Priority & Commitment To Plan Evaluation

Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

PROPOSAL TITLE

Texas Coast Migratory and Shore Bird Habitat Restoration

PROPORAL NUMBER

USDA-1

LOCATION

Texas Coast - involving Gulf Coast Prairie to Gulf saline Gulf Prairie common resource area, 32 counties, spanning 621 miles

SPONSOR(S)

Department of Agriculture

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

Planning/Technical Assistance/Implementation

REVIEWED BY:

Ebonye T. Allen

DATE:

12 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:

USDA is seeking funds to restore and enhance migratory and shore bird habitat on private lands along the 621 miles of Texas coast. This would be done through a leveraged partnership with private landowners, local organizations, as well as state and federal agencies. The sponsor anticipates there would be secondary positive effects including improved water quality; enhanced community resilience related to better flood control, drought tolerance, decreased wildfire risk, and reduced storm damage; and a revitalized economy related to productive fisheries, ranching, natural resources-dependent tourism, and various indirect industry and related local jobs.

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:

This proposal covers the 621 miles of Texas coast, involving 32 counties. According to the sponsor, the actions in the proposal would support existing state comprehensive gulf coast plans. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), city governments, state agencies and federal agencies would be involved in the proposed activities. The sponsor anticipates there would be primary benefits to migratory and shore bird habitat and secondary benefits to water quality, community resilience, recreation, and the economy.

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:

According to the submission, the collaborative involvement of a wide array of stakeholders in the implementation of this proposed activity would help ensure that the best available science is used.

2. Regional Ecosystem-based Approach to Restoration

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The proposed activity would cover the 621 miles of Texas coast, involving 32 counties and a land area which empties into 8 major bays and estuaries.

3. Engagement, Inclusion, and Transparency

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The proposed project would involve a USDA team with representatives from the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, Soil And Water Conservation Districts, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program, Oaks and Prairies Joint Ventures, The Nature Conservancy, United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), City of Rockport, Armand Bayou Nature Center, City of McAllen, Valley Nature Center, World Birding Center, and the Audubon Society. All partners in the proposal would conduct outreach by holding public meetings, workshops and training as needed throughout duration of the project.

4. Leveraging Resources and Partnerships

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

As stated in the proposal, the requested funds would be leveraged with $17,781,522 million from agency and partner funds to provide for a $32,994,722 million total project cost over 5 years. This does not include in-kind contributions by parties which would be involved in this project. The sponsor estimates that if these in-kind contributions were added, the total amount spent on this project could be from $38 to $42 million.

5. Delivering Results and Measuring Impacts

(●) YES ( ) NO

Notes:

USDA has a record of implementing the types of activities contained in this submission. The proposed project is designed to provide quick local delivery of program benefits on private lands. As described below, the submission includes a discussion of monitoring activities to measure the benefits of this proposed project.

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, the FWS has ongoing Whooping Crane monitoring that would be used as a gauge for crane populations. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) would expand their statewide monitoring of bird populations to monitor migratory and shore bird populations. Current methods used by TPWD would be used to monitor trends and correlations to habitat restoration during the span of this proposal. FWS also has ongoing monitoring of piping plover.

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 has a long-term goal of instilling conservation and stewardship knowledge and commitment in landowners. Educational benefits of this submission could also extend to schools, cities, municipalities and the general public.

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

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The use of easements in the proposed habitat restoration efforts would provide permanent or long-term benefits. The sponsor estimates that close to 5,000 acres in easements would be in place along the coast if the proposal is funded.

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

(●) YES ( ) NO ( ) Not articulated

Notes:

The sponsor asserts that the coordination and collaboration among all of the proposed partners would help ensure the success of this project. The sponsor has also indicated that the proposed system of delivering benefits has a long track record of effectiveness. Delivery of technical and financial assistance directly to the local level has been the focal point of USDA's work with the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and Soil and Water Conservation Districts for the past 78 years.

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 noted above, the proposed project could restore and enhance coastal habitat, while benefiting water quality, community resilience, and the economy.