

ALABAMA EARLY NRDA PROJECT PROPOSAL EVALUATION

Positive:

- * The loss of habitat in some areas, the impacts to water quality and, most importantly for Alabama, the loss of use and enjoyment of public resources are significant losses that must be addressed. Each of the supported projects specifically addresses one of these particular impacts.
- * Living reef projects, land acquisition, and projects related to stormwater improvements are favored because they address injuries that have either occurred as a result of the *Deepwater Horizon* oil disaster, or as a result of long-term stressors, including commercial fishing, shipping, industrial activity, and storm damage. These projects offer a replacement of lost use – fishing, swimming, etc. – and water quality improvements.
- * Many projects propose use of funds for land acquisition, which provides long-term protection and possible restoration/education opportunities for the future. Acquisition of properties should be placed as a priority for NRDA funding in Alabama, because setting land aside for protection is an excellent way to preserve equivalent resources to those lost.
- * Projects that include broad partnerships to ensure the spirit of cooperation and teamwork that either continues or grows post oil disaster are favored.

Issues of Concern:

- * Most, if not all, projects proposed in Alabama lacked a monitoring or evaluation plan.
- * Most, if not all, proposed projects lacked a bilingual training component.
- * Few proposed projects deal directly with education, although there are a handful of proposals for educational/environmental centers. Some proposed projects provide educational signage and materials, as well as the potential to host student groups for alternative extra-classroom lessons, while others outline specific ways to educate the community on the importance of the Gulf of Mexico and Alabama's coastal environment. The Alabama project reviewers support education projects as an excellent means to address why there are impacts, the importance of assessing and protecting our critically important natural resources.
- * It is imperative that projects incorporate impacted communities in their hiring and or job training.
- * Projects that promote updates to water treatment systems, improve water quality, and result in a direct nexus to damage from the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill should be given priority.

Recommended Proposals:

Projects focused on Habitat Creation and Water Quality Improvement Projects that have environmental, economic, and water quality benefits for the Alabama coast should be prioritized. For example, the oyster reefs installed as a part of “100-1000 Restore Coastal Alabama” project addressed damage done to the shoreline and coastal fisheries by both the oil disaster and years of storm damage and industry impacts. A firm grounding in science, carefully selected project sites and numerous partnerships with public agencies,

nonprofit organizations, and independent businesses strengthened these projects. Below is a list of all “100-1000”-style projects submitted for early restoration NRDA funding that scored favorably under our criteria. Projects are not listed in any particular order.

- * 100-1000: Restore Coastal Alabama
- * Western Mobile Bay and Portersville Bay Coastal Resiliency and Habitat Restoration (100-1000)
- * Grand Bay Coastal Resiliency and Habitat Restoration (100-1000)
- * Town of Perdido Beach Shoreline Restoration Project
- * Shoreline Restoration near Skunk Bayou
- * Eastern Mobile Bay and Bon Secour Bay Coastal Resiliency and Habitat Restoration (100-1000)
- * Fairhope Beach Shoreline Enhancement & Water Quality Project
- * Shell Belt Road and Coden Belt Road Shoreline Restoration and Preservation
- * Dauphin Island Parkway, Bayfront Park, and Heron Bay Cut-Off Shoreline and Habitat Restoration and Public Access Enhancements
- * Coastal Alabama Habitat Restoration – Portersville Bay Islands
- * Dauphin Island Salt Marsh, Finfish and Shellfish Habitat Restoration
- * Coastal Alabama Habitat Restoration – Arlington Cove Project, Mobile
- * BayWinds Living Shoreline

Mobile Causeway Hydrologic Restoration Project – Mobile and Baldwin Counties

This project proposes to restore historic hydrologic connectivity between the Mobile/Tensaw Delta and Mobile Bay. Reconnecting the tidal exchange will ensure the productivity of the estuary. The exchange will have significant ecological benefits to the water, flora and fauna that live within Alabama’s significant estuary, all of which were impacted by the *Deepwater Horizon* oil disaster. While this project resolves an historic problem, addressing upstream and downstream modifications that have altered ecological productivity can create habitat for brown pelicans and other wildlife significantly impacted by the oil spill. This hydrologic restoration will also create high paying technical and construction jobs.

Land Acquisition

Land acquisition projects received favorable scores from the Alabama reviewers for early restoration NRDA funding. Land acquisition is an excellent strategy for protecting vital habitats, restoring damaged ecosystems, and preventing the further loss or degradation of ecologically sensitive lands. The reviewed land acquisition projects, in no particular order, are:

- * Coastal Land Acquisition in Alabama – Mobile and Baldwin Counties
- * Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge
- * Property Acquisitions for Protecting Big Creek Lake/Converse Reservoir
- * City of Spanish Fort Land Acquisition Project
- * Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge
- * Fly Creek Restoration
- * Acquisition of Wetlands for Habitat Enhancement and Public Access for the City of Satsuma

- * Swift Tract Addition- A Resource Protection Project
- * Headwaters Coastal Forest Protection
- * Andrew Benton Tract – Protection and Restoration of Coastal Alabama – A Coastal Resource Recovery Land Acquisition Project
- * Meadows Addition—A Resource Protection Project
- * Dauphin Island Eco-Tourism & Environment Education Area
- * Land Expansion for Foley’s Graham Creek Nature Preserve
- * Gulf Highlands/Gulf Shores AL Public Beach
- * Wolf Bay Wetland Nature Preserve A Coastal Resource Recovery Land Acquisition Project

Habitat Restoration Projects

Projects that include plans to restore acquired lands, or have the potential for future restoration also received positive reviews. For example, the “Alabama Coastal Forest Restoration Project” aims to conserve longleaf pine forest. Additionally, this project will work with private landowners/managers and public partners to create effective restoration strategies. Other restoration projects that were scored favorably by the Alabama reviewers, in no particular order, are:

- * Safe Harbor Marsh Restoration
- * Shoreline Restoration near Skunk Bayou
- * Island Wildlife Habitat Enhancement
- * Magnolia Springs Habitat Restoration
- * Andrew Benton Tract- Protection and Restoration of Coastal Alabama - A Coastal Resource Recovery Land Acquisition Project
- * Dauphin Island Eco-Tourism and Environment Education Area
- * Restoration of the Former Ziebach WWTF Property Near Mobile Bay

Alabama Oyster Shell Recycling Program – Mobile and Baldwin Counties

The Alabama reviewers believe there is a direct nexus between local businesses and restaurants affected by the oil disaster and this proposed restoration project, for two main reasons. First, this project will engage local businesses in environmental education, provide opportunities for summer jobs/internships for young people, and enlist those businesses and students in the job of teaching a broad population about the importance of oysters, environmental protection and restoration. Oyster shell recycling will connect people to the resource, thus strengthening their knowledge of their relationship with the environment. The second valuable rationale is that creating a system to take precious oyster shells out of landfills and putting them back into the environment facilitates habitat restoration and water quality improvements.

Water Quality Improvement Projects

Projects that address storm water and other water quality issues were scored favorably by the Alabama reviewers. Water Quality projects reduce ongoing impacts to the water flows and chemistry that can impair the functioning of natural ecosystems. The *Deepwater Horizon* oil disaster exposed coastal waters to hydrocarbons and reduced oxygen levels due to increased microbial productivity. This, in turn, has had some negative impacts on water quality, although as yet fully undetermined. Additionally, the

loss of fishing, swimming and pure enjoyment of both the beaches and Mobile Bay requires a response through restoration. Restoring natural flows of clean water into the estuaries will aid the productivity and resilience of coastal ecosystems impacted by toxic hydrocarbons and persistent dispersants. Improving water quality and clarity by addressing storm water problems will improve access to our waterways for fishing, swimming and enjoyment.

These projects have a lot of potential to produce living-wage jobs and job training, as many existing water quality workers in the coastal Alabama region are set to retire. The following is a list of projects that received positive review (in no particular order).

- * Map City of Mobile Drainage Systems
- * The Renovation of Mobile, Alabama's Antiquated Storm Water Treatment Methods to Meet Modern EPA standards
- * Safe Harbor Marsh Restoration
- * Magnolia Springs Habitat Restoration
- * Perdido Watershed Water Quality Improvement
- * Fly Creek Restoration
- * Fairhope Beach Shoreline Enhancement & Water Quality Project
- * Reconstruct Dauphin Street (Fulton Street to Broad Street)
- * Reconstruct Old Shell Road Multiple Phases 1) East of I-65 to Catherine St.; 2) West of I-65 to University
- * Reconstruct US-90 (Government St.) Multiple Sections (1) 0.53 miles – Pinehill to Dauphin Island Pkwy, (2) 1.42 miles – West St. to Broad St., 3) 0.93 miles Broad St. to Water St.
- * Little Stickney Drainage Repair/Update
- * Drainage Improvements in the Southern Drain Watershed
- * Three Mile Creek Repair/Maintenance

D'Olive Creek Watershed Restoration

The streams included within the D'Olive Watershed have been impaired for decades, suffering in particular from excessive erosion and sedimentation. Sedimentation inhibits photosynthesis in the water column and in submerged vegetation, which has ecological impacts downstream. This project will restore natural hydrology, stabilize stream banks, and provide habitat for wildlife impacted by the oil spill.

Additionally, this project is included within the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program's Watershed Management Plan.

Increasing Research Capacity In Alabama Coastal Waters

Projects that increase monitoring and research capacity in the coastal waters of Alabama were also favorably reviewed. For example construction of a laboratory at the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve would support coastal and estuarine science, enable research and monitoring, and support future resource recovery activities. The goal of this project is to protect and restore the natural resources of coastal Alabama. Partner organizations in the Weeks Bay community would contribute to the operation of the lab. Initiatives such as this increase the research and monitoring capacity in the Bay as well as enable nonprofits, government agencies, and other organizations to work more efficiently towards caring for the health and sustainability of our estuarine and marine resources.

Three more projects (listed in no particular order) also seek to increase the monitoring and research capacity of groups working in the Mobile Bay and coastal Alabama areas. Therefore, these projects were scored favorably by the Alabama reviewers:

- * Fisheries Oceanography of Coastal Alabama (FOCAL)
- * Water Quality Monitoring for Protecting Fish and Shellfish Resources in South Mobile County
- * Informed Restoration: Assessing the uptake of Deepwater Horizon-derived heavy metals and organic contaminants by coastal molluscan species in the Gulf of Mexico

Educational Centers, Programs, and Signage

Several promising projects have been proposed which aim to create environmental education centers, training programs, or the introduction of passive educational/informative signage to restoration sites or protected lands. We highlight several of these projects (listed in no particular order, also merit consideration for early NRDA funding because they would increase public knowledge and appreciation of the importance of our estuarine and marine resources:

- * Visitors Center at Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge
- * Dauphin Island Eco-Tourism and Environment Education Area
- * 100-1000: Restore Coastal Alabama--Community Outreach and Education
- * Island Wildlife Habitat Enhancement

Projects Aimed at Addressing Loss of Human Use:

A handful of projects focused on loss of human use of resources have been submitted for Mobile and Baldwin Counties, Alabama. Many of them involve increasing access to public beaches, public waterways, and state and national parks. Listed below are a few projects (in no particular order) that were favorably scored by the Alabama reviewers:

- * Dauphin Island Parkway, Bayfront Park, and Heron Bay Cut-Off Shoreline and Habitat Restoration and Public Access Enhancements
- * Dog River Scenic Blueway – Put-in/Take-out Canoe/Kayak Launch Sites
- * Dauphin Island Causeway Habitat Restoration and Public Access
- * Acquisition of Wetlands for Habitat enhancement and public access for the City of Satsuma
- * Bicycling Trail Connecting Foley to the Graham Creek Nature Preserve
- * Fly Creek Restoration
- * Gulf Highlands/Gulf Shores AL Public Beach
- * Access Road and Trails for Foley's Graham Creek Nature Preserve
- * Nearshore and Snorkeling Reef Project

Several other proposed projects would be more favorably scored by the Alabama reviewers if they were modified so that the focus was not on creating more parking structures, etc., but rather on opening up more natural places to human enjoyment, in the spirit of promoting appreciation for the environment.

Inappropriate Proposals:

Construction/Reparation of Police Headquarters and Fire Stations – These types of

projects do not meet any of the criteria for NRDA funding.

Parking Structures—Although projects aimed at increasing public access to beaches and other coastal habitat are appropriate, a parking structure is neither necessary nor an appropriate project substitute for loss of use. The projects discussed above better meet the NRDA and Framework Agreement criteria for loss of use, as well as the needs of coastal Alabama communities.

Conclusions:

One hundred and twenty-seven (127) projects listed as early restoration NRDA proposals in both Mobile and Baldwin Counties, Alabama, were reviewed for this report. Positive reviews were given for seven (7) overall themes or categories of projects and fifty (57) specific projects. Two projects reviewed were identified by the Alabama reviewers as totally inappropriate for NRDA funding, as they neither meet the criteria or the goals of resource restoration or access. Other proposed projects similar in nature to the two projects identified above as inappropriate projects would be equally inappropriate. We reviewed only a sample of all proposed projects for this evaluation. Projects not discussed in this evaluation did not provide enough information or were similar in nature to projects that were reviewed.