

June 2018

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
(cc/Ken Wagner)
500 Poydras Street, Suite 1117
New Orleans, LA 70130

Dear Council Members:

Over time, our organizations have advocated for coordinated, science-based, and large-scale restoration of the Gulf of Mexico. The RESTORE Council has made important commitments toward that end in the 2016 Updated Comprehensive Plan. As the RESTORE Council embarks on the early planning stages for the third Funded Priorities List, we offer the following thoughts regarding high-priority activities to ensure that the next FPL includes the best investments to advance ecosystem restoration goals. We believe that implementing these activities, as well as other proactive efforts described below, will help ensure that restoration efforts are strategic, maximizing the opportunity that the settlement affords.

On behalf of our members across the Gulf Coast and around the nation, we thank you for the work you have done so far and urge you to prioritize the actions below. Our organizations have worked for years to serve as good partners to the RESTORE Council, and we are eager to continue to make progress together.

We believe there are several key elements that if incorporated by the Council will strengthen the next FPL. These include:

Prioritize Ecosystem Needs & Stressors:

- Identify priority watersheds/estuaries based on ecological importance, level of threat/stressors, opportunity for meaningful restoration, and public support.
- Identify underlying stressors and most pressing ecosystem needs within a given watershed/estuary and develop restoration strategies to meet those needs first (pulling from applicable existing plans when the stressors and restoration needs have already been identified).
- Consider project synergies and interactions, as well as intended uses of other restoration funding streams, to inform project sequencing and identify leveraging opportunities; and
- Adhere to the RESTORE Act's prioritization of large-scale projects, including the expressed need to maximize use of available resources for these larger investments and the greater environmental benefits they are expected to produce. This is particularly important in light of the series of severe storms that hit Gulf Coast communities in the fall of 2017, as large nature-based projects can play an important role in coastal resilience.

Proposal Development and Review:

- Update the RESTORE Council proposal submission guidelines. Updated guidelines should help illuminate how proposals meet the RESTORE Act priority criteria, fulfill Comprehensive Plan objectives, and contribute to lasting ecosystem benefits. We encourage opportunities for public input in the development of these guidelines.
- Implement the Comprehensive Plan commitment to update and strengthen the science review processes (e.g., updating science review questions, reconciling reviewer comments, etc.).
- Provide forums for public input regarding ecosystem needs and priorities, as well as specific project ideas.
- Develop shared priorities across federal agencies and states, with the aim of developing more coordinated and joint proposals. We encourage Council members to identify opportunities to leverage federal agency expertise and strengths in service of on-the-ground priorities.

Project Implementation:

- Identify approaches for improving the regulatory efficiency of project review and permitting - while maintaining the integrity of environmental safeguards - and then develop follow up actions.
- Develop and/or reinforce processes to identify shared monitoring indicators and tools to track regional cumulative effects of restoration across programs and projects.
- Continue to explore creative financing approaches to allow for acceleration of restoration efforts with RESTORE Act funds.

We applaud the Council's commitment to collaboration in the Updated Comprehensive Plan, and we look forward to additional public engagement opportunities in advance of the next Funded Priorities List. We hope that many of the above ideas can be implemented through the course of meaningful collaboration activities and proposal development. We stand ready to assist the RESTORE Council members and staff as they move toward the next FPL.

Sincerely,

Alabama Coastal Foundation

America's WETLAND Foundation

Audubon Florida

Audubon Louisiana

Houston Audubon

Houston Wilderness

Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation

Land Trust for Louisiana

Audubon Mississippi	Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain
Audubon Texas	Louisiana Wildlife Federation
Bayou City Waterkeeper	Mississippi Wildlife Federation
Birmingham Audubon	Mobile Baykeeper
Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana	National Audubon Society
Coastal Conservation Association - Mississippi	National Wildlife Federation
Conservation Alabama Foundation	North Gulfport Community Land Trust
Environmental Defense Fund	Ocean Conservancy
Florida Wildlife Federation	Steps Coalition
Galveston Bay Foundation	Texas Conservation Alliance
Greater New Orleans, Inc.	The Nature Conservancy
Gulf Islands Conservancy, Inc.	Turtle Island Restoration Network
Gulf Restoration Network	