

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force Preliminary Strategy

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. What are the major recommendations addressed in the preliminary strategy?

A. The preliminary strategy responds to the long-standing decline of the Gulf region's ecosystem. These natural resources are vital in that they support much of the economic wellbeing of the area – like tourism and recreation, energy production, and fishing and seafood sales. The preliminary strategy addresses several key areas of concern, among them stopping the loss of critical wetlands like sand barriers and beaches.

The preliminary strategy also addresses the need to reduce the amount of nutrients flowing into the Gulf. The overload of nutrients can create hypoxic or oxygen starved areas where important coastal and marine creatures can't survive. The overload of nutrients coming down the Mississippi alone has contributed to the creation of the second largest "dead zone" in the world in the Gulf.

The preliminary strategy points out the need to do more to enhance the resiliency of coastal communities. Those communities have long been at increased risk from storm and sea level changes and other environmental impacts.

The preliminary strategy also calls for enhancing the quality of life for people in the Gulf by working in partnership with Gulf with coastal communities themselves utilizing local planning programs and ideas.

Q: What does the Task Force identify as the most pressing environmental concern currently being faced in the Gulf?

A. At the top of our list of priorities are restoring the supply of sediment needed to build up eroding wetlands, sand barriers and beaches. Reducing the flow of nutrients which have contributed to the creation a "dead zone" in the Gulf. And helping coastal communities develop improved resiliency against environmental impacts from things like storms and sea level changes.

Together, the Gulf's tourism and commercial and recreational fishing industries make a significant contribution to the United States economy. More than 90 percent of the Nation's offshore oil and gas is produced in the Gulf, and it is where nearly one-third of seafood production in the continental United States is harvested. This preliminary strategy, and this Task Force represent an historic opportunity to stop the loss of wetlands, sand barriers, beaches and natural beauty that support those activities.

Q. Why is the Task Force releasing the report in draft form and asking for public feedback?

A. This preliminary strategy is the product of more than 40 public meetings and listening sessions over the last year throughout the Gulf region. That is why, before the

preliminary strategy is finalized, we wanted to give the public, especially in the Gulf region, an opportunity to review and provide feedback. We want this preliminary strategy to be as informed as much as possible by the people who will help with the solutions and benefit the most from improvements. The final strategy will be out very shortly, in December.

Q: How did the Task Force develop the preliminary strategy?

A. The first step was Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus's report on Gulf restoration, in which he red flagged the long-term decline of resources as a major concern to be addressed. Following Mabus' recommendation, President Obama created this Task Force one year ago to address the Gulf's longstanding ecological decline in the Gulf and to begin moving toward a more resilient Gulf Coast ecosystem. The Task Force includes all five Gulf states as well as federal agencies. For the last year the Task Force has listened to the people of the Gulf during more than 40 public meetings. We've heard concerns and ideas for moving forward from fisherman, environmental experts, scientists, local officials, concerned citizens and business owners. The Task Force members and countless citizens who have helped all form an unprecedented coalition and an historic opportunity for change.

Q: How will the Task Force go about implementing, and funding the preliminary strategy released today?

A. The work of the Task Force does not stop with the completion of this strategy. The purpose of the Task Force is to set strategic direction and to accelerate restoration by working with the implementing agencies to resolve barriers to progress and to identify or leverage available resources. The Task Force is now shifting gears to assess specific projects and required resources that will help achieve the recommendations. While some of these recommendations will require additional resources, others can be accomplished by better aligning existing resources and targeting restoration work to the key problems. We anticipate identifying lead agencies, partners, and resource needs that can be included in various budget proposals. While exact costs have not yet been determined, the way forward is affordable and doable – and will result in major benefits for the Gulf region.

Q: What is the current state of the Gulf Coast's ecosystem?

A. Our report speaks to long-standing threats from the decline of the region's ecosystem – an ecosystem that the Gulf states depend upon for much of their economic wellbeing. The loss of wetlands and beaches directly impacts tourism and recreation. The loss of wildlife habitats directly affects seafood catches and sales. Nutrient problems can lead to "dead zones" which obviously also impact fishing and the seafood industry. The Gulf is losing a football field size piece of wetlands in Louisiana every 38 minutes, over time an area of almost 2000 square miles. The region already has lost about half its wetlands -- a loss that continues unabated. Key habitats for a wide range of fish and other animals are being lost or reduced across the Gulf. The creation of channels and levees from dredging in the Lower Mississippi often can "disconnect" the vast wetland delta

from the source of sediments that built the delta over thousands of years. These are serious and urgent problems that have been growing for a long time and are reaching a critical mass – problems that the preliminary strategy addresses – and probably the biggest threat to the region at the moment.

Q: What specific environmental damage was caused by the oil spill?

A. The Deepwater Horizon oil spill caused vast damage to the natural resources of the Gulf of Mexico. The extent of this damage is currently being assessed by the Natural Resources Damage Assessment process led by certain federal agencies and the five Gulf Coast states. For more information, please visit: http://www.fws.gov//contaminants/pdf/NRDAR_Program_2-10-05.pdf. For our purposes, however, the bigger threats to the Gulf ecosystem involve the startling loss of wetlands, sand barriers and beaches – resources that contribute to the economy greatly.

Q. Does the Administration support SB 1400, the Gulf recovery act?

A. The preliminary strategy reaffirms the President’s call for a substantial amount of Clean Water Act penalties obtained in the Deepwater Horizon oil spill litigation to be returned to the Gulf for recovery activities and for a council to be established to oversee these recovery activities and investments.

Q. Where can members of the public go to review the preliminary strategy?

A. The preliminary strategy is available to the public for review and feedback at www.epa.gov/gulfcoasttaskforce.

Q. How much time will members of the public have to provide input on this preliminary version of the strategy?

A. The preliminary strategy is available to the public for review and feedback at www.epa.gov/gulfcoasttaskforce until 11:59 p.m. EST October 26, 2011.

Q. Will the preliminary strategy be available for non-English speakers?

A. Yes. Recognizing the large populations of non-English speaking stakeholders in the Gulf states, the preliminary strategy will be available in both Spanish and Vietnamese. These documents will be available on the website, www.epa.gov/gulfcoasttaskforce. We are working with some of the leaders of these communities to inform them of the translated documents and encourage its distribution as well as the translated instructions on how to provide feedback.

Q. What is the date for the final release of the strategy?

A. The Task Force will release the final version in December 2011.

Q. Who are the members of the Task Force?

A. The Task Force is made up of representatives from the five Gulf states and 11 federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, Council on Environmental

Quality, Department of Interior, Department of Commerce, Department of Defense, Department of Agriculture, Department of Justice, Department of Transportation, Office of Management and Budget, Office of Science and Technology Policy and Domestic Policy Council. The five states are: Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. The names of each member and their bios are here:

<http://epa.gov/gulfcoasttaskforce/members.html>.

- Q. **Where can I read the president's Executive Order that created the Task Force?**
A. More information on the president's executive order: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/10/05/executive-order-gulf-coast-ecosystem-restoration-task-force>.