private ranchland located north of Laguna Atascosa NWR with the 1.3 million acre Rio Bravo Protected Area, managed by the Commission Nacional De Areas Naturales Protegidas

## 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:

As indicated in the proposal, an acquisition of this scale and quality of habitat would make a contribution to protecting coastal natural resources. The proposed activities are leveraged by the fact that implementation completes a corridor directly connecting tens of thousands of acres for conservation. These conservation areas include beaches, dunes, lagoons, tidal wetland systems, transitional and upland habitats forming an ecosystem mosaic supporting diverse fish and wildlife communities in North America.

As stated in the proposal, the BGCC project would help to complete a protected corridor linking the Laguna Madre region

## 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:

As indicated in the proposal, the project managers are committed to making decisions about land acquisition and restoration on the basis of the best available science, including inventory, survey, GIS-derived projections about critical habitat and corridor functions, relative sea-level rise, land uses and demographics.

As stated in the proposal, the extent of success for protected areas to fulfill their roles and affect long-term species protection is dependent upon conservation planning, location consideration, size and connectivity (Margule and Pressey 2000). Larger and connected conservation areas are more likely to mitigate threats to habitat and sustain the species

### 2. Regional Ecosystem-based Approach to Restoration

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As indicated in the proposal, building a refuge system from a collection of disconnected parcels has necessitated strategic planning in the context of regional ecosystem goals and objectives. In the case of the South Texas refuges, this documentation exists. The tracts targeted for acquisition make strategic contributions to regional ecosystem goals and facilitate systemic landscape-scale restoration and management.

As stated in the proposal, the BGCC project is being proposed as an adaptation strategy to reduce long-term risks and

### 3. Engagement, Inclusion, and Transparency

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, the Bahia Grande is now managed as a unit of the Laguna Atascosa NWR. Starting in early 2001, citizen, conservation, and government groups met to devise strategies for restoring the Bahia Grande. Today, these groups form a community-based partnership that includes more than 65 governmental agencies, educational institutions, conservation organizations, commercial and recreational fishermen, private landowners, corporations and foundations. As stated in the proposal, this collaboration has accomplished one of the largest coastal habitat restoration projects in the United States and has drawn national attention to the cooperative, community-based efforts of public and

### 4. Leveraging Resources and Partnerships

◉ YES ◯ NO ◯ Not articulated

Notes:

See Section D.3 of this form.

As stated in the proposal, it is the intent of the BGCC partners to seek additional funding to secure protection of additional private lands within the corridor leveraging RESTORE dollars with contributions from other non-profits, foundations, communities and private organizations.

### 5. Delivering Results and Measuring Impacts

◉ YES ◯ NO

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, the BGCC project is being proposed as an adaptation strategy to reduce long-term risks and uncertainties. Scenarios of land-use change, climate change, and sea-level rise are incorporated into the proposal to minimize the impacts of potentially foreseeable threats to the sustainability of the proposed land conservation investment. Desired future conditions in the BGCC would include increasing populations of estuarine and fresh marsh environments that provide historic levels of nursery habitat for commercially and recreationally important fisheries species, as well as improved habitat for shorebirds, wading birds and waterfowl. These desired future conditions will help meet habitat

## 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:

As stated in the proposal, once acquisition of lands is completed, Inventory and Monitoring (I&M) plans will be written and implemented so that restoration prescriptions can be monitored for effectiveness. The number of acres purchased through this project proposal will be important as a basis for supporting biological outcomes including:

- Nest production of colonial nesting waterbirds.
- Number of nesting pairs of northern aplomado falcons.
- Safe corridor for ocelots as documented by camera trapping

## 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:

As stated in the proposal, the extent of success for protected areas to fulfill their roles and affect long-term species protection is dependent upon conservation planning, location consideration, size and connectivity (Margule and Pressey 2000). Larger and connected conservation areas are more likely to mitigate threats to habitat and sustain the species they were intended to protect. The BGCC includes over 15,000 acres of unprotected habitat. TPWD, USFWS, The Nature Conservancy and The Conservation Fund have identified multiple parcels with willing sellers totaling over 10,000 acres as high priorities for acquisition. This proposal will target 6,100 acres for acquisition from willing sellers, either

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

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As indicated in the proposal, ownership of subject tracts by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the Nature Conservancy will assure long-term stewardship for sustaining healthy coastal habitats.

As stated in the proposal, actions proposed to accomplish post-acquisition restoration include:

• Restore natural tidal hydrology by completing internal basin connections;

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

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, the BGCC project is being proposed as an adaptation strategy to reduce long-term risks and uncertainties. Scenarios of land-use change, climate change, and sea-level rise are incorporated into the proposal to minimize the impacts of potentially foreseeable threats to the sustainability of the proposed land conservation investments. In addition, because of the leveraged partnerships and commitments of stewardship by USFWS and TNC, the proposed project's likehood of success increases.

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:

As stated in the proposal, South Texas is a world-renowned birding destination, which brings millions of dollars to the South Texas tourism economy. The Bahia Grande landscape has unobstructed views of coastal marsh, prairie and lomas. The large scale and accessibility of this landscape make it suitable for hunting, fishing, kayaking and nature observation.
According to Woosnam et. al. (2011), "Direct economic contribution from [Rio Grande Valley] nature tourism led to a total county-level economic output of $344.4 million and 4,407 full and part-time jobs annually. This total contribution includes a $179.4 million contribution to gross regional product and a $110.1 million contribution to labor income across the region.