

Florida Gulf of Mexico Restoration
Project Submittal Form

Project Name:

Southwest Florida Regional Land Acquisition Plan

Contact Information

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Project Location (include map, if possible, and the city, county, long/lat, and watershed)

The *Southwest Florida Regional Freshwater Flow Restoration Plan* includes 9 land acquisition projects, located in 5 counties stretching from Hillsborough County south to Lee County on Florida's west coast. The projects span the Tampa Bay, Sarasota Bay and Charlotte Harbor watersheds.

Project Description (describe all aspects of the project)

The *Southwest Florida Regional Freshwater Flow Restoration Plan* directly supports the State's Priority Area 2 (Community resilience/living shorelines), Priority area 3 (Water quality projects including those which achieve water quality benefits provided by the preservation of buffer lands around military bases) and Priority Area 5 (Fish and wildlife habitat and management).

Southwest Florida NEPs work with partners to develop continuous greenways and corridors to allow movement of people, animals and water.

Large, landscape scale connections improve wildlife and habitat diversity, foster natural freshwater distribution and assist with management. The photo of Babcock Ranch State Preserve below shows cypress sloughs, cypress domes and open water as components within a pine flatwood that has recently been managed with fire. Strategically placed land conservation

through acquisition of title or conservation easement coupled with restoration yield big rewards in water quality, wildlife diversity and tourism benefits.

Information on the location of individual projects included in the *Southwest Florida Regional Land Acquisition Plan* (with city/county, latitude and longitude) is included in the individual project descriptions from the *Southwest Florida Regional Ecosystem Restoration Plan* in the FDEP database. Project locations are shown on Map 2 (page 12) of the attached *Southwest Florida Regional Ecosystem Restoration Plan* (SWFRERP).

The *Southwest Florida Regional Land Acquisition Plan* includes 9 restoration projects, 7 of which are priority projects (listed on page 14 of the SWFRERP). The 9 projects are designed to "expand the network of state, federal and private conservation areas to ensure healthy landscapes that support the environment and culture of the region and the diverse services provided by the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem," as specified in the December 2011 *Gulf of Mexico Regional Ecosystem Restoration Strategy* and the January 2013 document, *The Path Forward to Restoring the Gulf Coast*. Combined these projects will result in more natural timing and distribution of freshwater flows into the Gulf of Mexico. Projects include:

- Filling key gaps to create continuous corridors which allow movement of people, animals and water.
- Protection of bay front estuarine, scrub and other natural habitats.
- Acquisition of an island.

Estimated Project Costs (describe the estimated costs of the project, including any assumptions for contingency and ongoing operations/maintenance. Identify other secured funding sources such as matching funds, in-kind contributions or state/federal dollars. In addition, if possible, complete and submit the Cost Appendix Sheet associated with this form):

Estimated needed total project costs for the 9 habitat restoration projects included in the *Southwest Florida Regional Land Acquisition Plan* is \$211,836,120 (see page 40 of the SWFRERP). Individual project descriptions include estimates of matching funds and other contributions.

Of the 9 proposals, the attached *Southwest Florida Regional Ecosystem Restoration Plan* identified 7 project priorities recommended for the first 3 years of the program (see page 14 of the SWFRERP). The requested amount of these projects in the first 3 years is \$123,899,730. However, the plan further suggests a cap of \$10,000,000 placed on each individual component project, or a first three year funding request of \$46,861,450.

Other funding (indicate if the project is submitted for any potential funding or if it may be used to leverage additional funding, of so please describe the funding source (e.g. State/Federal Grants):

None identified at this time.

Technical feasibility (describe the technologies involved and any relevant past experience or proven success with similar projects):

Acquisition of land is dependent on negotiations with existing property owners. Counties and cities employ techniques to keep costs down, including use of appraisals and timing.

Environmental Benefits (Describe the nature, magnitude, and timing of any environmental benefits attributable to the project. If possible, describe potential environmental performance measures [e.g. pollutant reduction]. Please address any potential environmental impacts associated with implementing or maintaining the project [e.g., loss of a habitat or conversion of habitat from one type to another during implementation]).

Environmental benefits resulting from the *Southwest Florida Regional Land Acquisition Plan* is estimated at **9,562 acres** (9,541 in 3 Year Priority projects and 111 additional acres in the 10 Year projects). Individual project descriptions include habitat restored and additional information on each (see FDEP database for individual project descriptions).

Economic and Social Benefits (describe the economic and social benefits including those related to the project's improved ecosystem services and any estimates on jobs created or preserved).

Tourism is the number one employer for many southwest Florida communities, accounting for 1 of every 5 jobs. Resources acquired become important tourism destinations.

Community Resilience (describe if the project assists Florida's ability to anticipate, withstand, or recover from hazards or threats [e.g. hurricane preparedness, establishing living shorelines]).

Flood protection, improved water quality, improved habitat within southwest Florida. Based on the ecosystem service values derived in Costanza et. Al. (1997), these acquisitions provide estimated yearly ecosystem services values of over \$65,000,000.

Conflicts or Complements to Existing Efforts (describe any ongoing activities in the project implementation area, if the project is part of another plan, and why the project does or does not interfere with that work. Please consider how the project may complement existing local, regional, and state efforts/plans/objectives).

Projects in the *Southwest Florida Regional Land Acquisition Plan* occur within one or more of the National Estuary Program boundaries (see Map 5 of the SWFRERP, page 34) can assist in implementing the NEPs federally-approved Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plans. The two Water Management Districts develop Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Plans, of which many of the projects would assist in implementing. In addition, all of these projects are elements of the *Southwest Florida Regional Ecosystem Restoration Plan*, adopted on March 8, 2013.

Complies with Federal, State, Local and Tribal Laws/Regulations (describe any concerns or potential conflicts).

This project helps to implement NEP Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plans.

Readiness for Implementation (describe if the project has had any design or permitting work started or completed [attach permits or design work]. Please address any issues that may delay start or finish of the project).

Land acquisition negotiations in an on-going process for many of the individual applicants and can proceed immediately.

Public Acceptance (describe any known or potential public approval or opposition to the project).

All projects contained in the *Southwest Florida Regional Ecosystem Restoration Plan*, including the 9 included in the *Southwest Florida Regional Land Acquisition Plan*, were reviewed and ranked through publicly-noticed meetings of a Work Group (January 28-29 and February 11, 2013), followed by a Joint NEP Management Board on Feb 20, 2013. The Joint NEP Policy Board, consisting of 39 elected officials, Water Management Governing Board members, and agency leads (listed on page 8 of the SWFRERP) approved the process and resulting plan on March 8, 2013. All meetings were noticed (1) in the Florida Administrative Register; (2) through direct notice to the three National Estuary Program Board members and all applicants; and (3) on the websites of the three NEPs.

Additional Information you may wish to provide (Please include any maps, designs, drawings, photos, or background resources that may assist in completely and accurately understanding the project):

Two documents are attached:

- Attachment 1- Map showing locations of the 9 projects included in the *Southwest Florida Regional Land Acquisition Plan*.
- Attachment 2- A listing of the 9 projects included in the *Southwest Florida Regional Land Acquisition Plan*.

The Southwest Florida Regional Ecosystem Restoration Plan (SWFRERP), approved by the Joint NEP Policy Board members on March 8, 2013 has been previously provided to FDEP.