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Habitat Restoration Listening Session

| Commenter's Affiliation | Comment |
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| Question 1: What are the big ideas or major outcomes that need to be accomplished or undertaken as part of the strategy? | |
| NGO | Big idea we are focused on is acquisition of land along the Gulf Coast. We would like to see as much land acquired as possible; restoration is a priority. Once you have land conserved, you must restore it. Whether it is upland or wetland habitat, it is providing shorebird, gopher tortoise and other endangered species habitat. It is a buffer, filters water, provides habitat - first line of defense. Section 404 CWA designates priority and there seems to be a conflict with what the Corps is calling a priority. Policy change: look at how first line staff members are instructed to give feedback. Take a look at the way the Corps of Engineers is working |
| NGO | Land acquisition is a good idea. Three main criteria should be used determining lands for acquisition: 1) coastal lands that are viable for the future; 2) provides a suite of different ecosystem services; and 3) network of connected sites that represent connected themes, and result in connected habitat sites. |
| NGO | Restoration messages: 1) even though much of this effort was precipitated by DWH and its direct impacts, the Gulf-wide systems have been hammered for years. Oil spill is just the latest assault in a series; 2) there are many different levels and types of restoration, with so much restoration needed, it is going to take many partners, no one single entity can do this. The restoration really has to be Gulf-wide. There needs to be a way to distribute the workload and distribute pieces to different partners. And, the funding mechanisms that get put into place need to allow many partners to contribute. |
| NGO | Lists and lists of restoration projects are out there. We want the best projects to get funded, those projects that will do the most good for the coast to come out of this. Want to make sure there is objectivity and a competitive nature so that the best ones get funded. |
| NGO | We need to take a comprehensive ecosystem approach, which includes the deep water marine resources. In addition to restoring the coastal wetlands, we must make sure we restore the marine areas that we know the least about, and as fleets are coming into wetland areas make sure that they are not causing destruction. Consider marine restoration. |

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| NGO | A big issue in Texas is the preservation of barrier islands. These islands were built by the hurricanes they wouldn't be here otherwise. We're losing them, but I'm not sure putting a bulldozer on the beach is the solution. |
| NGO | For Galveston Island, the main issue is subsidence. |
| NGO | TX does not have a single issue like LA does. They have a series of interrelated issues. Lots of different habitat issues, fresh water inflows. Don't necessarily have one thing to rally around. |
| NGO | We are seeing a lot of the shale drilling. All of those rivers are heavily impacted by the drilling. We are concerned about fracking and deepwater drilling. The water is coming into the coast. We need policies and rules that regulate the chemicals that are being pumped into the ground. Eagle Ford Shale is devastating the water quality of the rivers and the aquifers (the underground water supply). |
| Business and Industry | Underscore the notion of a comprehensive plan and that things are connected. Part of doing this would be to understand and apply the concept of carrying capacity so that we understand the concept of resilient communities in relation to how much the Gulf coast can bear. |
| Business and Industry | Would love to see a dollar value put on oyster habitats, coral reefs, bird sanctuaries, so that when the ACOE or other organization does a CBA, the economic valuation of ecosystem services and environmental benefits is considered. |
| Question 2: What are key policy changes need to improve the processes needed to support restoration? | |
| NGO | A key policy change should be to change the way first-line staff and instructed to understand the priorities. The commenter is currently working on 4 restoration projects in the Gulf. The ACOE is the primary point of entry, and in each case the ACOE is telling me in each case, "we're not sure this is our priority." According to Section 404 of CWA it is a priority. Therefore, the first-line staff who are looking at land acquisition need to be instructed to give feedback in a different manner, and perhaps they need a broader point of reference. A 450-acre tract of land not in Galveston County is out of bounds because it was in the wrong county. We need to take a look at the way in which the ACOE is working. |

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| Business and Industry | A streamlined approach to the regulatory process is needed. Sometimes it is faster to get a permit from the ACOE than it is to get an easement for restoration from the state of TX. Streamline the process for the different types of reporting that is required to the different agencies; there are multiple patterns of reporting. Maybe a better nationwide permit that coordinates with each of the states towards restoration. Maybe without an arduous public comment period. Less requirements to get through the process. |
| NGO | 1) There needs to be a strict adherence to the goal of habitat impacts. No net loss, is no net loss, and otherwise don't permit! 2) There needs to be a strict adherence to remaining within watershed. Don't let them jump watersheds to provide mitigation. Don't allow some other kind of habitat type to substitute so that we aren't keeping balance the scorecard, and ultimately the watershed. Support habitat protection and minimum loss. Agencies need to apply rules consistently. |
| NGO | Impressed by Jim Tripp's analysis of the immense impact of the Mississippi River. Found it to be a compelling statement. In terms of priority, is there a sense of urgency here? |
| NGO | There are a few policy changes to consider: 1) be resolute not to make policy choices that do more harm than what we've already done, 2) look across agencies for efficiencies and to align the policies across the agencies, line up the priorities; 3) some emergency-level review so that they could get expedited review to do more timely restoration |
| Business and Industry | It is difficult for navigation projects to do beneficial use. For most navigation projects that want to do beneficial use, they don't go through the NER analysis. Several channels do not receive enough funding. But if there is a way to move them forward, a cost-benefit ratio that could help, there would be a lot of support from the navigation industry. If there is some sort of point system that goes along with navigation project planning, it would have a lot of support from the navigation industry to help move forward GCERTF recommendations and allow them to do beneficial use. |

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| Question 3: What new programs and actions (state, federal and private) are needed? | |
| Business and Industry | <p>Recommend looking at again ACOE's program, e-Permit, which was ditched a few years ago. The idea behind the program was that a lot of questions that people would have to wait for the answers to questions would be able to answer them online. Try to look for internal efficiencies in Agencies - staff time for more difficult projects is saved for more senior employees. How do you divide the duties and get the right projects to the right people (in terms of seniority). There are many benefits to technological solutions, and technology to coordinate between agencies. There needs to be training of staff in the agencies to be sure you have the skills on board at the agencies to handle these complex problems. Also, it would help coordinate with agencies. What do you need to do to get people, keep them in agencies, get them trained, and handle the complex projects.</p> |
| NGO | <p>More funding. If TX ultimately does wind up with money from CWA penalties, put it into a trust to generate long-term funding, to provide for restoration funding over the long-range. Rather than spend \$1 billion in a few years, put it in a trust to fund restoration for our lifetime. We don't have a steady stream a funding, so to the extent its possible, lets make it happen.</p> |
| NGO | <p>Would like to see a fully funded land and water conservation fund. Encourage the Obama Administration to take a stronger look at that once again. Acquiring land is important for providing habitat. Also take a look at the list of endangered species to be reviewed. How many are on that list right now, and the USFWS does nto have the funds to do the appropriate review and comment so that we can get them listed. If havitat can be identified for these species, then we know what we need to do to help them be protected.</p> |
| Business and Industry | <p>Give ACOE whatever capacity it needs to get its programs and permits on-line, so the public can easily see whether permits are being enforced. Is the mitigation happening? Is it working? Make that information publicly available so we can tell what is going on.</p> |

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| NGO | Biggest concern is that, after all of the hype, that there is no new program, and no new actions. An endowment would be one way to address that. Think big. We can look at other programs that have mandated funding programs. We have no comparable program to the Great Lakes program. GOM has been neglected in terms of that level of dedicated funding where other bodies have had this. |
| NGO | Create a long-term research and monitoring endowment program that would allow academic and other research institutions to study the marine environment and understand what is going on with our fisheries. It needs to allow us to study this into the future. would allow research institutions to take the pulse of the Gulf to see what is happening with restoration projects so that we can make decisions to use adaptive management to make restoration take place. |
| LGO | Program and policy changes: in-lieu fee. Give those funds to an organization like the Nature Conservancy to do a project. If you let a federal or state agency do a project, you are going to get an over-planned effort. Allow people who are experts and who are able to do it. |
| NGO | Need to include and bring in local hiring. Consider what is going to be the restoration economy. Job skill requirements and the contracting that needs to be done. Bring them to the table to talk about jobs and long-term stream of revenues and look for local hires in the process. |
| NGO | Nature Conservancy has done a good job of wetland mitigation. Don't leave out the private entrepreneurs and hiring consultants to do new, creative ideas. NGOs shouldn't be the only ones eligible for doing these types of initiatives. Policy should include entrepreneurs that are trying to do this work as well. |
| Business and Industry | One of the best things that can happen with bringing industries. If we can build acceptance of failure into the programmatic process, you will see what works, what doesn't, and a few more ideas. ACOE and others are extremely conservative by nature, so if we can build in an acceptance of failure into the program development process then we can allow for more risk taking and more ideas to come forward. |



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| Question 4: What would success look like and how should it be measured and reported? | |
| NGO | Habitat restoration - long term management and monitoring are needed to make sure invasive species are kept out and quality of habitat is maintained in perpetuity. Long-term protection and restoration of the property that is acquired. |
| Business and Industry | Moving all of the whoopers and others off the endangered list. Success would mean we'd have enough functional habitat so that we can move endangered species of the T&E (threatened and endangered) list. |
| NGO | Success will look like restoring and protecting habitat, but also humans contribute to the cycle of protection. |
| Business and Industry | Difficult to get people to pay attention to the species that are at on the endangered species list today. We need enough habitat and large enough populations so that such species can survive the next disaster and not be at-risk. You need to build species populations beyond the point where they are at risk of slipping back onto the endangered species list. |
| Business and Industry | We need resilience for the human population as well; we conserve lands for habitat restoration. Don't put people in harm's way and refocus human development. |
| Business and Industry | Measure success by actual functionality. It needs to function like it does in nature. It is a lot easier to let something that is functioning well to do its job than to try to build something to mimic nature. Success wouldn't look like dollars spent or the number of projects done. It doesn't matter how much acres of wetlands we restore if it doesn't function for organisms like it should, like nature. For conservation, it is a lot easier for something that is functioning well to do its job than it is to build something to mimic nature. |
| General Public | One challenge we face is how we work together; how do we successfully, efficiently deliver the funds towards projects. Not sure how to do this, but we all understand and know of instances where relationships work well. One main measure of success is efficiency of delivering the right dollars to projects. |
| NGO | To get a wetland permit in any ACOE district is difficult because on the interagency review team each agency has its own priorities. EPA does not agree with TDEQ, ACOE does agree with some other agency. Streamlining the permitting process may not be the answer, but we need to stop the infighting between the different agencies because it is difficult to get a permit today. |

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| Question 5: How can the supporting strategies be most effective? (adaptive management, international coordination, tribal coordination, and engagement) | |
| Business and Industry | Would hope to see that there is a list of problems that is clearly articulated; there are goals and objectives that are clearly articulated; and there should be a vision for stakeholder engagement etc. so that we can all see where we are going. Have your problems identified, goals and objective, and then your approach. You should be quantifying goals, such as feet of shoreline. |
| Business and Industry | If any of these strategies are going to be effective, you need to do monitoring and you need to build in funding for monitoring. Where structures are already in place, like an estuary program, you use that to develop a monitoring program so you can have consistent data on projects. |

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