

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

MISSISSIPPI STATE EXPENDITURE PLAN

2022 AMENDMENT

Submitted Pursuant to the

Oil Spill Impact Component of the RESTORE Act

33 U.S.C. § 1321(t)(3)

Approved May 2023

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## **Introduction**

Projects, and corresponding project details/provisions, approved in the Mississippi State Expenditure Plan (MSEP), as amended, remain in full force and effect to the extent not modified in this MSEP 2022 Amendment.

### *Overview of the Oil Spill*

On or about April 20, 2010, the mobile offshore drilling unit Deepwater Horizon, which was being used to drill a well for BP Exploration and Production, Inc. (BP) in the Macondo prospect (Mississippi Canyon 252 – MC252), experienced an explosion, caught fire, and subsequently sank in the Gulf of Mexico (the Gulf). This incident resulted in the discharge of oil and other substances into the Gulf from the rig and the submerged wellhead. The Deepwater Horizon oil spill (Spill) is the largest maritime oil spill in U.S. history. The Spill discharged millions of barrels of oil over a period of 87 days. In addition, well over one million gallons of dispersants were applied to the waters of the Spill area in an attempt to disperse the spilled oil. An undetermined amount of natural gas was also released to the environment as a result of the Spill. After several failed attempts to stop the release of oil, the well was declared “sealed” on September 19, 2010.

As a result of civil and criminal settlements with the parties responsible for the Spill, the State of Mississippi (Mississippi) has and will continue to receive funding from several sources to restore or benefit the natural resources or the economy of Mississippi including, but not limited to, funding received through the following: (1) the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA) and the corresponding Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA); (2) the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act (RESTORE Act); and (3) the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund (GEBF).

The Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) is the designated natural resource trustee under OPA and the Governor’s designee for the RESTORE Act and NFWF GEBF for the State of Mississippi.

### *RESTORE Act*

On July 6, 2012, the President signed into law the RESTORE Act, Subtitle F of Public Law 112-141. The RESTORE Act makes available 80% of the Clean Water Act (CWA) civil and administrative penalties paid by the responsible parties for the Spill (i.e., BP and Transocean) for programs, projects, and activities that restore and protect the environment and economy of the Gulf Coast region through the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund established in the U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury). Within the RESTORE Act, there are five funding components (commonly referred to as “buckets”), which make funds available to each of the Gulf States in accordance with certain legal parameters. These components are:

- Direct Component (Bucket 1)
- Comprehensive Plan Component (Bucket 2)
- Oil Spill Impact Component (Bucket 3)
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Science Program (Bucket 4)
- Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program (Bucket 5)

The Oil Spill Impact Component, also referred to as Bucket 3, accounts for 30% of the funds available in the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund. In accordance with the requirements of the RESTORE Act and as set out in the allocation regulation at 40 C.F.R. § 1800.500, the State of Mississippi will receive 19.07% of the 30% allocation of the Oil Spill Impact Component. The RESTORE Act requires Mississippi, through MDEQ, to prepare a Mississippi State Expenditure Plan (MSEP) describing each activity, project, or program for which Mississippi seeks funding under the Oil Spill Impact Component.

As defined in 31 C.F.R. § 34.503, the MSEP includes a narrative description for each activity, project, or program for which Oil Spill Impact Component funding is being sought. The narrative description for each activity in the MSEP contains the following information:

- The need, purpose, and objectives of the activity;
- How the activity is eligible for funding and meets all requirements of § 34.203 and § 34.503;
- Location of the activity;
- Budget for the activity;

- Milestones for the activity;
- Projected completion dates for the activity;
- Criteria MDEQ will use to evaluate the success of each activity in helping restore and protect the Gulf Coast Region;
- If funding has been requested from other sources, including other components of the Act, the plan identifies the source, states how much funding was requested, and provides the current status of the request;
- How the activities in the plan contribute to the overall economic and ecological recovery of the Gulf Coast; and
- How each activity that would restore and protect natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, coastal wetlands or the economy of the Gulf Coast, is based on the best available science.

New and/or amended MSEP(s) may be written as additional funds become available and as additional projects are identified for funding.

*Eligible Activities for the Oil Spill Impact Component*

The RESTORE Act dedicates 80% 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 for ecosystem restoration (environmental), economic recovery, and tourism promotion in the Gulf Coast region. The RESTORE Act differs from other restoration funding sources (i.e., NFWF, NRDA) in that it specifically allows and anticipates that restoration projects will be developed for the restoration of natural resources and the restoration of the economy, both of which were affected as a result of the Spill.

The eligible activities for the Oil Spill Impact Component cover both ecological and economic projects. The RESTORE Act defines eligible activities for which the Oil Spill Impact Component funds may be used. The eligible activities, projects, and programs as defined in 31 C.F.R. § 34.203 are:

1. Restoration and protection of the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast Region;
2. Mitigation of damage to fish, wildlife, and natural resources;
3. Implementation of a federally approved marine, coastal, or comprehensive conservation management plan, including fisheries monitoring;
4. Workforce development and job creation;
5. Improvements to or on state parks located in coastal areas affected by the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill;
6. Infrastructure projects benefitting the economy or ecological resources, including port infrastructure;
7. Coastal flood protection and related infrastructure;
8. Planning assistance;
9. Administrative costs;
10. Promotion of tourism in the Gulf Coast Region, including recreational fishing; and
11. Promotion of the consumption of seafood harvested from the Gulf Coast Region.

## **Designated State Entity**

The State of Mississippi, Office of the Governor, is the entity designated under the Oil Spill Impact Component of the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act of 2012 (RESTORE Act) to develop the required State Expenditure Plan. The Office of the Governor appointed Chris Wells, the Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, as his appointee.

## **Points of Contact**

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## **Section I: State Certification of RESTORE Act Compliance**

### **Certifications of RESTORE Act Compliance**

The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality hereby certifies to the following:

- Pursuant to the RESTORE Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1321(t)(3)(B)(i)(I), the MSEP includes projects, programs, and activities which will be implemented within the Gulf Coast Region and are eligible for funding under the RESTORE Act.
- Pursuant to the RESTORE Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1321(t)(3)(B)(i)(II), the projects, programs, and activities in the MSEP contribute to the overall economic and ecological recovery of the Gulf Coast.
- Pursuant to the RESTORE Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1321(t)(3)(B)(i)(III), the MSEP takes into consideration and is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan adopted by the RESTORE Council.
- Pursuant to the RESTORE Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1321(t)(2)(B)(i), the projects and programs that would restore and protect the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, coastal wetlands, and economy of the Gulf Coast included on the MSEP will be based on the best available science as defined by the RESTORE Act.
- Pursuant to the RESTORE Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1321(t)(3)(B)(ii), not more than 25% of the funds will be used for infrastructure projects for the eligible activities described in 33 U.S.C. § 1321(t)(1)(B)(i)(VI-VII).
- Issues crossing Gulf State boundaries have been evaluated to ensure that a comprehensive, collaborative ecological and economic recovery is furthered by the MSEP.

### **Process Used to Verify Compliance**

The development of the MSEP involves a series of activities that create an iterative process while maintaining transparency to stakeholders and are designed to achieve the following criteria:

- Identify eligible projects, programs, and activities for inclusion on the MSEP;
- Ensure that eligible projects, programs, and activities included on the MSEP contribute to overall ecological and economic recovery of the Gulf Coast;
- Ensure the MSEP takes into consideration and is consistent with the goals, objectives, and commitments of the RESTORE Council's Comprehensive Plan; and
- Promote funded projects to be as successful and sustainable as possible.

In 2016 -2019, Mississippi's MSEP planning effort included five phases:

- Phase 1: Establishing a Foundation
- Phase 2: Project Contribution, Benefit, and Coordination
- Phase 3: Project Filtering
- Phase 4: Project Vetting
- Phase 5: Project Selection and MSEP development

In 2020, the State of Mississippi did not publish an MSEP amendment due to COVID-19.

Beginning in 2021, the Governor of the State of Mississippi formed the Governor's Gulf Coast Advisory Committee (GCAC or Committee). The Committee is comprised of over ninety (90) stakeholders, including private citizens, non-governmental organizations, business owners, elected officials, and other community leaders from the Mississippi Coast. The Committee is divided into seven (7) advisory sub-committees representing the following categories:

- Economic Development,
- Eco-Restoration,
- Workforce Development and Research and Education,
- Tourism,
- Small Business,
- Seafood, and
- Infrastructure.

MDEQ held multiple stakeholder engagement events to gather public feedback regarding restoration on the Mississippi coast to inform project planning. These included the Restoration Summit and Coastal Resource Engagement Meetings. The Restoration Summit was held as a hybrid event (in-person and virtual) and provided updates to restoration efforts and outcomes of restoration projects and listening to the priorities of stakeholders through roundtable discussions. The Coastal Resource Engagement Meetings were open to the public and held in each coastal county. The meetings provided an update on coordinated restoration activities and offered the public a platform to engage with MDEQ during roundtable discussions. Utilizing feedback from the engagement activities, Phase 1 and Phase 2 for this MSEP planning effort were accomplished by summarizing the projects captured in the MDEQ Project Portal and sorting the projects by the seven respective sub-committee categories. Then, Phases 3-5 for this MSEP planning effort were undertaken through the GCAC process.

The same approach was used in 2022 for project selection. The GCAC process was as follows:

- The sub-committees were tasked by the Governor to provide a list of agreed upon project recommendations.
- May 12, 2022 – The Governor and MDEQ Executive Director held the initial meeting of the GCAC. This meeting occurred in Biloxi, MS, was open to the public, and was streamed live. The purpose of the meeting was to provide high-level restoration information to the committee members as well as begin the project selection process.
- May 16, 2022– Each sub-committee member was sent a list of projects previously selected for funding within their respective category and provided a list of remaining portal projects related to their respective sub-committee category. The sub-committees undertook their own project selection process to provide project recommendations.
- May 23-25, 2022 – MDEQ convened in-person meetings for the sub-committees and requested that they present and formally approve project recommendations for the Governor’s consideration for funding. Each sub-committee discussed projects and provided their respective recommendations to MDEQ by the end of the meeting and via email by close of business on June 2, 2022. Each sub-committee meeting was open to the public via live feed.

Thirty-two (32) projects were recommended for funding from the GCAC to the Governor’s Office. MDEQ evaluated these projects for eligibility under the Oil Spill Impact Component and presented these projects to the Governor for consideration in project selection for this MSEP Amendment. Of these projects, the Governor selected eight (8) projects for this MSEP Amendment.

## **Section II: Public Participation Statement**

There were multiple phases of public engagement for the 2022 MSEP Amendment in order to gather the appropriate public participation necessary to conform with the public participation requirements outlined in 31 C.F.R. § 34.503(g). In accordance with 31 C.F.R. § 34.503(g), the MSEP was available for public review and comment for a minimum of forty-five (45) days. Each activity on the MSEP will only be adopted after consideration of all meaningful input. MDEQ made the MSEP available for public comment and review in a manner that is consistent with other MDEQ-administered public comment periods related to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

## **Section III: Financial Integrity**

On behalf of the State of Mississippi, MDEQ understands its fiduciary responsibilities under the RESTORE Act and is committed to maintaining the highest level of fiscal accountability and transparency to assure the public and Congress that funds have been managed appropriately to further the purposes of the RESTORE Act. These responsibilities include RESTORE Act project administration functions, such as maintaining financial records and ensuring complete and accurate reporting through project oversight. MDEQ’s financial system was developed around the basic principles of sound financial management. These principles are internationally accepted accounting and financial management practices recognized worldwide by leading public and private sector organizations. The basic principles of sound financial management include, among others, principles of transparency, internal checks and balances, and independent external auditing.

Transparency – MDEQ is committed to maintaining transparency with the public and to reporting on RESTORE

Act projects, programs, and activities.

**Internal checks and balances** – To maintain effective controls, MDEQ properly segregates duties among state personnel performing financial functions for RESTORE Act projects, programs, and activities.

**Independent external auditing** – All state agencies are subject to annual audits to be conducted by the Office of the State Auditor or its contracted designee as prescribed by state law. Agency audits are performed at the fund level in conjunction with the State Auditor's annual audit of the State's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR).

These principles of sound financial management are designed to:

- Prevent corruption and reduce or eliminate financial risk and loss;
- Ensure that funds are spent in accordance with the respective grant awards, state law and federal law, as applicable;
- Ensure that personnel responsible for implementing the activities in the project work plans have the resources needed to support the job; and
- Assist state personnel in spending funds efficiently and effectively and reporting expenditures accurately.

MDEQ is responsible for:

- Fiscally managing and safeguarding RESTORE Act project funds;
- Disbursing funds to sub-recipients in a timely manner for reimbursement of eligible project expenditures;
- Keeping accurate and up-to-date records of all financial transactions related to project activities;
- Providing accurate financial reports as requested or required;
- Assisting state personnel with financial planning, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation; and
- Assisting state personnel in understanding and complying with financial policies and procedures needed to ensure efficient and effective stewardship of RESTORE Act funds.
- Effective financial operations depend on clear policies and procedures for different areas of activity such as:
  - Cash management policies (e.g., project budgets, requests for funds, and disbursement of funds);
  - Personnel policies;
  - Policies regarding delegation of signature authority for expenditures or reimbursements in excess of established thresholds;
  - Purchasing and procurement laws, regulations, and policies;
  - Policies regarding reimbursement of administrative expenses;
  - Policies regarding supporting documentation required for disbursement of funds; and
  - Policies establishing financial reporting requirements and schedules, including documented review processes by appropriate supervisory personnel.

### **Financial Controls**

Financial controls are designed to enable state agencies to accomplish fiduciary responsibilities. These controls also reduce the risk of asset loss, ensure that RESTORE Act project documentation is complete and accurate, that financial reports are reliable, and ensure compliance with laws and regulations. A financial control system includes both preventative controls (designed to discourage errors or fraud) and detective controls (designed to identify an error or fraud after it has occurred).

Mississippi law requires "...each state agency, through its governing board or executive head, to maintain continuous internal audit covering the activities of such agency affecting its revenue and expenditures, and maintain an adequate internal system of pre-auditing claims, demands and accounts against such agency as to ensure that only valid claims, demands and accounts will be paid...". Miss. Code Ann. § 7-7-3(6)(d), (2016). Consistent with the RESTORE Act and the MSEF, sub-recipients must operate and use resources with minimal potential for waste, fraud, and mismanagement. The State's financial control system provides assurance that significant weaknesses that could affect the State's ability to meet its objectives would be prevented or detected in a timely manner.



Project management, other personnel, and those charged with governance will apply internal control processes that are designed to provide reasonable assurance in the reliability of project financial reporting. The system includes characteristics such as:

- Policies and procedures that provide for appropriate segregation of duties to reduce the likelihood of deliberate fraud;
- Personnel training materials that ensure employees are qualified to perform their assigned responsibilities;
- Sound practices to be followed by personnel in performing their duties and functions; and
- Proper authorization and recording procedures for financial transactions.

MDEQ's internal control system has been modeled after the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations (COSO) internal control framework and the following five inter-related components. Annually, each state agency is required to certify that it has performed an internal control risk assessment, identify weaknesses, and describe a corrective action plan, if applicable.

**Control Environment** – In Mississippi, responsibility for implementing internal controls at each state agency begins with the chief executive officer and extends to everyone in the agency. Each agency director personally holds those in leadership positions responsible for helping to design, implement, maintain, and champion an internal control program that encompasses all agency fiscal programs and related activities. Each agency's chief financial officer shares this leadership role, yet ultimate accountability remains with the agency head.

Personnel are adequately trained to carry out their responsibilities and are required to understand their responsibilities. The State provides its employees with the authority to perform the tasks assigned to them.

**Risk Assessment** – As part of establishing proper controls and procedures, an assessment is performed to identify, analyze, and manage risks relevant to achieving the state's goals and objectives for RESTORE Act projects. This assessment identifies internal and external events or circumstances that could adversely affect the state's ability to carry out its fiduciary responsibilities. Identified risks according to potential impact on the RESTORE Act projects and the likelihood of occurrence will be considered. The MSEF is considered in the risk assessment process by considering the goals and objectives of the RESTORE Act activities while assessing the control environment, the overall financial management process, the role of the accounting system, and other financial management activities.

Identification of component systems comprising the complete accounting system is also included in the risk assessment process. Transaction cycles were identified and considered along with inherent risks. These will be continuously reviewed, and strategies will be updated as needed to manage the risks.

**Control Activities** – MDEQ's internal control activities include written policies, procedures, techniques, and mechanisms that help ensure management's directives are carried out in compliance with the RESTORE Act criteria. Control activities help identify, prevent, or reduce the risks that can impede accomplishment of state objectives. Control activities occur throughout the financial department, at all levels and in all functions; control activities include things such as approvals, authorizations, verifications, reconciliations, documentation, separation of duties, and safeguarding of assets.

For each transaction cycle identified in the risk assessment, the flow of information through the process and the internal control activities taken will be documented and analyzed.

Documentation may include organizational charts, standard operation procedures, manuals, flowcharts, decision tables, questionnaires, and/or review checklists.

**Communication and Information** – The state's financial system provides adequate processes and procedures to ensure that each agency or department has relevant, valid, reliable, and timely communications related to internal and external events to effectively run and control its operations. Agency directors can obtain reliable information to make informed business decisions, determine their risks, and communicate policies and other important information to those who need it.

Communication is vital to effective project management, and MDEQ's financial information system has

mechanisms in place to properly capture and communicate RESTORE Act project financial data at the level appropriate for sound financial management. Policy manuals, accounting and financial reporting manuals, internal memoranda, verbal directives, and management actions are a few of the means of communicating across state agencies.

**Monitoring** – Monitoring of the internal control system will be performed to assess whether controls are effective and operating as intended. Monitoring is built into normal, recurring operations, is performed on a real-time basis, reacts dynamically to changing conditions, and is ingrained in each state agency. Ongoing monitoring occurs through routine managerial activities such as supervision, reconciliations, checklists, comparisons, performance evaluations, and status reports. Monitoring may also occur through separate internal evaluations (e.g., internal audits/reviews) or from external evaluations (e.g., independent audits, comparison to industry standards, surveys). Any deficiencies found during monitoring will be reported to the appropriate authority.

MDEQ requires prompt evaluation of any findings and recommendations. Formal procedures are documented for responding to findings and recommendations. Those that generate action items are properly outlined for timely response and resolution. Responsible parties are required to complete action items to correct or otherwise resolve the deficiencies within an established timeframe. The monitoring process also includes analysis of whether exceptions are reported and resolved quickly.

### **Accountability**

While each state employee has personal internal control responsibility, the state agency director holds ultimate responsibility and assumes ownership for internal control over financial reporting of RESTORE Act funds. Other directors and managers support the state's internal control philosophy, promote compliance, and maintain control within their areas of responsibility. Chief financial officers have key oversight and policy enforcement roles over fiscal matters. Other state personnel hold lead responsibility for compliance with nonfinancial aspects of laws, directives, policies, procedures, and codes of ethics.

The state agency director has designated a senior manager as the RESTORE Act project manager specialist who is responsible for coordinating the overall state-wide effort of evaluating, improving, and reporting on internal controls over RESTORE Act project management. A risk assessment of project internal control systems will be performed annually. If the risk assessment indicates a high level of risk associated with the financial control system, internal controls will be evaluated. Any serious deficiencies will be reported to the appropriate authority.

### **Key Controls**

MDEQ applies key controls for financial operating functions that serve as strategic risk mitigation tools within each area. These key controls are developed around financial management policies of segregation of duties, systematic reviews and reconciliations, and documented approval processes. These key controls serve as the framework for financial processes used in the flow of information for capturing and reporting financial data.

### **Other Financial Integrity Mechanisms**

MDEQ has developed detailed written policies and procedures as part of its financial control systems and financial control system plan. The plan, policies, and procedures provide assurance that RESTORE Act funds are being safeguarded and that applicable statutes, rules, and regulations are being followed while also ensuring that the goals and objectives of the RESTORE Act are being met.

The financial control system plan is more than just a list of procedures or flowcharts of how activities operate. Rather, the plan is a comprehensive document that encompasses all components of internal controls. Likewise, the plan documents the financial control structure as it relates to those functions. Key financial integrity mechanisms of internal control over financial reporting are described in the following paragraphs.

**Risk assessments of sub-recipients** – Pursuant to the Uniform Guidance requirements in 2 C.F.R. Part 200, MDEQ will emphasize components of sub-recipients' financial system internal checks and balances that address fraud, waste, and performance. MDEQ's financial management system is designed for the prevention of fraud, waste, and abuse. As such, risk assessments of all sub-recipients' financial management systems will be conducted before awarding RESTORE funding. MDEQ's formalized risk assessment process for sub-recipients is described in the document titled "Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, Office of Restoration,

Sub-recipient Monitoring Procedures,” which outlines MDEQ’s process to assess the capabilities of sub-recipients to implement activities in the MSEP consistent with the requirements of 2 C.F.R. § 200, including the sub-recipient risk evaluation in 2 C.F.R. 200.332(b).

**Project budgets** – Project budgets represent the financial plans for projects throughout their lifespans. The budgets match planned expenditures with revenues that the state expects to receive, which is essential for effective cash flow planning and management. Budgets also help prevent the misuse of project funds and control spending.

**Segregation of duties** – MDEQ employs several levels of control to achieve proper segregation of duties in financial processes. Departmental controls allow for proper segregation among functions related to the recording and reporting of project transactions. Supervisory approval is required for all expenditures by personnel independent of the recording process. Stewardship over project funds is essential for proper fiduciary accountability, and the State has established the framework to achieve this component of internal control.

**Safeguarding of assets** – Access to financial project information is restricted to essential personnel. Passwords and other physical safeguards are employed by the State to restrict access to financial data. By restricting access, risk of misappropriation and fraud is reduced because only the personnel who will be working on the financial data for the projects have access to those functions. Regular backups of financial information are done and stored off-site to minimize loss of data due to an unforeseen occurrence.

**Sub-recipient monitoring** – MDEQ developed a process for sub-recipient monitoring using an effective risk assessment model. As part of the initial risk assessment process, sub-recipients are required to complete an Organizational Self-Assessment (OSA) questionnaire and provide copies of standard financial policies and procedures that the state evaluates as part of designing the sub-recipient monitoring program. The OSA is required to be updated annually by each sub-recipient. On-site assistance and reviews for a sub-recipient based on appropriate risk levels will be provided throughout the life of the projects. MDEQ will require and review financial and progress reports for accuracy, completeness, and alignment with RESTORE goals. Budget reports may also be required for comparison to actual expenditures, in detail if necessary.

MDEQ may also employ other financial integrity mechanisms if necessary or for specific RESTORE Act project types. Modifications will be based on updated risk assessments for the RESTORE Act financial control system.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The processes that MDEQ uses to prevent conflicts of interest in the development and implementation of the MSEP, as required by 31 C.F.R. § 34.503(b)(3), are guided by applicable Mississippi law. Under Mississippi Code § 25-4-1, it is essential to the proper operation of democratic government that public officials and employees be independent and impartial, that governmental decisions and public policy be made on the proper channels of the government structure; that public office is not used for private gain other than the remuneration provided by law; that there be public confidence in the integrity of government; and that public officials be assisted in determinations of conflicts of interest.

Further, MDEQ requires, where applicable, the completion of a non-collusion and conflict of interest affidavit certifying that there are no present or currently planned interests (financial, contractual, organizational, or otherwise) relating to the work to be performed under any contract resulting from the proposed work that would create any actual or potential conflict of interest (or apparent conflicts of interest) (including conflicts of interest for immediate family members: spouses, parents, children) that would impinge on its ability to render impartial, technically sound, and objective assistance or advice or result in it being given an unfair competitive advantage. MDEQ also requires sub-recipients and contractors to notify MDEQ immediately of any potential or actual conflicts that may arise. If any potential or actual conflict cannot be resolved to MDEQ’s satisfaction, MDEQ reserves the right to terminate the sub-award agreement or contract in place pursuant to the Termination for Convenience clause of the sub-award agreement or contract.

## **Section IV: Overall Consistency with the Goals and Objectives of the Comprehensive Plan**

Mississippi's 2022 MSEP Amendment focuses on three of the goals identified in the Comprehensive Plan:

- Replenish and Protect Living Coastal and Marine Resources
- Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy – Enhance the sustainability and resiliency of the Gulf economy
- Enhance Community Resilience – Build upon and sustain communities with capacity to adapt to short- and long-term changes

Mississippi's 2022 MSEP Amendment focuses on three objectives identified in the Comprehensive Plan:

- Promote community resilience
- Protect and restore living and coastal marine resources
- Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education

## Section V: Projects, Programs, and Activities

	<i>Project Title</i>	<i>Estimated Cost</i>	<i>Infrastructure (Yes/No)</i>	<i>Start Date</i>	<i>End Date</i>	<i>Primary Eligible Activity (number 1-11; see section 4.1.1 of Submittal Guidelines)</i>	<i>Informed by Best Available Science (Yes/No)</i>	<i>Status</i>
1	Mississippi Gulf Coast Water Quality Improvement Program	\$56 Million	No	08/01/2018	07/31/2023	1	Yes	Activity Approved (2016 Initial MSEP). Activity Amended (2017 MSEP Amendment). Activity Amended (2019 MSEP Amendment).
2	Pascagoula Oyster Reef Complex Relayand Enhancement	\$4.1 Million	No	08/01/2018	07/31/2023	1	Yes	Activity Approved (2016 Initial MSEP). Activity Amended (2017 MSEP Amendment).
3	Compatibility, Coordination, and Restoration Planning	\$2.3 Million	No	08/01/2018	07/31/2026	8	No	Activity Approved (2016 Initial MSEP). Activity Amended (2017 MSEP Amendment). Scope clarification (2018 MSEP Amendment). Activity Amended (2022 MSEP Amendment)
4	Gulf of MexicoCitizen Led Initiative (GMCLI)	\$1.9 Million	No	08/01/2018	7/31/2023	1	Yes	Activity Approved (2017 MSEP Amendment).

	<i>Project Title</i>	<i>Estimated Cost</i>	<i>Infrastructure (Yes/No)</i>	<i>Start Date</i>	<i>End Date</i>	<i>Primary Eligible Activity (number 1-11; see section 4.1.1 of Submittal Guidelines)</i>	<i>Informed by Best Available Science (Yes/No)</i>	<i>Status</i>
5	Remote Oyster Setting Facility	\$9.36 Million	No	01/01/2019	12/31/2023	1	Yes	Activity Approved (2017 MSEP Amendment).
6	Coastal Headwater Land Conservation Program	\$8 Million	No	08/01/2018	12/31/2021	1	Yes	Activity Approved (2017 MSEP Amendment).
7	Round Island Living Shoreline Demonstration and Protection Project (Planning)	\$2.2 Million	No	08/01/2018	12/31/2020	8	Yes	Activity Approved (2017 MSEP Amendment).
8	Mississippi Sound Oyster Shell Recycling Program	\$650,000	No	12/01/2019	11/30/2021	1	Yes	Activity Approved (2018 MSEP Amendment).
9	Beneficial Use of Dredge Material for Marsh Creation and Restoration in Mississippi	\$19 Million	No	12/01/2019	11/30/2024	1	Yes	Activity Approved (2018 MSEP Amendment) Activity Amended (2019 MSEP Amendment).
10	Hancock County Marsh Living Shoreline Extension	\$6 Million	No	10/01/2019	09/30/2021	1	Yes	Activity Approved (2018 MSEP Amendment)
11	Mississippi Beachfront Resilience	\$9.95 Million	No	10/01/2020	12/31/2024	1	Yes	Activity Approved (2019 MSEP Amendment)

	<i>Project Title</i>	<i>Estimated Cost</i>	<i>Infrastructure (Yes/No)</i>	<i>Start Date</i>	<i>End Date</i>	<i>Primary Eligible Activity (number 1-11; see section 4.1.1 of Submittal Guidelines)</i>	<i>Informed by Best Available Science (Yes/No)</i>	<i>Status</i>
								Activity Amended (2021 MSEP Amendment)
12	Public / Private Training Partnership (Accelerate MS)	\$2.2 Million	No	1/1/2023	12/31/2027	4	Yes	Activity Approved (2021 MSEP Amendment)
13	Coastal Habitat Management Program	\$3.3 Million	No	1/1/2023	12/31/2027	1	Yes	Activity Approved (2021 MSEP Amendment)
14	Gulf Coast Center of Security and Emerging Technology (CSET) Fusion	\$5.5 Million	No	1/1/2023	12/31/2027	4	Yes	Activity Approved (2021 MSEP Amendment)
15	Improvement of Wastewater Quality and Solid Waste Disposal from Shrimp Processing Industry	\$5.5 Million	No	1/1/2023	12/31/2027	1	Yes	Activity Approved (2021 MSEP Amendment)
16	D'Iberville Working Waterfront and Commercial Seafood Harbor	\$6.6 Million	Yes	1/1/2023	12/31/2027	6	Yes	Activity Approved (2021 MSEP Amendment)
17	Harbor Expansion Parking Area (Jones Park)	\$1.65 Million	Yes	1/1/2024	12/31/2026	6	Yes	New Activity (2022 MSEP Amendment)
18	Walter Anderson Museum of Art Creative Complex	\$1.21 Million	No	1/1/2024	12/31/2025	10	Yes	New Activity (2022 MSEP Amendment)

	<i>Project Title</i>	<i>Estimated Cost</i>	<i>Infrastructure (Yes/No)</i>	<i>Start Date</i>	<i>End Date</i>	<i>Primary Eligible Activity (number 1-11; see section 4.1.1 of Submittal Guidelines)</i>	<i>Informed by Best Available Science (Yes/No)</i>	<i>Status</i>
19	Workforce Training – Meeting the Needs of the Supply Chain	\$5.5 Million	No	1/1/2024	12/31/2027	4	Yes	New Activity (2022 MSEP Amendment)
20	Health Professions (HEALP) for Our Community: Health Professions Center of Excellence	\$6.6 Million	No	1/1/2024	12/31/2027	4	Yes	New Activity (2022 MSEP Amendment)
21	Marina at Front Beach	\$5.5 Million	Yes	1/1/2024	12/31/2026	6	Yes	New Activity (2022 MSEP Amendment)
22	IMMS Outreach and Ecotourism	\$825,000	No	1/1/2024	12/31/2025	10	Yes	New Activity (2022 MSEP Amendment)
23	Coastal Science Program for Mississippi High Schools	\$566,500	No	1/1/2024	5/31/2026	4	Yes	New Activity (2022 MSEP Amendment)

### **Activity #3: Compatibility, Coordination, and Restoration Planning**

**Project Summary:** The Compatibility, Coordination, and Restoration Planning project was approved in the 2016 MSEP and amended on the 2017 and 2018 MSEP Amendments. This project will provide planning assistance to support MDEQ’s coordinated restoration planning effort to maximize the effectiveness of coordination of restoration in the Gulf Coast Region and the development of new and/or amended State Expenditure Plan(s). Additional information about the approved scope of work for this program can be found in the 2016 MSEP and the 2017 and 2018 MSEP Amendments.

#### **Project Modifications – 2022 MSEP Amendment**

The 2022 MSEP Amendment increases the program budget by \$500,000 to support activities approved in the 2016, 2017, and 2018 MSEP Amendments.

The approved 2016 MSEP and the 2017 and 2018 MSEP Amendments can be found at the following links: [2016 MSEP Amendment](#); [2017 MSEP Amendment](#); [2018 MSEP Amendment](#)



## **Activity #17: Harbor Expansion Parking Area (Jones Park)**

### **Project Summary:**

This project will support infrastructure benefitting the economy in the Gulf Coast Region through the expansion of parking along the eastern edge of Jones Park in Gulfport, MS.

Jones Park is located between Highway 90 and the Gulfport Small Craft Harbor and features public amenities such as a greenspace, walking trail, playground, pavilions, parking and access to the beach, fishing piers and boat launches. Jones Park is also used to host events and festivals year-round. Currently, parking within Jones Park is limited with many visitors being required to use parking areas north of Highway 90.

The City of Gulfport has a multi-phased expansion planned for the Jones Park area. Coast Transit Authority (“CTA”) has a TRAM Bridge currently under construction that will link the north side of Hwy 90 to the south side near downtown allowing pedestrians to safely cross Highway 90. This project is proposed at the southeast corner of 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Highway 90 and will include approximately 500 parking spaces.

The project would fund the engineering and design, permitting, and construction of the expanded parking area at Jones Park. Additional activities may also include, but are not limited to, planning, oversight and management, and coordination of sub-award(s) between MDEQ and sub-recipient.

**Need:** With increased development of downtown Gulfport there is a critical need for expanded parking to cater to increased use and traffic.

**Purpose:** Create additional parking capacity to support continued economic and tourism activities.

**Objective:** To provide enhanced public access to Jones Park and complement the expansion of Gulfport Harbor.

**Location:** This project would take place in Harrison County, Mississippi.

**Timeline:** This project is anticipated to start 1/1/2024 and end 12/31/2026.

**Additional Information:** The project would be administered by MDEQ.

**Overall Economic or Ecological Contribution to the Recovery of the Gulf Coast:** This project would contribute to infrastructure benefitting the economy in the Gulf Coast Region by providing enhanced public access to Jones Park amenities.

**Eligibility and Statutory Requirements:** This project is located in the Gulf Coast Region as defined by 31 C.F.R. § 34.2. This project qualifies as an eligible activity for Oil Spill Impact Component funding through 31 C.F.R. § 34.201(f) - infrastructure benefitting the economy or ecological resources, and 33 U.S.C. §1321(t)(1)(B)(i)(VI) of the RESTORE Act. This activity would be implemented by the City of Gulfport and would comply with the definition of infrastructure in 31 C.F.R. §34.2. The primary purpose of the project is to support infrastructure improvements in the Jones Park area.

### **Comprehensive Plan Goals and Objectives:**

This project aligns with the following Comprehensive Plan goals:

- Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy – Enhance the sustainability and resiliency of the Gulf

### **Major Milestones:**

*Milestone* – Planning: Engineering, Design and Permitting

*Milestone* – Construction

### **Success Criteria/Metrics/Outcomes:**

The anticipated success criteria that would be measured are:

- Number of engineering design plans and permits acquired;
- Square footage of constructed parking area

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Anticipated Project Success Criteria/Metrics/ Outcomes:</b>	<b>Short-term Outcome</b>	<b>Long-term Outcome</b>
Engineering and Design	Final design of the expanded parking area at Jones Park and Gulfport Harbor	Engineering and Design drawings and Permits	Enhanced public access opportunities
Construction	Construction of the parking area	Construction of the parking area	Enhanced public access opportunities

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** The success of this project would be evaluated by the number of engineering and design plans and permits acquired to implement the construction of expanded parking area at Jones Park as well as the square footage documented by as-built drawings of the project area.

**Best Available Science:** For cities to enhance economic development, public access, as well as attract tourism, there needs to be an investment in infrastructure (i.e., buildings, attractions, business centers, etc.). Beyond infrastructure development and economic development opportunities, the tourism sector additionally contributes to economic growth and creates jobs (Du et al., 2016). Planning, engineering and design, and permitting are priority action steps for public access and tourism investment.

**Budget/Funding**

**Estimated Cost of the Project and Amount to be Requested from Oil Spill Impact Component Funds:** \$1,650,000 (20% Planning/80% Implementation)

**Partnerships/Collaboration:**

- City of Gulfport

**Leveraged Resources:** None currently anticipated.

**Funds Used as Non-Federal Match:** None currently anticipated.

**Other:** None currently anticipated.

**References:**

Du, D., Lew, A.A., Ng, P.T. 2016. Tourism and economic growth. *Journal of Travel Research*, 55(4), 454-464.

**Activity # 18: Walter Anderson Museum of Art Creative Complex**

**Project Summary:** This project would support the promotion of tourism in the Gulf Coast Region through the construction of features within Creative Complex at the Walter Anderson Museum of Art.

The Creative Complex, a combined 15,000 square feet of interior and exterior spaces and public gardens, will be a center of education and recreation where visitors make connections to 21st century landscapes and applications, including those in science and technology, aquaculture and foodways, tourism, environmental stewardship, and restoration. This project supports the construction of the Education Pavilion and Shoreline Garden features of the Creative Complex.

The Education Pavilion would provide a space for STEM workshops and interdisciplinary instruction. The Shoreline Garden would showcase and interpret significant native flora from the mainland and the islands, much of which was rendered through art by Walter Anderson, as well as steel sculptures fabricated by Mississippi artists and students. The Shoreline Garden would also create new opportunities for community gathering and study, while serving as a point of departure for enhanced recreational opportunities that transport participants further into nature.

The project would fund the engineering, permitting, and construction of new facilities, including an education

pavilion; design of the Shoreline Garden; and landscape construction of the Shoreline Garden. Additional activities may also include, but are not limited to, planning, oversight and management, and coordination of sub-award(s) between MDEQ and sub-recipient.

**Need:** There is a need to expand tourism engagement in the art and culture space of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Walter Anderson museum is a tourist attraction with opportunity to expand what it delivers to the Mississippi public.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the project is to provide increased tourism opportunities to the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

**Objective:** The project would support the promotion of tourism of the Gulf Coast Region through the construction of new facilities and gardens to host programs that focus on Nature and Conservation; Science and Technology; Industry and Business; Culture and Community; and Art and Creativity.

**Location:** This project would take place in Jackson County, Mississippi.

**Timeline:** This project is anticipated to start 1/1/2024 and end 3/31/2026.

**Additional Information:** The project would be administered by MDEQ.

**Overall Economic or Ecological Contribution to the Recovery of the Gulf Coast:** This project would provide a location in which environmental education and outreach would occur, including features for both the public (residents and tourists alike) and students through coastal exhibits and collections, public green spaces, hands-on activities, education programs related to coastal resources and economies, and other interactive activities.

**Eligibility and Statutory Requirements:** This project is located in the Gulf Coast Region as defined by 31 C.F.R. § 34.2. This project qualifies as an eligible activity for Oil Spill Impact Component funding through 31 C.F.R. § 34.201(h) - Promotion of tourism in the Gulf Coast region, including recreational fishing, and 33 U.S.C. §1321(t)(1)(B)(ii)(I) of the RESTORE Act. The primary purpose of the project is to provide increased tourism opportunities to the Gulf Coast region through the development of the Creative Complex at the Walter Anderson Museum of Art.

**Comprehensive Plan Goals and Objectives:**

This project aligns with the following Comprehensive Plan goals:

- Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy – Enhance the sustainability and resiliency of the Gulf economy.

This project supports the following Comprehensive Plan objectives:

- Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education

**Major Milestones:**

*Milestone – Engineering, Design and Permitting*

*Milestone – Construction*

**Success Criteria/Metrics/Outcomes:**

The anticipated success criteria that would be measured are:

- Number of engineering design plans and permits acquired;
- Square footage of constructed areas

Activity	Anticipated Project Success Criteria/Metrics/ Outcomes	Short-term Outcome	Long-term Outcome
Engineering and Design	100% engineering design drawings and signed permits	Engineering and Design and Permitting complete	Improved connection between communities and coastal natural resources
Construction	Construction of the Creative Complex	Construction of the Creative Complex	Improved connection between communities and coastal natural resources

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** The success of this project would be evaluated by the number of engineering and design plans and permits acquired to implement the construction of Creative Complex as well as the square footage documented by as-built drawings of the project features.

**Best Available Science:** Americans spend nearly 90% of their time indoors (Klepeis, 2001), and public education lacks opportunities for outdoor education. Richard Louv coined the term nature-deficit-disorder to describe the dislocation between children and nature. There are many ways to bridge this chasm, but the basic goal is "to use the surrounding community, including nature, as the preferred classroom," where students develop skills and insights that boost performance across disciplines (Louv, 2009). The MS Economic Council notes that 40% of businesses cite "lack of qualified workers" as a key issue, with 83% concerned about the lack of soft skills such as effective teamwork and communication. Forbes reported in 2017 that MS had the lowest share of STEM graduates in the nation. The Creative Complex supports programs that introduce complex concepts and real-world scenarios through exploration, inquiry, prototyping, collaboration, fabrication, critical thinking, and other applied skills.

**Budget/Funding**

**Estimated Cost of the Project and Amount to be Requested from Oil Spill Impact Component Funds:** \$1,210,000 (20% Planning/80% Implementation)

**Partnerships/Collaboration:**

- The Walter Anderson Museum of Art

**Leveraged Resources:** In addition to RESTORE funding, the Museum is leveraging dollars that include, approximately: \$1.3 M (Gulf Coast Restoration Fund; Received), \$1.2 M (NRDA; Received), \$450K (MS Arts Commission; Received), \$250K (Private Contributions and WAMA Assets; Received).

**Funds Used as Non-Federal Match:** None currently anticipated.

**Other:** None currently anticipated.

**References:**

Klepeis, N. E., Nelson, W. C., Ott, W. R., Robinson, J. P., Tsang, A. M., Switzer, P., ... & Engelmann, W. H. (2001). The National Human Activity Pattern Survey (NHAPS): a resource for assessing exposure to environmental pollutants. *Journal of Exposure Science & Environmental Epidemiology*, 11(3), 231-252.

Charles, C., & Louv, R. (2009). Children’s nature deficit: What we know and don’t know. *Children and Nature Network*, 32.

## **Activity #19: Workforce Training - Meeting the Needs of the Supply Chain**

**Project Summary:** This project would support workforce development and job creation in the Gulf Coast Region through the development of training programs to address workforce needs that are vital to meeting the supply chain needs of coastal Mississippi's industries.

The project will focus on enhancing Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (MGCCC) programs that are vital to meeting the supply chain needs of industry partners. Programs will receive modern equipment and curriculum changes to align them with the rapid adoption of new technology by local companies. As part of this project, the College will upgrade the automotive and heavy equipment maintenance programs to include autotronics (e-vehicles) training. The College will also embed autonomous/electric semi-trucks in CDL programs located on three of the MGCCC campuses/centers. Technology for automation programs will be upgraded to include Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence, and robots. The heavy equipment maintenance and heavy equipment operator training will be enhanced with autonomous and electric heavy equipment. These changes will position the College with the ability to train students and incumbent workers with the skills necessary for a rapidly changing supply chain ecosystem.

The project would fund the implementation of workforce development at MGCCC including industry training, acquisition of training equipment, staff, and associated administrative support. Additional activities may also include, but are not limited to, planning, oversight and management, and coordination of sub-award(s) between MDEQ and sub-recipient.

**Need:** Technological advances in industries require updates to workforce development training programs. In order to remain employed, or to be eligible for new employment, workers must be trained on skills that are in-line with evolving industry needs.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the project is to enhance existing training to incorporate new technology into workforce training programs in order to meet employer expectations regarding capabilities of workers on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

**Objective:** Provide enhanced workforce development training in emerging technologies to alleviate key pressure points in supply chain disruptions.

**Location:** This project would take place in Harrison County, Mississippi.

**Timeline:** This project is anticipated to start 1/01/2024 and end 12/31/2027.

**Additional Information:** The project would be administered by MDEQ.

**Overall Economic or Ecological Contribution to the Recovery of the Gulf Coast:** This project would contribute to workforce development and job creation of the Gulf Coast Region through the development of programs to provide workforce training in emerging technologies.

**Eligibility and Statutory Requirements:** This project is located in the Gulf Coast Region as defined by 31 C.F.R. § 34.2. This project qualifies as an eligible activity for Oil Spill Impact Component funding through 31 C.F.R. § 34.201(d) – workforce development and job creation, and 33 U.S.C. § 1321(t)(1)(B)(i)(IV) of the RESTORE Act. The primary purpose of the project is to provide workforce training in emerging technologies.

### **Comprehensive Plan Goals and Objectives:**

This project aligns with the following Comprehensive Plan goals:

- Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy – Enhance the sustainability and resiliency of the Gulf economy.

### **Major Milestones:**

*Milestone* – Development of the program curriculum

*Milestone* – Curriculum implementation

### **Success Criteria/Metrics/Outcomes:**

The anticipated success criteria that would be measured are:

- Number of workforce development programs developed
- Number of students enrolled in the program
- Number of students completing the program

Activity	Anticipated Project Success Criteria/Metrics/ Outcomes:	Short-term Outcome	Long-term Outcome
Development of the program curriculum	Development of program specific training materials	Program implementation	Graduation and job acceptance of graduates from the program.
Curriculum implementation	Implement and provide workforce training.	Recruitment of program participants	Graduation and job acceptance of graduates from the program.

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** The success of this project would be tied to the number of workforce development programs implemented. Once a program and curricula have been implemented, the number of students enrolled in the program and the number of students graduated from the program would be additional success criteria measured.

**Best Available Science:** Planning and coordination of job needs and filling those needs with educational requirements is the fundamental building block for economic development and state prosperity (Ozturk, 2008; Berger and Fisher, 2013). The World Economic Forum projected in its *Future of Jobs Report 2020* that half of all employees worldwide would need reskilling by 2025 (WEC, 2020). The rise of automation and new technologies has transformed the world of work, resulting in an urgent need for large-scale upskilling and reskilling (Li, 2022). The Mississippi Gulf Coast lacks an adequately trained workforce relative to emerging technologies and automation. The American Truck Driving Association estimates that 130,000 more drivers will be needed by 2030 to make up for shortages (StarPoint, 2022). Currently, there is a significant shortage of trained truck drivers (commercial driver's license holders) in the MGCCC district and the surrounding areas. For example, in the MSWorks system there are approximately 1,026 job openings for drivers in the state. Within 100 miles of Gulfport, there are 260 job openings in the MSWorks system and 414 job postings on the Indeed platform. The Mississippi Department of Employment Security projects that there will be an average of 12,610 new job openings annually in production occupations through 2028 (MDES, 2018).

**Budget/Funding**

**Estimated Cost of the Project and Amount to be Requested from Oil Spill Impact Component Funds:** \$5,500,000 (100% Implementation)

**Partnerships/Collaboration:**

- Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College

**Leveraged Resources:** None currently anticipated.

**Funds Used as Non-Federal Match:** None currently anticipated.

**Other:** None currently anticipated.

**References:**

Berger, N., Fisher, P. 2013. A well-educated workforce is key to state prosperity. Economic Analysis and Research Network Report. Published – August 13, 2013. Available online: <https://files.epi.org/2013/A%20well-educated%20workforce%20is%20key%20to%20state%20prosperity.pdf>

Li, L. (2022). Reskilling and upskilling the future-ready workforce for industry 4.0 and beyond. Information Systems Frontiers, 1-16.

Mississippi Department of Employment Security.(n.d.) Mississippi Occupational Projections: Statewide, Long-Term, 2018-2028. [https://mdes.ms.gov/media/63514/oep\\_state.pdf](https://mdes.ms.gov/media/63514/oep_state.pdf)

Ozturk, I. 2008. The role of education in economic development: a theoretical perspective. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1137541> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1137541>

StarPoint. 2022. <https://www.starpointscreening.com/blog/shortage-of-truck-drivers-continues-in-2022/>

World Economic Forum. (2020). The Future of Jobs Report 2020. [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Future\\_of\\_Jobs\\_2020.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2020.pdf)

## **Activity #20: Health Professions (HEALP) for Our Community: Health Professions Center of Excellence**

**Project Summary:** This project would support workforce training efforts in the Gulf Coast Region through the development of workforce development programs to address high industry demand for health profession workers in coastal Mississippi.

The Gulf Coast healthcare industry faces complex workforce challenges, including worker shortages. The Health Professions (HEALP) for Our Community: Health Professions Center of Excellence project will provide a learning environment where academic partners, healthcare organizations, and corporate innovators come together to anticipate and meet the healthcare workforce needs of the Gulf Coast, with a focus on high demand health professions. This project involves two steps: (1) attract and train students in two high-demand health professions – Respiratory Therapy and EMT/Emergency Medical Science (EMS) Paramedic – and (2) renovate an existing MGCCC facility to house the HEALP Center of Excellence.

The project would fund the implementation of workforce development at MGCCC including industry training, staff, and associated administrative support and renovate the HEALP Center of Excellence facility to serve students and staff to successfully implement the training programs. Additional activities may also include, but are not limited to, planning, oversight and management, and coordination of sub-award(s) between MDEQ and sub-recipient.

**Need:** New training programs are needed to meet rising demand for jobs in the healthcare profession.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the project is to implement workforce training programs for in-demand healthcare professions on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

**Objective:** Provide innovative, short-term healthcare training at a renovated Health Professions facility on MGCCC Jackson County campus to meet industry demand for healthcare professionals.

**Location:** This project would take place in Jackson County, Mississippi.

**Timeline:** This project is anticipated to start 1/1/2024 and end 12/31/2027.

**Additional Information:** The project would be administered by MDEQ.

**Overall Economic or Ecological Contribution to the Recovery of the Gulf Coast:** This project would contribute to workforce development and job creation of the Gulf Coast Region through the development of programs to provide workforce training to healthcare professionals.

**Eligibility and Statutory Requirements:** This project is located in the Gulf Coast Region as defined by 31 C.F.R. § 34.2. This project qualifies as an eligible activity for Oil Spill Impact Component funding through 31 C.F.R. § 34.201(d) – workforce development and job creation, and 33 U.S.C. § 1321(t)(1)(B)(i)(IV) of the RESTORE Act. The primary purpose of the project is to expand the number of Respiratory Therapists and EMT/EMS Paramedics over a four-year period through training and to establish the Health Professions Center

of Excellence via the renovation of a current facility on MGCCC’s Jackson County Campus.

**Comprehensive Plan Goals and Objectives:**

This project aligns with the following Comprehensive Plan goals:

- Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy – Enhance the sustainability and resiliency of the Gulf economy

**Major Milestones:**

*Milestone* – Development of the program curriculum

*Milestone* – Curriculum implementation

*Milestone* – Engineering and Design

*Milestone* – Demolition Activities / Construction

**Success Criteria/Metrics/Outcomes:**

The anticipated success criteria that would be measured are:

- Number of workforce development programs developed
- Number of students enrolled in the program
- Number of students graduated from the program
- Number of E&D plans developed
- Square footage of renovated training facility

Activity	Anticipated Project Success Criteria/Metrics/ Outcomes:	Short-term outcome	Long-term outcome
Development of the program curriculum	Development of program specific training materials	Recruitment of program participants	Graduation and job acceptance of graduates from the program.
Curriculum implementation	Implement and provide workforce training.	Implementation of job specific workforce training	Graduation and job acceptance of graduates from the program.
Engineering and Design	Design for the Health Professions Center of Excellence	Engineering and Design drawings and Permits	Expanded training for credit and non-credit health professions programs.
Demolition Activities/ Construction	Renovation of the facility	Renovated facility for the Health Professions Center of Excellence	Expanded training for credit and non-credit health professions programs.

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** The success of this project would be evaluated by the number of workforce development programs developed. Once programs and curriculum have been developed, the number of students enrolled in the program and the number of students graduated from the program would be additional success criteria measured. The success of the workforce development facility would be evaluated by the number of engineering and design plans developed to implement the renovation of the Health Professions Center of Excellence as well as the square footage documented by as-built drawings of the project area.



**Best Available Science:** The Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health (WHO, 2016) provides evidence for a growing mismatch between supply, need, and demand for health professionals resulting in skills and staff shortages across nations and economies. Mississippi is no exception with documented shortages for nurses, respiratory health professions, and EMTs during the COVID-19 pandemic. An analysis of market demand for EMTs, EMS paramedics, and respiratory therapists in the College’s four-county district reveals that the area is a “hotspot” for these occupations, with 484 jobs in the area vs. the national average of 387 jobs. It is projected that these three occupations will grow by 18.2% over the next ten years, exceeding the national projected growth of 17.7% and the statewide projected growth of 12.7%. Compensation for EMTs, EMS paramedics, and respiratory therapists is strong, with the median wage of \$45,977 exceeding the national median wage for these occupations by 2% (data from Lightcast/EMSI). From January 2021 to October 2022, there were 224 unique job postings in the four-county area, representing 30 employers.

In order to mitigate ongoing shortages and the potential for sustained shortages in the healthcare workers community, it is essential to provide affordable education and workforce training options to local communities. Community colleges play a unique and significant role in STEM education and workforce development. With their open-access mission, affordable tuition, and locations in numerous communities, community colleges enroll nearly half of the nation’s undergraduate students, including high numbers of low-income and first-generation college students (Van Noy and Zeidenberg, 2014). Furthermore, their mission of serving local workforce needs has immediate relevance to employment in local communities. This project would follow that mission of providing local workforce needs through the HEALP program and focus on two high-demand health professions – Respiratory Therapy and EMT/Emergency Medical Science (EMS) Paramedic.

**Budget/Funding**

**Estimated Cost of the Project and Amount to be Requested from Oil Spill Impact Component Funds:** \$6,600,000 (20% Planning; 80% Implementation)

**Partnerships/Collaboration:**

- Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College

**Leveraged Resources:** None currently anticipated.

**Funds Used as Non-Federal Match:** None currently anticipated.

**Other:** None currently anticipated.

**References:**

Lightcast jobs data. <https://lightcast.io/>

Van Noy, M., & Zeidenberg, M. (2014). Hidden STEM producers: Community colleges’ multiple contributions to STEM education and workforce development. Barriers and Opportunities in Completing 2-and 4-Year STEM Degrees.

World Health Organization. (2016). Global strategy on human resources for health: workforce 2030.

**Activity #21: Marina at Front Beach**

**Project Summary:** This project would support the planning and construction activities for infrastructure benefitting the economy in the Gulf Coast Region.

This project is part of an overall re-development and re-purposing of a former seafood business centrally located on the primary public beach in Ocean Springs. The property has a long and deep connection with the seafood industry and the overall development and economic growth of the Gulf Coast dating back to the early 1800’s. Following destruction of the structure during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the surrounding area thrives as a public center and destination and includes improvements to enhance and protect the area for public access. The re-development would include a small marina, associated walkways, an open-air pavilion, green space, and other

recreational amenities. The subject property is directly adjacent to the functional center of the public beach and will complement the existing amenities that includes a public pier, the historic Fort Maurepas Park (green space, play structure, splash pad, pavilion with restrooms), volleyball area, and fire pits available to the public. The inclusion of new water access in the form of a small marina will be directly beneficial not only to the residents and visitors to the area but will also support the commercial seafood industry and improve the marina-related infrastructure for protection of the physical features in the area.

This project would potentially provide funding for engineering and design, environmental permitting, and the construction of an open-air pavilion, areas for mobile vendors, restrooms that are movable during severe weather, greenspace, additional living shoreline area, a marina suitable for both commercial and pleasure craft use, and other outdoor amenities. Additional activities may also include, but are not limited to, planning, oversight and management, and coordination of sub-award(s) between MDEQ and sub-recipient.

**Need:** For increased economic development and tourism for the City of Ocean Springs as well as the seafood sector, there is an opportunity to develop a marina for commercial and recreational use.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the project is to provide improvements to the property to enhance public access and to support tourism and seafood industry activities.

**Objective:** To support planning and construction activities for a marina and other amenities in the Front Beach area of Ocean Springs.

**Location:** This project would take place in Jackson County, Mississippi.

**Timeline:** This project is anticipated to start 1/1/2024 and end 12/31/2026.

**Additional Information:** The project would be administered by MDEQ.

**Overall Economic or Ecological Contribution to the Recovery of the Gulf Coast:** This project would support infrastructure benefitting the economy in the Gulf Coast Region by constructing a marina and other amenities in Ocean Springs, MS. The project would open public access to the waterfront area.

**Eligibility and Statutory Requirements:** This project is located in the Gulf Coast Region as defined by 31 C.F.R. § 34.2. This project qualifies as an eligible activity for Oil Spill Impact Component funding through 31 C.F.R. § 34.201(f) - infrastructure benefitting the economy, and 33 U.S.C. §1321(t)(1)(B)(i)(VI) of the RESTORE Act. This activity would be implemented by the City of Ocean Springs and would comply with the definition of infrastructure in 31 C.F.R. §34.2. The primary purpose of the project is to supporting planning and construction activities to develop a marina in the City of Ocean Springs.

**Comprehensive Plan Goals and Objectives:**

This project aligns with the following Comprehensive Plan goals:

- Enhance Community Resilience – build upon and sustain community with capacity to adapt to short- and long-term changes;
- Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy – Enhance the sustainability and resiliency of the Gulf economy.

This project supports the following Comprehensive Plan objectives:

- Promote Community Resilience

**Major Milestones:**

*Milestone* – Planning, Engineering, Design and Permitting, and Construction

**Success Criteria/Metrics/Outcomes:**

The anticipated success criteria that would be measured are:

- Number of engineering design plans and permits acquired
- Number of improvements to recreational resources

Activity	Anticipated Project Success Criteria/Metrics/ Outcomes:	Short-term outcome	Long-term outcome
Planning	100% engineering design drawings and signed permits	Engineering and Design and Permitting complete	Public use of a marina and commercial/recreational amenities
Construction	Construction of the marina, pavilion, and other amenities	Build out of the marina at Front Beach	Public use of a marina and commercial/recreational amenities

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** The success of this project would be evaluated by the number of engineering and design plans and permits acquired to implement the construction of the marina. Additionally, number of improvements to recreational resources, such as boat slips, would be measured based on final engineering and design specifications.

**Best Available Science:** In order for municipalities to enhance economic development, public access, as well as attract tourism there needs to be an investment in infrastructure (i.e., buildings, attractions, business centers, etc.). Beyond infrastructure development and economic development opportunities, the tourism sector additionally contributes to economic growth and creates jobs (Du et al., 2016). Planning, engineering, and design, permitting, and construction are priority action steps for potential economic development and tourism investment. For the Ocean Springs marina at Front Beach, public access improvements would create a more resilient waterfront amenity for commercial vendors, recreation, and outdoor congregation.

**Budget/Funding**

**Estimated Cost of the Project and Amount to be Requested from Oil Spill Impact Component Funds:** \$5,500,000 (20% Planning; 80% Implementation)

**Partnerships/Collaboration:**

- City of Ocean Springs

**Leveraged Resources:** The City of Ocean Springs has received GOMESA funding (\$2,728,250) that will be used as leveraged funds for the project.

**Funds Used as Non-Federal Match:** None currently anticipated.

**Other:** None currently anticipated.

**References:**

Du, D., Lew, A.A., Ng, P.T. 2016. Tourism and economic growth. *Journal of Travel Research*, 55(4), 454-464.

**Activity #22: Institute of Marine Mammal Studies Outreach and Ecotourism**

**Project Summary:** This project would support the promotion of tourism in the Gulf Coast Region through two Institute for Marine Mammal Studies’ programs: *Ecotourism - Enhancement of IMMS Public Outreach and Education Program* and *Enhancement of Ocean Adventures Public Outreach and Education Programs*. The programs would provide eco-tourism benefits and environmental and ecosystem education opportunities that would encourage conservation of the Mississippi Sound and its marine life.

The Institute for Marine Mammal Studies’ Center for Marine Education and Research (IMMS-CMER) is a marine education and conservation facility that offers a variety of educational programs designed to meet diverse educational and outreach needs. This mission has been expanded to include Ocean Adventures, a public display

facility featuring interactive programming with dolphins, sea lions, birds, snakes, alligators, rays, and sharks. Since opening in 2018, Ocean Adventures has attracted over 100,000 visitors annually. Current educational programs consist of field trips, student summer camps, dolphin programs, talks and presentations, hands-on interactions with marine mammals, swimming with and feeding sting rays and sharks, interactions with tropical birds, interactions with snakes and alligators, college courses led by IMMS' experienced scientists, and an opportunity to learn about marine mammals, various fish species, aquatic turtles, snakes, sea turtles, and the conservation and research work conducted at IMMS. This exposure is critical in fostering an educational foundation for stewardship of students, residents, and visitors to the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and in assisting them in understanding the importance of conserving the Mississippi Sound and its marine life.

This project would provide funding of two initiatives: 1) *Ecotourism - Enhancement of IMMS Public Outreach and Education Program*; and 2) *Enhancement of Ocean Adventures Public Outreach and Education Programs*. The two-year project would develop new exhibits, graphics, presentations, and pay for salaries and supplies to conduct education and outreach programs. Additional activities may also include, but are not limited to, planning, oversight and management, and coordination of sub-award(s) between MDEQ and sub-recipient.

**Need:** There is a need to develop additional eco-tourism opportunities that includes educating coastal stakeholders as well as visitors regarding marine conservation.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the project is to implement ecotourism-based outreach and education programs focused on marine conservation.

**Objective:** To continue and enhance current educational and outreach programs while actively engaging in development of new programs to educate the public.

**Location:** This project would take place in Harrison County, Mississippi.

**Timeline:** This project is anticipated to start 1/1/2024 and end 12/31/2025.

**Additional Information:** The project would be administered by MDEQ.

**Overall Economic or Ecological Contribution to the Recovery of the Gulf Coast:** This project would support promotion of tourism in the Gulf Coast region by implementing education and outreach programs focused on coastal and living marine resources in Mississippi. The project would provide education opportunities for the general public around marine conservation.

**Eligibility and Statutory Requirements:** This project is located in the Gulf Coast Region as defined by 31 C.F.R. § 34.2. This project qualifies as an eligible activity for Oil Spill Impact Component funding through 31 C.F.R. § 34.201(h) - Promotion of tourism in the Gulf Coast region, including recreational fishing., and 33 U.S.C. §1321(t)(1)(B)(ii)(I) of the RESTORE Act. This activity would be implemented by the Institute of Marine Mammal Studies. The primary purpose of the project is to promote tourism in coastal Mississippi and provide educational opportunities for the general public around coastal and marine living resources and conservation.

### **Comprehensive Plan Goals and Objectives:**

This project aligns with the following Comprehensive Plan goals:

- Enhance Community Resilience – build upon and sustain community with capacity to adapt to short- and long-term changes;
- Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy – Enhance the sustainability and resiliency of the Gulf economy;
- Replenish and Protect Living Coastal and Marine Resources.

This project supports the following Comprehensive Plan objectives:

- Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education

### **Major Milestones:**

*Milestone* – Implementation of education/outreach programs

**Success Criteria/Metrics/Outcomes:**

The anticipated success criteria that would be measured are:

- Number of programs enhanced

Activity	Anticipated Project Success Criteria/Metrics/Outcomes:	Short-term outcome	Long-term outcome
Implementation of education/outreach programs	Program implementation	Enhanced public education and outreach capabilities	Improved ecotourism opportunities and public understanding of coastal marine living resources and conservation

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** The success of this project would be evaluated by the number of programs enhanced.

**Best Available Science:** Effective environmental education and outreach enhances attitudes, values, and knowledge toward the environment, as well as builds skills that prepare individuals and communities to collaboratively undertake environmental action (Ardoin et al., 2020). Interactive coastal and marine outreach programs improve public science literacy through participant learning and enables communities to engage with the marine environment about issues including seafood harvesting, marine plastic pollution, cetacean conservation, and marine environmental planning, among others (Kelly et al., 2020). Through this project, IMMS would endeavor to improve the public’s understanding of coastal and marine living resources and conservation by engaging the public through effective education and outreach programs.

**Budget/Funding**

**Estimated Cost of the Project and Amount to be Requested from Oil Spill Impact Component Funds:** \$825,000 (100% Implementation)

**Partnerships/Collaboration:**

- Institute for Marine Mammal Studies

**Leveraged Resources:** None currently anticipated.

**Funds Used as Non-Federal Match:** None currently anticipated.

**Other:** None currently anticipated.

**References:**

Ardoin, N. M., Bowers, A. W., & Gaillard, E. (2020). Environmental education outcomes for conservation: A systematic review. *Biological Conservation*, 241, 108224.

Kelly, R., Fleming, A., Pecl, G. T., von Gönner, J., & Bonn, A. (2020). Citizen science and marine conservation: a global review. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 375(1814), 20190461.

**Activity #23: Coastal Science Program for Mississippi High Schools**

**Project Summary:** This project would support workforce development and job creation in the Gulf Coast Region. The coastal science program, which would be implemented by the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, is designed to engage high school students in environmental education with hands-on experiences to monitor water quality, raise native wetlands plants in a nursery for use at coastal restoration sites, and grow marine species, including native fish at an aquaculture facility, to be released in local estuarine waters.

The program would provide marine education program upgrades such as purchasing equipment and constructing

on-site facilities to two schools: St. Stanislaus High School in Hancock County and Ocean Springs High School in Jackson County.

#### St. Stanislaus High School

This project may include, but it not limited to, the purchase of water quality analysis instrumentation for students to monitor water quality, detect the presence of various toxins, various harmful bacteria, and nuisance algae, or to predict harmful algae in the water, as well as building a Plant Materials Center on the campus to grow native plants and wetland plants for restoration projects along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The project would enable students at St. Stanislaus in Bay St. Louis to assess environmental conditions in the Mississippi Sound and to grow native plants that may be used in coastal restoration projects. Plants would be grown for shoreline stabilization, barrier island restoration, dune stabilization, mitigation banks, and the like. Both aspects of this project, water analysis and plant growth for restoration projects, provide many benefits. In addition to the scientific study involved in both, this level of work for high school students will expose many more students to the realities of coastal resources and ignite interest in more young people to pursue coastal marine resource preservation as a career, thus providing a career pathway to encourage them to remain on the Mississippi coast as adults.

#### Ocean Springs High School

This project would provide new equipment and supplies that are needed to expand the capabilities of the existing aquaculture program and advance opportunities for future aquaculture careers of students. The enhancements would increase the capacity for students in the aquaculture program and expand husbandry opportunities with different marine resources. The current program includes a year-long study of the process and commercial aspects of marine aquaculture as it relates to growth and release of native species.

The Coastal Science Programs for Mississippi High Schools project would provide funding for the purchase of water quality and aquaculture equipment and the construction of greenhouse space for a plant nursery facility. The project would allow for enhanced engagement for students in the fields of marine aquaculture, marine biology, and coast ecology. Additional activities may also include, but are not limited to, planning, oversight and management, and coordination of sub-award(s) between MDEQ and sub-recipient.

**Need:** There is a need to provide enhanced education opportunities to high school students in order to foster interest in marine and coastal sciences and provide a needed learning environment so that students can successfully transition learned skills into marine and coastal science professions.

**Purpose:** To provide students with enhanced education programs that will serve to increase knowledge about marine and coastal science and natural resource stewardship.

**Objective:** To provide equipment and learning space for enhanced programmatic activities for marine and coastal science education at high schools on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

**Location:** This project would take place in Hancock and Jackson Counties, Mississippi.

**Timeline:** This project is anticipated to start 1/1/2024 and end 12/31/2025.

**Additional Information:** The project would be administered by MDEQ.

**Overall Economic or Ecological Contribution to the Recovery of the Gulf Coast:** This project would support workforce development and job creation in the Gulf Coast Region by providing the needed equipment and facilities for enhanced marine and coastal science education at high schools in Mississippi.

**Eligibility and Statutory Requirements:** This project is located in the Gulf Coast Region as defined by 31 C.F.R. § 34.2. This project qualifies as an eligible activity for Oil Spill Impact Component funding through 31 C.F.R. § 34.201(d) – workforce development and job creation, and 33 U.S.C. § 1321(t)(1)(B)(i)(IV) of the RESTORE Act. The primary purpose of the project is to expand marine and coastal science education opportunities on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. This activity would be implemented by the Department of Marine Resources.

**Comprehensive Plan Goals and Objectives:**

This project aligns with the following Comprehensive Plan goals:

- Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy
- Replenish and Protect Living Coastal and Marine Resources

This project supports the following Comprehensive Plan objectives:

- Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education
- Protect and Restore Living and Coastal Marine Resources

**Major Milestones:**

*Milestone* – Purchase of water quality instrumentation

*Milestone* – Purchase of aquaculture equipment

*Milestone* – Construction of the native plant nursery

**Success Criteria/Metrics/Outcomes:**

The anticipated success criteria that would be measured are:

- Number of water quality instruments purchased
- Number of facilities constructed
- Square footage of constructed facilities
- Number of students engaged

Activity	Anticipated Project Success Criteria/Metrics/ Outcomes:	Short-term outcome	Long-term outcome
Purchase of water quality instrumentation	Use of water quality instruments by students	Enhanced education capabilities at local high schools	Enhanced student education related to coastal marine living resources and conservation and water quality
Purchase of aquaculture equipment	Use of aquaculture equipment by students	Enhanced education capabilities at local high schools	Enhanced student education related to coastal marine living resources and conservation and water quality
Construction of the native plant nursery	Build native plant nursery	Enhanced education capabilities at local high schools	Enhanced student education related to coastal marine living resources and conservation and water quality

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** The success of this project would be evaluated by the number of water quality instruments and aquaculture equipment obtained and number of educational facilities constructed. The number of students enrolled in and completing the programs would be additional success criteria measured.

**Best Available Science:** To successfully address complex marine and coastal issues, balance the human use and conservation of marine resources, and understand future benefits from the marine environment, an educated, engaged workforce will be needed. Developing and maintaining such a workforce will rely, in turn, on programs of higher education that prepare future marine science professionals through enhanced education opportunities (U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, 2004). Integration of academic curricula with hands-on learning is widely considered to be effective in improving opportunities for youth who will face technologies that demand high-level skills (Conroy and Walker, 2000). Additionally, studies have revealed the integrated learning that incorporates

hands-on experiences in science lead to increases in positive attitudes toward science and, more importantly, development in interest in science disciplines and/or science career pursuits (Thompson, 2020). Through this project, participating high schools would apply effective, hands-on educational opportunities to provide meaningful learning and understanding of standard marine and coastal ecological concepts and relationships.

**Budget/Funding**

**Estimated Cost of the Project and Amount to be Requested from Oil Spill Impact Component Funds:**

\$566,500 (100% Implementation)

**Partnerships/Collaboration:**

- The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources
- St. Stanislaus High School
- Ocean Springs High School

**Leveraged Resources:** None currently anticipated.

**Funds Used as Non-Federal Match:** None currently anticipated.

**Other:** None currently anticipated.

**References:**

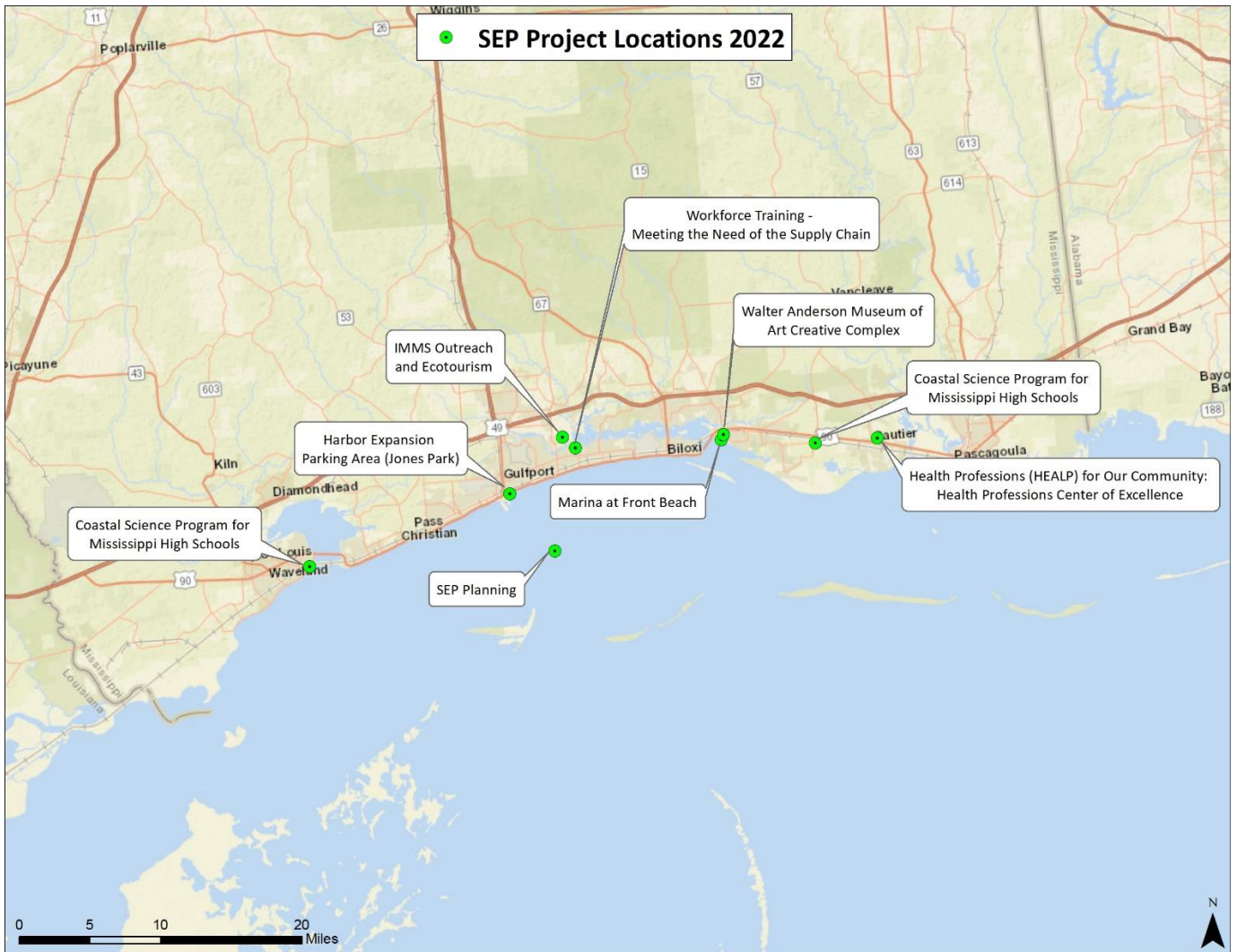
Conroy, C. A., & Walker, N. J. (2000). An examination of integration of academic and vocational subject matter in the aquaculture classroom. *Journal of agricultural education*, 41(2), 54-64.

Thompson, K. R. (2020). Dissertation. Assessing the Effects of an Authentic Project-Based Intervention on Secondary Students' Understanding of Ecosystems and Their Attitudes Toward Interest in STEM. University of Kentucky.

U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy. (2004). The Preliminary Report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy Governors' Draft.



# Project Location Map



## **THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI'S RESPONSE TO COMMENTS REGARDING THE 2022 AMENDED MISSISSIPPI STATE EXPENDITURE PLAN (MSEP)**

On January 13, 2023, the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) published for public review and comment its 2022 Amended MSEP. The MDEQ announced the 2022 Amended MSEP at the 2022 Restoration Summit in Biloxi, MS. During the 2022 Restoration Summit, MDEQ representatives presented project information to the public. Spanish and Vietnamese translation services were available. A notice was published in the Sun Herald and Clarion Ledger newspapers informing the public that the 2022 Amended MSEP was available for public review and comment. Email blasts were also sent to those registered to receive notices. The 2022 Amended MSEP was made available for public review and comment for a total of 62 days, from January 13, 2023 until March 15, 2023. The 2022 Amended MSEP was available to the public, directly downloadable, through [www.restore.ms](http://www.restore.ms) and was also available upon request via email, fax, telephone, or mail directly from MDEQ. The 2022 Amended MSEP was available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

MDEQ accepted public comments and input electronically via [www.restore.ms](http://www.restore.ms), as well as via email, fax, telephone, or mail directly to MDEQ. On January 13, 2023, MDEQ delivered email messages to notify the public that the public review and comment period for the amended MSEP is open and would close on March 15, 2023. On February 16, 2023, MDEQ delivered an email blast to remind those registered to receive notices that the public review and comment period for the 2022 Amended MSEP would close on March 15, 2023. A final email blast was delivered on March 13, 2023 as a reminder that the public review and comment period for the 2022 Amended MSEP would close on March 15, 2023.

During the public review and comment period, MDEQ received a total of one (1) set of written comments. No other comments were submitted. The comments have been summarized for purposes of this response. All comments submitted during the public review and comment period were reviewed and considered by MDEQ. Each activity in the Amended MSEP was adopted after consideration of meaningful input from the public.

This document includes the following sections:

Section 1: Comments on Specific Projects on 2022 Amended MSEP

Section 2: General Comments on 2022 Amended MSEP

### **SECTION 1: COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC PROJECTS ON 2022 AMENDED MSEP**

**No comments on specific projects on the 2022 Amended MSEP were received.**

### **SECTION 2: GENERAL COMMENTS ON 2022 AMENDED MSEP**

**2.1 MDEQ received a comment stating that an increase of funding should not be made to existing activities. Additionally, the commentor suggests that there is a need for local capacity building to identify, mitigate and improve communities directly impacted, historically underserved residents, communities and other stakeholders. The comment also suggested, without citing any factual support, that there is some lack of transparency in the project selection process and that certain stakeholders are excluded.**

MDEQ appreciates and acknowledges this comment. Each activity on the MSEP meets one or more of the eligibility criteria available for funding under the Oil Spill Impact Component of the Resources and

Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act (RESTORE Act). After review, MDEQ believes there is sufficient detail in this MSEP Amendment to demonstrate that the proposed activities are eligible. MDEQ encourages the submission of project ideas to support local capacity building to the Restoration Project Idea Portal for funding consideration.

As to any alleged lack of transparency and/or exclusion of stakeholder groups, MDEQ strongly disagrees. The project portal is available for any member of the public to submit project ideas for consideration. For purposes of the Spill Impact Component of the RESTORE Act, portal projects are considered for funding in the MSEP through the Governor's Gulf Coast Advisory Committee (GCAC) process, as documented in the MSEP. The GCAC is comprised of a wide range of coastal stakeholders. Committee members select portal project entries through a live streamed, publicly accessible deliberation process. Project selections are then made available to the public via the draft MSEP to provide the opportunity for public comments. In addition, MDEQ held multiple stakeholder engagement events to gather public feedback regarding restoration on the Mississippi coast to inform project planning. These events included the Restoration Summit and Coastal Resource Engagement Meetings. Residents and members of historically underserved communities were in attendance, engaged personally with MDEQ staff, and had the opportunity to engage with other Federal and State coastal restoration partners. The Restoration Summit was held as a hybrid event (in-person and virtual) and provided updates to restoration efforts and outcomes of restoration projects and involved listening to the priorities of stakeholders through roundtable discussions. The Coastal Resource Engagement Meetings were open to the public and held in each coastal county. The meetings provided an update on coordinated restoration activities and offered the public a platform to engage with MDEQ to discuss stakeholder priorities. MDEQ will continue to consider projects with both ecological and economic benefits in future MSEP amendments.