

Deepwater Horizon • Project Proposal Form

Response ID:618 Data

2. Submission Type

1. Submission type:

Update

3. Update Login

Update

Project Proposal Number : 1772

Proponent email in lowercase : abirch@tnc.org

4. Project Proposal Information

2. Project Title:

Setting the Foundation and Restoring Oyster Habitat in Florida's Panhandle

3. Project Description:

Funding from the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill settlement offers a unique opportunity to reverse the decline of Florida oyster populations and re-establish sustainable stocks of oysters across the Panhandle region for their ecological and market values. To achieve this end, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) proposes the State seek funds to engage a diversity of community stakeholders in an integrated, collaborative approach for the recovery of oyster resources with implementation of restoration as the end objective. The overall proposed approach to restoring oyster populations is the co-development of stakeholder engagement, filling data gaps and science-based goal setting followed by strategic in-water project implementation and monitoring.

The project includes 4 phases: (1) map existing reefs and assess their condition, (2) model oyster habitat suitability, (3) use these products to develop estuary-scale, stakeholder-driven ecosystem-based oyster management plans to serve as oyster recovery roadmaps and (4) implement one restoration project per bay as prioritized through the planning process. Phases 1-3 can be implemented simultaneously and are essential elements for implementing Phase 4. All 4 phases are identified by the State in the Oyster Integrated Mapping and Monitoring Report as recommendations needed to restore oyster habitat in Florida's Northwest Florida region. The Florida NRDA Oyster TIG prioritizes the first 3 phases of this project. The maps, models, restoration plans, and in-water restoration projects will serve as catalysts to kick-start the recovery of Panhandle oysters while leveraging and guiding future restoration. Funding for this project may come from DWH RESTORE, NRDA, NFWF-GEBCF or other sources.

4. Resource Benefits:

Fish
Human Use (Recreational, Cultural, Educational)
Shellfish
Shoreline
Water Quality/Quantity

Other Benefit(s):

5. Is the Project included in a Regional or Statewide Plan(s)?

Yes

6. Plan Name:

Florida's State Wildlife Action Plan (FWC, 2012): bivalve reef is listed among habitats under the greatest overall threat and eastern oyster is listed as a taxa of concern under species of greatest conversation need.

7. Technical Feasibility:

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has agreed to collaborate with TNC on this project with the understanding that funding of either entity is not guaranteed. Both organizations have experience with oyster habitat restoration in Florida and established valued and long-standing partnerships with federal, state and local partners in the Panhandle region.

FWC has technical expertise in oyster research, fisheries management and restoration including oyster habitat restoration projects in St. Andrew Bay. The FL TNC team has expertise in project coordination of oyster mapping, habitat suitability modeling, restoration planning and habitat restoration in the Gulf of Mexico. Partnerships can be formed with the Estuary Programs, and academic and community stakeholders to create an interdisciplinary project team with the technical capacity to ensure successful recovery of oysters in the Panhandle. Additional technical details for each project phase can be found in the attached document.

8. Complements to Existing Efforts:

The project complements FWC's Oyster Integrated Mapping & Monitoring Program recommendations for NWFL- understanding the extent and condition of existing reefs, using a science-based process to identify areas most suitable for restoration and creating stakeholder-based oyster habitat management plans. This project aligns with the Funding Priorities in the NFWF-GEBCO FL Restoration Strategy and helps achieve the goals for oyster restoration described in the DWH-NRDA Programmatic Restoration Plan (section 5.5.9.1) and Strategic Framework for Oyster Restoration Activities. This project addresses two of the highest priorities identified by the FL Oyster TIG: 1) Habitat suitability studies and 2) Restore or create oyster reefs. TNC is leading an oyster ecosystem-based planning initiative with the Pensacola & Perdido Bay Estuary Program that can serve as a model for implementation in other bays. The SRC Oyster Shell Recycling Program, funded through County RESTORE, can provide material for the restoration projects.

9. Community Resilience:

Oyster reefs are frequently a major component of "living shoreline" projects which use nature-based techniques and materials such as oyster shells, reef blocks, bagged shells, live shellfish, and plants to help protect eroding shorelines. Partnerships with state, federal, and private partners are expanding the use of living shorelines at sites around the Gulf of Mexico to test the effectiveness of different techniques at limiting future erosion and establishing new habitat for native plants and animals. Planning and creation of living shorelines that include intertidal oyster reefs can be one type of oyster restoration project under consideration as part of this proposal. Shoreline erosion rates, risk maps, suitability information and stakeholder feedback will be used to identify opportunities to implement oyster-based living shorelines in the Florida Panhandle. These projects can be designed to provide risk reduction and community resilience benefits to Panhandle communities where suitable

10. Public Support:

Strong public support among the stakeholders across the Panhandle for oyster habitat restoration projects was acknowledged during the community-based watershed planning led by TNC and continues today. The counties that are standing up Estuary Programs in Choctawhatchee Bay and St. Andrew/St. Joe Bays have expressed their support for this project and may have future funding available to use as leverage. There are also an estimated 35 projects in the state's DWH project portal specifically focused on oyster habitat restoration along Florida's Gulf Coast. Additionally, as part of the stakeholder assessment process TNC conducted for the current Oyster Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management planning in the Greater Pensacola Bay System, 79 stakeholders were interviewed to collect their thoughts on restoring oyster resources in the area. The interviewees represented a diverse mix of interest groups, and the response to the plan development and the need for restoration was overwhelmingly positive and supportive.

11. Total Cost of Project:

\$27,492,590.00

12. Total Funding Request:

\$27,492,590.00

13. Funding Needed For:

Planning/Design
Permitting
Implementation
Operation/Maintenance
Monitoring

14. Status of Project Planning/Design:

Started

15. Status of Project Permitting:

Not Started

16. Is the Project able to be Phased?

Yes

17. Number of Phases:

4

18. Describe the phases:

Phase 1-Oyster Mapping & Condition Analysis, 1-year duration
Phase 2-Oyster Habitat Suitability Model, 1-year duration
Phase 3-Ecosystem-Based Oyster Management Plans, 2-year duration
Phase 4-Oyster Habitat Restoration Projects, 5-year duration

19. Time Frame of the entire Project:

84

20. Category:

Living resources

5. Subcategory

Land Acquisition Subcategory:

Is there a willing seller?

Water Quality or Quantity Subcategory:

Habitat Restoration Subcategory:

21. Living Resources Subcategory:

Shellfish conservation

Recreation or Public Access Subcategory:

Community Resilience Subcategory:

Other Subcategory:

6. Contact Information

22. Contact Information

First Name:

Anne

Last Name:

Birch

Company, Agency or Organization Name:

The Nature Conservancy

Email Address:

abirch@tnc.org

Confirm Email Address:

abirch@tnc.org

Phone Number:

3216103892

Extension:

7. Partner Information

23. Would you like to identify a project partner?

Yes

24. Partner Information

First Name:

Kent

Last Name:

Smith

Company, Agency or Organization Name:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Email Address:

kent.smith@myfwc.com

Phone Number:

8504883831

Extension:

8. Leveraging Information

25. Other Funding:

Select "Yes" if other funding for the project has been secured.

No

1. Leveraging Information

Organization:

Funding Type:

Funding Amount:

Description:

Deadline:

Constraints:

9. Location

26. Extent of Project Location:

Regional

Vicinity

27. Region

Panhandle

28. Additional information on the location:

The Panhandle Bays that will be included in this project are Perdido Bay, the Pensacola Bay System, Choctawhatchee Bay and St. Andrew Bay. For the purposes of this project, the Pensacola Bay System is defined as Escambia and Pensacola Bays (Escambia County) and Blackwater and East Bays (Santa Rosa County).

10.

Project Location

1. Project Location:

11. Documents

29. Upload documents:

[DWH_#1772_FL_Panhandle_Oyster_Restoration_Additional_Project_Information.pdf](#)

13. Thank You!

FDEP DWH Project Proposal Receipt

Sep 18, 2019 16:07:40 Success: Email Sent to: abirch@tnc.org