

[Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council releases Draft Initial Comprehensive Plan: Restoring the Gulf Coast's Ecosystem and Economy](#)

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The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council marked significant progress today with the public release of the [Draft Initial Comprehensive Plan: Restoring the Gulf Coast's Ecosystem and Economy](#) (PDF 621kb) and accompanying [Draft Environmental Assessment](#) (PDF 1.1 MB) for [formal public comment](#). The Draft Plan provides a framework to implement a coordinated region-wide restoration effort in a way that restores, protects, and revitalizes the Gulf Coast region following the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill.

The Draft Plan establishes overarching restoration goals for the Gulf Coast region; provides details about how the Council will solicit, evaluate, and fund projects and programs for ecosystem restoration in the Gulf Coast region; outlines the process for the development, review, and approval of State Expenditure Plans; and highlights the Council's next steps. The Council expects to release a Final Plan this summer.

Along with the release of the Draft Plan, Acting Secretary of Commerce Rebecca Blank and Council Chair announced today that Justin Ehrenwerth will serve as the Executive Director of the Council. These steps signify the Council's efforts to ensure that it is ready to move efficiently and effectively to implement a restoration plan once funds are received.

“As Chair of the Council, I am proud to announce that my Chief of Staff, Justin Ehrenwerth, will move into the role of Executive Director of the Council. I can think of no better person to help the Council continue to move forward with implementing a plan that ensures the long-term health, prosperity, and resilience of the Gulf Coast,” said Council Chair Blank.

In order to ensure robust public input throughout the entire process, the Council is hosting a series of public engagement sessions in each of the five impacted Gulf States in June to give the public the opportunity to provide input on the Draft Plan and the Council's restoration planning efforts. The 30-day [formal public comment](#) period for the Draft Plan and associated documents begins today, May 23, and ends June 24. Public meetings to discuss the Draft Plan are scheduled for the following dates and locations:

- June 3, 2013: Pensacola, Florida
- June 5, 2013: Spanish Fort, Alabama
- June 10, 2013: Galveston, Texas
- June 11, 2013: Biloxi, Mississippi

- June 12, 2013: Belle Chasse, Louisiana
- June 17, 2013: St. Petersburg, Florida

To view or provide comments on the Plan and associated documents and to get additional details on the upcoming public meetings as they become available, please visit www.restorethegulf.gov.

Comments can be submitted here:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/commentFormBasic.cfm?documentID=53621>

Background on the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council

The Council, which was established by the Resources and Ecosystem Sustainability, Tourism, Opportunities Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act of 2012 (RESTORE Act), will help restore the ecosystem and economy of the Gulf Coast region by developing and overseeing implementation of a Comprehensive Plan and carrying out other responsibilities. The *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill caused extensive damage to the Gulf Coast's natural resources, devastating the economies and communities that rely on it. In an effort to help the region rebuild in the wake of the spill, Congress passed the bipartisan RESTORE Act. The Act dedicates 80 percent of any civil and administrative penalties paid under the Clean Water Act by responsible parties in connection with the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill to the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund (the Trust Fund) for ecosystem restoration, economic recovery, and tourism promotion in the Gulf Coast region.