



**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS 96TH AIR BASE WING (AFMC)
EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA**

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Randall D Rowland, Chief
Environmental Management Division
501 DeLeon Street, Suite 100
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Monica Medina
Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Oceans & Atmosphere
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Office of the Undersecretary/Administrator
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Rachel Jacobson
Acting Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C. Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Ms. Medina and Ms. Jacobson:

I am very pleased to write this letter of support for The Nature Conservancy's projects submitted to the State of Florida for consideration of funding through the early Natural Resource Damage Assessment funds arising as a result of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Specifically, we are supportive of the *Living Shoreline and Oyster Reef Restoration in Pensacola Bay* and the *Rattlesnake Bluff Road and Riverbank Restoration* projects. Both projects are either adjacent to or located on Eglin Air Force Base property.

Eglin Air Force Base enjoys a successful and longstanding relationship with the Conservancy and has sought their assistance on habitat restoration, species management and connectivity issues for nearly 20 years. Currently we at Eglin are working with partners to reduce road sediment from entering the Yellow River watershed. Unpaved roads like the Rattlesnake Bluff Road are the source of significant sedimentation entering the Yellow River, affecting not only the habitats and species in the river, but ultimately the health of estuary in the East Bay region of the greater Pensacola Bay. Most significantly, the sedimentation from these unpaved roads affect the critical habitat of the Gulf sturgeon, a species listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service. The entirety of Pensacola Bay and much of the Yellow River are considered critical habitat for the Gulf sturgeon. Any effort to restore these areas will benefit this species that may have been impacted by the oil spill.

The *Living Shoreline and Oyster Reef Restoration in Pensacola Bay* project is directly impacted by the unpaved roads mentioned above as part of the *Rattlesnake Bluff Road and Riverbank Restoration* project. The oyster reefs and salt marsh habitats and their associated species in Pensacola Bay have declined, due in part to this sedimentation pollution. Efforts to restore habitats in the East Bay area of Pensacola Bay would also need to address the sedimentation issues for project success. The *Living Shoreline and Oyster Reef Restoration in Pensacola Bay* project proposes building living shoreline to help protect the eroding shoreline and restore oyster reefs in the bay. The significant archaeological resources – a prehistoric shell midden site and a British Colonial homestead site from the 1760s – located along this fragile section of shoreline would directly benefit from construction of a living shoreline. The *Living Shoreline and Oyster Reef Restoration in Pensacola Bay* project, together with the *Rattlesnake Bluff Road and Riverbank Restoration* project, will enhance the Gulf's natural systems and species, historical resources and the community's livelihoods that revolve around clean water, fisheries and tourism.

Implementation of these important projects is contingent on funding. We look forward to assisting the Nature Conservancy on the *Rattlesnake Bluff Road and Riverbank Restoration* and *Living Shoreline and Oyster Reef Restoration in Pensacola Bay* projects and offer volunteer assistance by staff, and troops stationed at Eglin, to help implement these projects. In addition, we are ready to offer technical expertise and logistical support as needed.



RANDALL D. ROWLAND, GS-14
Chief, Environmental Management Division