



Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund (GEBF) Florida 2016 Project Pre-proposal

Project Title: West Bay Preservation (Phase I)

Project Location: Bay County Florida, West Bay Area, within St. Andrew Bay Watershed. Proposed protection and restoration activities on the site will be included in the updated SWIM plan.

Estimated Project Cost: \$2.5 million

Additional Funding Sources (anticipated source and amount, if applicable): Bay County- long term management and eventual installation of minimal public access features such as an elevated boardwalk along wetlands, interpretive nature trails, and a canoe/kayak launch.

Proposed Project Period: April 2016 – June 2018

Project Lead Agency/Organization:

ORGANIZATION	CONTACT	EMAIL and/or PHONE	ROLE
The Trust for Public Land (TPL)	Kate Brown, Senior Project Manager	Kate.Brown@tpl.org 850/661-2788	Will acquire from landowner; oversee restoration w/ FWC-DEP-Bay County; donate property to County
Bay County	Jim Muller, Bay County RESTORE Act Coordinator	www.baycountyfl.gov/restore 850/248-8253	Will work with TPL, the landowner, Bay County and DEP on coordinating restoration/management activities

Partner Organizations (if applicable): Bay County; Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; Florida Forest Service; Florida Department of Environmental Protection

Pre-proposal Project Narrative

- 1. Project Description:** *Please provide a brief narrative that outlines the conservation outcome(s) of the project and the proposed scope of work for achieving project outcome(s). Briefly describe how the expected outcome(s) will remedy harm to natural resources of a type affected by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, consistent with the conservation priorities for the GEBF (e.g., barrier islands, beach/dune habitat, coastal marsh, bays and estuaries, coastal and marine living resources).*

This proposal is for acquisition of a portion of the West Bay Preservation Area. There is the potential for future acquisition phases and restoration activities that would be submitted as separate project proposals.

The West Bay Preservation Area, added to the Florida Forever acquisition priority list in 2012 under the “Climate Change Lands” category, includes numerous wetlands and areas in commercial timber that are important for the health of West Bay and the St. Andrew Bay system. The land could also support low-impact public use, including hiking, biking, nature observation and paddle-craft launches.

Approximately 9,600 acres are already under a conservation easement, which will substantially reduce the eventual land acquisition cost for these acres. The conservation easement does not provide for public access. Another 4,500 acres are identified under the Florida Forever project as “Essential Parcels.” Restoration of the commercial timber areas, including bedded and ditched areas, will enhance the health of the bay system. Some restoration is already underway on the conservation easement areas.

Because the estimated cost to acquire both fee title to the 4,500 acres and the underlying fee to the 9,600 acres subject to the easement is expected to be substantial, this proposed acquisition of \$2.5 million will only be for a portion of the total property. TPL is presently working with the landowner, The St. Joe Company, to identify approximately \$2.5 million of property, and will have that configuration prior to the March 18, 2016 pre-approval submission date.

If this application is approved and funded, and the property acquired as proposed, TPL anticipates it will use this model to apply for a Phase II application in 2017.

- 2. Strategic Significance:** *Briefly describe the strategic significance and priority of the project, including how the project relates to established or emerging plans. In Florida, specifically identify connections between the project and the plans being considered as part of the state’s GEBF Restoration Strategy (visit “View a list of plans” at http://dep.state.fl.us/deepwaterhorizon/nfwf_projects.htm).*

Acquisition of the project area would contribute to the protection of the natural shoreline, water quality, and aquatic resources of West Bay as well as Crooked Creek and Burnt Mill Creek. The entire West Bay Preservation Area encompasses about 6 miles of frontage on West Bay and 1.7 miles on North Bay. It includes 6.1 miles of creek bank of Crooked and Burnt Mill Creeks. Both creeks are major sources of fresh water draining into West Bay, which is part of the St. Andrew Bay system. Protection of all the project lands, when added to the Panama City Airport Conservation



Easement and Breakfast Point Mitigation Bank lands, would preserve in natural condition a total of roughly 14.4 miles of the 30-mile West Bay shorefront.

About 40 percent of the project is in natural condition and the rest is in pine plantation. Most of the land in natural condition is concentrated near the coast and along the creek shores. The remainder is in inland freshwater wetlands and embedded pine plantation. Of the natural communities, salt marsh makes up the largest acreage. Extensive tidal flats are found in the upper portion of the salt marshes, and an approximately 100 foot wide band of seagrasses was observed in 2011 between Burnt Mill and Crooked Creeks. Archaeologically, there are 17 sites on the Florida Master Site File located within the entire project boundary.

Approximately 96 percent of the Florida Forever project area is habitat for between three and seven focal species (imperiled or rare wildlife). Approximately 60 percent of the West Bay Preservation Area lies within a designated FWC Species Habitat Conservation Area for the America swallow-tailed kite Coopers hawk, and Gulf salt marsh snake.

The Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Plan for the St. Andrew Bay watershed will be updated in the near future. The Northwest Florida Water Management District is coordinating the plan update, which is funded by the Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund. Given its proximity to the bay, its placement on the Florida Forever land acquisition list, and its potential to protect and enhance the water quality of the bay system, the West Bay Preservation Area land acquisition initiative is anticipated to be a major feature in the updated SWIM plan. Based on a recent brief analysis, the FWC Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Restoration Section stated that “Fee simple purchase of identified lands and management as natural habitats would provide for buffers against SLR [Sea Level Rise], allow migration of habitats in the face of predicted SLR, secure hydrologic connections from northern West Bay to upland habitats, and assist in retaining the estuarine nature of this system, among other ecologically important functions.”

- 3. Project Development Work Completed to Date:** *To the extent that preliminary planning or budgeting work for this project has been performed, please briefly describe that work and attach supporting documentation if available. If further planning and development work is required for certain components of the project, please describe the work needs to be performed and when that work is expected to be complete. If an Applicant is invited to submit a full proposal, that full proposal must reflect reasonable management plan, scope and cost certainties regarding the work to be performed. For projects that may require distinct steps to complete, NFWF encourages the submission of separate project proposals for one or more project components. These may include preliminary design, planning and development work needed to inform later project phases.*

The project area has been mapped and its natural and cultural resources thoroughly evaluated pursuant to its inclusion on the Florida Forever Acquisition Priority list in 2012. TPL is presently in discussions with the landowner, The St. Joe Company, to identify that portion of the overall project area that most effectively accomplishes the objectives of the GEBF and NFWF.

- 4. Supporting Material:** *In order to assist NFWF with scheduling and coordinating the required consultation and technical review activities should a full proposal be invited, please list any supporting materials that would be expected*



to be submitted at that time (e.g. engineering and design documents, construction plans and specifications, real estate appraisals, etc.).

Prior to the March 18, 2016 pre-approval submission by DEP to NFWF, TPL will provide mapping depicting the portions of the overall site proposed for this Phase I application. A preliminary map is attached showing the approximate area targeted for acquisition in red.

5. **Other (Optional):** *Provide any further information important for the review of this pre-proposal.*