



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

Project Title: Reclaim our Coasts (ROC): Increasing the quantity and quality of Florida's terrestrial and marine habitats for sea turtles

Project Location (include watershed, see <http://www.protectingourwater.org/watersheds/map/>):
Panhandle and west Peninsular coasts

Estimated Project Cost: \$250,000

Additional Funding Sources (anticipated source and amount, if applicable):

Disney Conservation Fund \$25,000 - funds have been awarded

Florida License Plate Grant \$23,700 - proposal has been submitted

Proposed Project Period: January 2017 to December 2018

Project Lead Agency/Organization: Archie Carr Center for Sea Turtle Research, University of Florida

ORGANIZATION	CONTACT	EMAIL and/or PHONE	ROLE
Archie Carr Center for Sea Turtle Research, University of Florida	Dr. Karen Bjorndal	bjorndal@ufl.edu 352-392-1126	Project Principal Investigator

Partner Organizations (if applicable):

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).*

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill negatively affected Florida's beaches for nesting sea turtles and marine habitats along the Panhandle and the Peninsula west coast of the State. Oil that remains in the water and washed-up on the beach has the potential to degrade nesting, foraging and developmental habitats and thus, reduce the overall

quantity and quality of Florida's terrestrial and marine habitats for sea turtles. In addition, oil incorporated into the beach can negatively affect developing embryos resulting in reduced hatching success or hatchling fitness. The Deepwater Horizon oil spill added to an already compromised status of many of Florida's beaches and in-water habitats important for sea turtle reproduction and growth.

During 2015, the Archie Carr Center for Sea Turtle Research held an Expert Working Group workshop to develop a strategic plan for Florida sea turtles as part of Disney's Reverse the Decline of Florida Sea Turtles initiative. Based on the input of more than 30 experts, several key strategies were identified to address threats to Florida sea turtles and improve their conservation outlook. Among the specific activities being developed is a program to "Reclaim Our Coasts", the purpose of which is to increase the quantity and quality of nesting and nearshore habitats for sea turtles in Florida. We propose to identify and remove barriers to nesting sea turtles and emerging hatchlings, and remove in-water debris from seagrass beds and reefs, which will help to offset the harm caused by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The removal of barriers to nesting turtles from beaches will increase available nesting habitat for adult female sea turtles and improve the quality of habitat for both nesting turtles and hatchlings. The removal of nearshore marine debris will help to decrease ingestion and entanglement events and improve the overall quality of critical in-water habitats for sea turtles. We will identify public and private partners, and work with local stakeholders to remove terrestrial barriers and improve in-water habitats from the Gulf coast of Florida. We anticipate that the "Reclaim Our Coasts" (ROC) program will continue for several years and thus, we expect it will have a cumulative effect of increasing the quantity and quality of sea turtle nesting and in-water habitats. At each site, local businesses and organizations will be contacted for their support and collaboration. Those that participate will benefit from the event through the exposure they receive via local media and promotion of the event. Where needed, local businesses will be contracted to provide machinery and other equipment for larger barrier removals. Debris will be sorted and where appropriate recycled, thus reducing the impact on local landfills. The use of local media outlets to promote barrier removal events, and the involvement of the public in removal activities, will contribute to increasing awareness and educating the public about barriers to nesting sea turtles and hatchlings, and the extent of degradation of marine habitats by debris.

- 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).*

Our project provides direct actions to improve Florida's gulf coast terrestrial and marine habitats for endangered sea turtles. This project addresses two of the three main priorities identified by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, which are to: 1) *remedy harm to natural resources (habitats, species) where there has been injury to, or destruction of, loss of, or loss of use of those resources resulting from the oil spill* and 2) *restore and maintain the ecological functions of landscape-scale coastal habitats, including barrier islands, beaches and coastal marshes, and ensure their viability and resilience against existing and future threats.*

Obstacles to nesting and the degradation of marine habitats due to debris and entanglement of sea turtles in-water are threats identified by the Recovery Plan for the Northwest Atlantic Population of the Loggerhead Sea Turtle (NMFS and USFWS 2008) and a strategic plan to Reverse the Decline of Florida Sea Turtles developed by the Archie Carr Center for Sea Turtle Research, University of Florida with expert partners.

- 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.

We are in the planning stages of this project and have consulted with State Parks, coastal counties, local non-governmental organizations, and the State of Florida in the Panhandle and along the west coast of the Florida Peninsula regarding the need to remove obstacles to nesting sea turtles and emerging hatchlings, as well as in-water debris removal. We are currently in the process of identifying the location for a pilot project to remove obstacles to nesting and to conduct in-water debris clean-ups for 2016. Tentatively, we are developing a plan to conduct in-water and beach debris removals in south Pinellas County in mid-2016 in partnership with Fort De Soto Park and several local groups. This area is at the mouth of Tampa Bay and experiences high volumes of marine debris. Efforts to improve habitat in this area will benefit both sea turtles and shorebirds. Appropriate state and local permits will be requested, and local stakeholders and citizens will be consulted prior to removal of barriers or in-water debris. Local media will be contacted and the events promoted. Local youth groups and appropriate partners will be identified and included in the planning and events.

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.).*

At this time, no additional supporting material will be submitted.

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