SCIENCE EVALUATION

Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

PROPOSAL TITLE

Texas Coast Migratory and Shore Bird Habitat Restoration

LOCATION

32 counties along entire Texas Coast

SPONSOR(S)

USDA

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

Planning, Technical Assistance, Implementation

REVIEWED BY:

DATE: 1/12/15

Best Available Science:

These 6 factors/elements help frame the reviewers answers to A, B and C found in next section:

1. Have the proposal objectives, including methods used, been justified using peer reviewed and/or publicly available information?

- ○ YES
- ○ NO
- ◉ NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

The proposal does not explicitly describe peer-reviewed or other information to support the objectives or methods. The proposal consists of several subproposals, most of which describe existing or ongoing federal, state, and nonprofit programs which will leverage funding. There is little justification or science-based evidence provided to support these projects; however, because the programs involved (e.g., NRCS Farm Bill program, Joint Venture habitat restoration programs, TNC prairie restoration, USFWS Coastal Program, Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, Conservation Bend Bays and Estuaries Program, etc.) are well established, successful, with well documented habitat conservation benefits, it could be assumed that the habitat restoration/preservation activities described in these proposals has been justified using peer-reviewed or publicly available information.

2. If information supporting the proposal does not directly pertain to the Gulf Coast region, are applicant's methods reasonably supported and adaptable to that geographic area?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

3. Are the literature sources used to support the proposal accurately and completely cited?

- ( ) YES
- ( ) NO
- (●) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

Although there are 19 literature sources provided in the references, only 1 is cited in the text, so it is difficult to determine if they are used accurately.

4. Are the literature sources represented in a fair and unbiased manner?

- ( ) YES
- ( ) NO
- (●) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

It is difficult to determine if the information sources are fair and unbiased, because it is not clear due to lack of citations in the text to what part of the proposal they refer. Some of the citations are for peer-reviewed scientific articles.

5. Does the proposal evaluate uncertainties and risks in the scientific basis for the proposal, including any identified by the public and Council members?

- ( ) YES
- (●) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

The proposal does not explicitly consider uncertainties and risks. Due to the fact that most of the projects included in the proposal are ongoing efforts under well-established conservation programs, it is likely that uncertainty and risk have already been considered within the scope of the individual conservation program. However, there is additional potential for risk and uncertainty in the assumption that leveraging among several different programs will result in a greater overall conservation impact. Integrating many conservation efforts over multiple agencies and programs requires additional levels of project coordination and oversight that increase risk and uncertainty. This has not been addressed in the proposal.

6. Does the proposal evaluate uncertainties and risks in achieving its objectives over time? (e.g., is there an uncertainty or risk that in 5-10 years the project/program will be obsolete or not function as planned given projections of sea level rise?)

- ○ YES
- ◉ NO
- ○ NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

The proposal does not consider the risk or uncertainty in achieving objectives over time. The proposal states an anticipated project lifespan of 10-20+ years, which reflects the time interval of conservation agreements. Most of the projects described in the proposal are ongoing efforts under existing state, federal, or non-profit organization programs; therefore, there is the expectation that these programs will continue to function as planned for the project lifespan. However, for some local-scale projects (such as those identified under the Texas Parks and Wildlife Urban Conservation program) there might be a greater

Based on the answers to the previous 6 questions, and giving deference to the sponsor to provide within reason the use of best available science the following three questions can be answered:

A. Has the applicant made a reasonable determination that the proposal is based on science that uses peer-reviewed and publicly available data?

- ○ YES
- ○ NO
- ◉ NEED MORE INFORMATION

Information Needed:

Although the proposal involves existing state, federal, and nonprofit conservation programs, no information is provided to assess if the projects described in the proposal are based on science.

B. Has the applicant made a reasonable determination that the proposal is based on science that maximizes the quality, objectivity, and integrity of information (including, as applicable, statistical information)?

- ○ YES
- ○ NO
- ◉ NEED MORE INFORMATION

Information Needed:

The proposal does not provide information on the scientific basis for the projects described.

C. Has the applicant made a reasonable determination that the proposal is based on science that clearly documents and communicates risks and uncertainties in the scientific basis for such projects?

- ○ YES
- ○ NO
- ◉ NEED MORE INFORMATION

Information Needed:

Science Context Evaluation

A. Have other methods been discussed and reasons provided to why the method is being selected (e.g., scientifically sound; cost-effectiveness)?

No, but the methods proposed are those that have been developed for use in well established state, federal, and nonprofit organization conservation programs. Although other methods

B. Has your agency/vendor/project manager conducted a project/program like the one proposed?

Yes.

C. Is there a risk mitigation plan in place for project objectives? (captures risk measures as defined under best available science by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

No, the proposal does not mention a risk mitigation plan. The individual conservation programs involved in the proposal may have their own risk mitigation plans in place, but there is no information provided in the proposal. The proposal assumes that risk of failure is minimal due to the well-established delivery system of coordinated conservation efforts in Texas.

D. Does the project/program consider consequences with implementation? (captures risk measures as defined under best available science by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

The proposal does not discuss any consequences of implementation; however, all of the conservation activities proposed under these projects are part of existing conservation programs, so it is likely that the consequences of implementation have been considered, at least within the scope of individual programs.

E. Does the project/program have clearly defined goals?

There are clearly defined goals; however, it is not clear from the proposal how each individual project contributes to the overall goals of the proposal. Also, the proposal does not explicitly tie the proposal goals to those of the Comprehensive Plan.

F. Does the project/program have clearly defined objectives?

Yes, there are 2 clearly defined objectives; however, these objectives do not have measurable attributes, and do not appear to be directly related to the goals or expected outcomes. The "Expected Outcomes" listed in the proposal are measureable, and are more closely linked to the objectives of the Comprehensive Plan.

G. Does the project/program have measures of success? (captures statistical information requirement as defined by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

Yes, the "Expected Outcomes" reflect measures of success in meeting the goals of the projects. These outcomes are specific, measurable, and clearly relate to the Comprehensive Plan goals of "Restore Habitat" and "Improve Water Quality." It is not clear what the expected outcome "Improved contact recreation in and along the Texas Coast" refers to.

H. Is a monitoring program in place to determine project goals, success and help adaptive management (if applicable)? (captures statistical information requirement as defined by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

The proposal describes two existing monitoring efforts for grassland birds and T&E species, with an expansion of one survey to include part of the project area. However, it is not clear how the data would be used to evaluate success or adapt the projects. The proposal also describes a partner technical team that will meet once a year to review project progress, share data and coordinate and implement changes.

I. Does the project/program consider recent and/or relevant information? (captures statistical information requirement as defined by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

Yes, the partnerships and projects described in this proposal appear to be recently created, with some existing projects in place at the current time of the proposal. Budgets described in the proposal appear to be current and up to date. The proposal appears to include relevant information on available properties for acquisition or easement.

J. Has the project/program evaluated past successes and failures of similar efforts? (captures the communication of risks and uncertainties in the scientific basis for such projects as defined by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

The proposal describes a successful conservation delivery system that will be used by NRCS to implement habitat restoration projects on private lands. The proposal also describes successful implementation of management actions under the Coastal Waterbird Management Program, and a successful pilot project to facilitate the production and distribution of native grass seed. There is no discussion of failures of similar efforts.

Please summarize any additional information needed below: