



Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
c/o U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Room 4077
Washington, DC 20230

June 24, 2013

Dear Secretary Blank:

The Steering Committees of the Peninsular Florida, South Atlantic, Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks, and Gulf Coast Prairie Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (Gulf LCCs) commend the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council for the development of the *Draft Initial Comprehensive Plan: Restoring the Gulf Coast's Ecosystem and Economy*. Through this plan, the Council provides a strong framework for restoring, protecting, and revitalizing the Gulf Coast region following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) are a national network of non-regulatory, public-private partnerships. The Gulf LCCs have established a geographically-broad partnership across the Southeast with a shared mission to define, design and deliver landscapes capable of sustaining natural and cultural resources at desired levels now and into the future (see Attachment 1). Through this partnership, we implement many activities to achieve this mission that are strongly aligned with the goals and objectives outlined in the Draft Comprehensive Plan (see Attachment 2).

The Draft Comprehensive Plan highlights the fact that Gulf Coast ecosystem restoration will require a long-term vision and multidisciplinary approach. It will involve not only identifying opportunities to restore ecosystems that provide critical ecological services, but strategies to ensure that those ecological services will persist given changing conditions. Climate change, sea level rise and other landscape scale challenges require innovative conservation strategies that reflect our best understanding of ecological vulnerabilities to changing conditions. The Gulf LCCs invested in the Gulf Coast Vulnerability Assessment and other ecological modeling efforts to identify resources that would be “at risk” under projected changes anticipated along the Gulf Coast. This is a vital first step towards a coordinated, science-based, proactive approach to effective conservation through adaptation. Therefore, we are encouraged by the inclusion of sustainability within the objectives of the Draft Comprehensive Plan as a critical element to restore the ecosystem and economy of the Gulf Coast region.

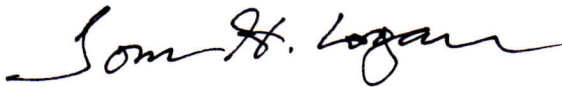
The Gulf LCCs work closely together to ensure their conservation plans will result in an ecologically-connected landscape conservation network. This requires considering both the coastal environment and the critical inland lands and waters that sustain them for a “white water to blue water” landscape approach. For example, the Gulf LCCs represent conservation partnerships that span large landscapes and major river systems important to the Gulf Coast, such as the Rio Grande, Mississippi River, the Mobile-Tensaw Delta, and Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin. Therefore, we are encouraged by the Council’s commitment to ecosystem-based and landscape-scale restoration and your recognition that upland, estuarine, and marine habitats are intrinsically connected.

We are also encouraged by the Council’s commitment to both science-based decision-making and measuring outcomes, which are the cornerstones of the LCC approach. Together, the Gulf LCCs work to develop and apply conservation science that incorporates the best available understanding of future change. As multidisciplinary, self-directed partnerships we provide a forum for leveraging resources and expertise to not only provide the best available conservation science, but also address critical science gaps

for conservation planning. Additionally, LCCs use an adaptive, science-based approach to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of scientific information and conservation to improve decision-making. For example, each of the Gulf LCCs is working with partners to select indicators and set conservation targets to define shared, measurable goals for sustainable fish, wildlife, and cultural resources.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input to the Draft Interim Comprehensive Restoration Plan. The Gulf LCCs are committed to a partnership approach to conservation in the Gulf Coast region and look forward to working with the Council.

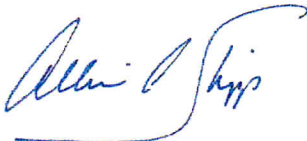
Sincerely,



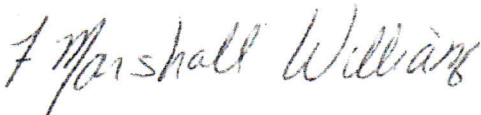
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Attachment 1: List of Gulf LCCs Steering Committee Organizations

Gulf Coastal Plains and Ozarks LCC

<http://gcpolcc.org/>

- Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- American Bird Conservancy
- Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
- Auburn University
- Ducks Unlimited
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
- Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
- Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks
- Mississippi State University
- Missouri Department of Conservation
- Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
- Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency
- Texas Parks & Wildlife Department
- National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- National Park Service
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. Geological Survey
- The Conservation Fund
- The Nature Conservancy

Gulf Coast Prairie LCC

<http://gulfcoastprairielcc.org/>

- Ducks Unlimited
- Gulf Coast Joint Venture
- Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
- National Park Service
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture
- Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
- Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership
- Rio Grande Joint Venture
- Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- The Conservation Fund
- The Nature Conservancy
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Geological Survey
- U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service

Peninsular Florida LCC

<http://peninsularfloralcc.org/>

- Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- Florida Farm Bureau
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Florida Forestry Association
- Florida Land Council
- Florida Natural Areas Inventory
- Florida Forest Service
- Florida Regional Planning Councils
- Florida Wildlife Federation
- Miccosukee Tribe
- National Park Service
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Private Sector Members At Large
- Seminole Tribe
- St John's River Water Management District
- South Florida Water Management District
- Southwest Florida Water Management District
- The Nature Conservancy
- U.S. Department of Defense
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. Geological Survey

South Atlantic LCC

<http://www.southatlanticlcc.org/>

- Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Georgia Department of Natural Resources
- National Park Service
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission
- South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
- South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
- The Nature Conservancy
- U.S. Department of Defense
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. Geological Survey
- Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

Attachment 2:**Example Gulf Coast LCC-led Efforts Supporting Gulf Coast Restoration and Conservation**

Project Title	Description	Key Project Partners with the Gulf LCCs
Gulf Coast Vulnerability Assessment	The GCVA will enhance conservation, restoration planning, and implementation by providing a better understanding of the potential range of effects of climate change, sea level rise, and land use change on Gulf of Mexico coastal ecosystems and their species.	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Gulf of Mexico Alliance, The Nature Conservancy, NOAA, and USGS.
Evaluation of Regional SLAMM Results to Establish a Consistent Framework of Data and Models and to Identify Critical Gaps for Evaluating Sea Level Rise Impacts to Coastal Marshes across the Gulf Coast.	The Sea Level Affecting Marshes Model (SLAMM) has been used in several projects along the Gulf Coast to model impacts to coastal marshes resulting from sea level rise (SLR). This project will synthesize, assess, and map the results from multiple modeling efforts for the Gulf Coast that can be used to characterize the impacts of SLR on coastal marshes.	Gulf of Mexico Alliance
Geospatial Vulnerability Analysis Tool: Gulf of Mexico Barrier Island System	This project will provide regionally comparable datasets that will be used to perform geospatial analysis to evaluate vulnerability of the Gulf of Mexico barrier island system. Available geospatial change analysis tools will be used with integrated physical and biological data sets to identify data gaps, characterize and map vulnerability variables, and develop an integrated set of data that can be used in decision support and visualization tools.	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Gulf of Mexico Alliance, The Nature Conservancy, NOAA, and USGS.
Southeast Urban Growth Modeling	This project will develop long term urbanization scenarios by expanding existing SLEUTH urban growth models. By understanding where urban growth is likely to occur under existing conditions, conservation and urban planners can develop better, more targeted strategies for land conservation.	DOI Southeast Climate Science Center
Conservation Planning Atlas	The Conservation Planning Atlas (CPA) is a science-based mapping platform where conservation managers can go to view, retrieve, and perform analyses on spatial information with specific conservation goals in mind. The CPA also allows its users to create groups of members from several organizations who may have the same conservation goals. Within a group, you can perform analyses, upload data, and share information for other group members to use.	Conservation Biology Institute, Data Basin
Southern Instream Flow Research Agenda	Flow alteration is identified by experts as one of the major threats facing aquatic habitats across the region. The importance of natural flow regimes to the ecological integrity of rivers has been established for decades, but more specific information is needed to develop and implement scientifically credible instream flow standards to protect our rivers.	Southeastern Aquatic Research Partnership

Example Gulf Coast LCC-led Efforts Supporting Gulf Coast Restoration and Conservation

Project Title	Description	Key Project Partners with the Gulf LCCs
Factors influencing autumn-winter distribution of dabbling ducks in the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways of North America	Changes in climate can influence availability of habitat and cause shifts in wildlife populations. A Weather Severity Index (WSI) to help explain weather-related duck migration will be used to estimate future distributions of duck populations given climate change scenarios.	Longpoint Waterfowl, University of Western Ontario
Climate change effects on fish and mussels in the ACF	Multi-scale modeling capabilities for forecasting climate change effects on stream fishes and mussels.	University of Georgia
Ecological implications of mangrove forest migration in the southeastern United States	Winter climate change has the potential to have a large impact on coastal wetlands in the southeastern U.S. Warmer winter temperatures and reductions in the intensity of freeze events would likely lead to mangrove forest range expansion and salt marsh displacement in parts of the U.S. Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic coast. The objective of the proposed research is to better evaluate the ecological implications of mangrove forest migration and salt marsh displacement.	USGS National Wetlands Research Center