

# **Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program**

## RESTORE Council Proposal Document

### **General Information**

*Title:*

Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program

*Project Abstract:*

The GCCRP was established through the Council's 2015 Initial Funded Priorities List and continued in FPL 3b. USDA is currently implementing the program in Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida for the purpose of protecting and restoring critical wildlife habitat and improving water quality through the development of conservation and restoration plans.

The GCCRP for the 2026 FPL will build upon the restoration and conservation progress made through the initial and secondary program funding, and will support the primary RESTORE Comprehensive Plan goal to restore water quality and quantity through the implementation of conservation practices and restoration activities to address the priority resource concerns identified in the planning phase.

The health of the Gulf of America depends upon the health of its estuaries, and the health of those estuaries are influenced by what happens upstream along tributary rivers including the Mississippi.

GCCRP activities will allow for conservation planning on private lands including, but not limited to, ecosystem restoration by conducting soil and water conservation for the benefit of water quality to priority bays and estuaries. Program duration is 4 years.

This program will serve to assist willing private landowners with implementing conservation measures that improve water and wildlife habitat conditions. The project will result in incremental improvements to water quality with comprehensive conservation measures being implemented in the watershed.

*FPL Category:* Cat1: Planning Only

*Activity Type:* Program

*Program:* Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program

*Co-sponsoring Agency(ies):*

TX

AL

*Is this a construction project?:*

No

*RESTORE Act Priority Criteria:*

(I) Projects that are projected to make the greatest contribution to restoring and protecting the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast region, without regard to geographic location within the Gulf Coast region.

*Priority Criteria Justification:*

(1) Projects that are projected to make the greatest contribution to restoring and protecting the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands

of the Gulf Coast region, without regard to geographic location within the Gulf Coast region.

(3) Projects contained in existing Gulf Coast State comprehensive plans for the restoration and protection of natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast region.

The intent of the program is to allow for conservation planning on private lands including, but not limited to ecosystem restoration by conducting soil and water conservation for the benefit of water quality to priority bays and estuaries. The health of the Gulf depends upon the health of its estuaries, and the health of those estuaries is influenced by what happens upstream along tributary rivers including the Mississippi. USDA staff will engage state and local conservation partners in planning efforts to identify tracts of lands within the Gulf Coast Region that could benefit from conservation measures that would address natural resources and wildlife habitat degradation.

These tracts of lands will be prioritized by watersheds (or sub-watersheds) that provide the most conservation benefit for the dollar invested. Conservation, forest management, and wildlife habitat plans will be developed to address the private landowners' conservation goals. The plans will document the natural resource concerns and conservation practices that would address the resource concerns. The plans will be developed with a regional perspective that fully considers the restoration and conservation needs of the Gulf Coast. Conservation practices that address water quality, wildlife habitat restoration and protection, and farmland preservation will be considered during the planning process.

*Project Duration (in years): 4*

**Goals**

*Primary Comprehensive Plan Goal:*

Restore Water Quality and Quantity

*Primary Comprehensive Plan Objective:*

Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources

*Secondary Comprehensive Plan Objectives:*

Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources

*Secondary Comprehensive Plan Goals:*

Restore and Conserve Habitat

*PF Restoration Technique(s):*

Reduce excess nutrients and other pollutants to watersheds: Agriculture and forest management

Reduce excess nutrients and other pollutants to watersheds: Erosion and sediment control

**Location**

*Location:*

Alabama and Texas

*HUC8 Watershed(s):*

South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Choctawhatchee-Escambia) - Florida Panhandle Coastal(Perdido Bay)

South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Alabama) - Alabama(Middle Alabama)

Texas-Gulf Region(Sabine) - Sabine(Upper Sabine)

Texas-Gulf Region(Sabine) - Sabine(Middle Sabine)

Texas-Gulf Region(Sabine) - Sabine(Lake Fork)

Texas-Gulf Region(Neches) - Neches(Upper Neches)

Texas-Gulf Region(Neches) - Neches(Middle Neches)

Texas-Gulf Region(Neches) - Neches(Lower Neches)

Texas-Gulf Region(Neches) - Neches(Village)

Texas-Gulf Region(Neches) - Neches(Pine Island Bayou)

Texas-Gulf Region(Trinity) - Lower Trinity(Lower Trinity)

Texas-Gulf Region(Galveston Bay-San Jacinto) - San Jacinto(West Fork San Jacinto)

Texas-Gulf Region(Galveston Bay-San Jacinto) - San Jacinto(Spring)

Texas-Gulf Region(Galveston Bay-San Jacinto) - San Jacinto(East Fork San Jacinto)

Texas-Gulf Region(Galveston Bay-San Jacinto) - San Jacinto(Buffalo-San Jacinto)

Texas-Gulf Region(Galveston Bay-San Jacinto) - Galveston Bay-Sabine Lake(East Galveston Bay)

Texas-Gulf Region(Galveston Bay-San Jacinto) - Galveston Bay-Sabine Lake(North Galveston Bay)

Texas-Gulf Region(Galveston Bay-San Jacinto) - Galveston Bay-Sabine Lake(West Galveston Bay)

Texas-Gulf Region(Galveston Bay-San Jacinto) - Galveston Bay-Sabine Lake(Austin-Oyster)

Texas-Gulf Region(Brazos Headwaters) - Brazos Headwaters(Salt Fork Brazos)

Texas-Gulf Region(Lower Brazos) - Lower Brazos(Lower Brazos)

Texas-Gulf Region(Lower Colorado-San Bernard Coastal) - Lower Colorado(Lower Colorado)

Texas-Gulf Region(Lower Colorado-San Bernard Coastal) - San Bernard Coastal(East Matagorda Bay)

Texas-Gulf Region(Nueces-Southwestern Texas Coastal) - Nueces(Nueces Headwaters)

Texas-Gulf Region(Nueces-Southwestern Texas Coastal) - Nueces(West Nueces)

Texas-Gulf Region(Nueces-Southwestern Texas Coastal) - Southwestern Texas Coastal(North Laguna Madre)

Texas-Gulf Region(Nueces-Southwestern Texas Coastal) - Southwestern Texas Coastal(San Fernando)

Texas-Gulf Region(Nueces-Southwestern Texas Coastal) - Southwestern Texas Coastal(Baffin Bay)

Texas-Gulf Region(Nueces-Southwestern Texas Coastal) - Southwestern Texas Coastal(Central

Laguna Madre)

*State(s):*

Texas

Alabama

*County/Parish(es):*

AL - Baldwin

AL - Mobile

TX - Aransas

TX - Brazoria

TX - Calhoun

TX - Cameron

TX - Chambers

TX - Galveston

TX - Harris

TX - Jackson

TX - Jefferson

TX - Kenedy

TX - Kleberg

TX - Matagorda

TX - Nueces

TX - Refugio

TX - San Patricio

TX - Victoria

TX - Willacy

*Congressional District(s):*

TX - 22

TX - 27

TX - 14

AL - 1

TX - 34

**Narratives**

*Introduction and Overview:*

The GCCRP was established through the Council's 2015 Initial Funded Priorities List. USDA is currently implementing the program in Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida for the purpose of protecting and restoring critical wildlife habitat and improving water quality through the development of wildlife habitat, conservation, and forest management plans.

The GCCRP for the 2026 FPL will build upon the restoration and conservation progress made through the initial and secondary program funding and will support the primary RESTORE Comprehensive Plan goal to restore water quality and quantity through the implementation of conservation practices and restoration activities to address the priority resource concerns identified in the planning phase.

The health of the Gulf depends upon the health of its estuaries, and the health of those estuaries is influenced by what happens upstream along tributary rivers including the Mississippi.

GCCRP activities will allow for conservation planning on private lands including, but not limited to,

ecosystem restoration by conducting soil and water conservation for the benefit of water quality to priority bays and estuaries. Program duration is 4 years.

*Proposed Methods :*

Projected to make the greatest contribution to restoring and protecting natural resources: The future health of the region's ecosystem will be decided on private lands. The five states on the Gulf of America encompass more than 290 million acres. Private agricultural and forest lands account for 86 percent of those acres. Consequently, the management of private lands has a tremendous influence on the health of the region's industries and natural resources, including the quantity and quality of water flowing into the gulf's estuaries, fisheries and other wildlife. Through an incentive-based, voluntary approach, USDA partners with farmers, ranchers, and landowners on private lands to sustain and enhance natural resources across the region. This proposal is for the continuation of conservation/restoration implementation in Alabama and Texas.

*Environmental Benefits:*

This program will serve to assist willing private landowners with implementing conservation measures that improve water and wildlife habitat conditions. The project will result in incremental improvements to water quality with comprehensive conservation measures being implemented in the watershed. The conservation implementation will be conducted with the landowner's conservation goals in mind, enabling greater ownership in conservation and management activities that affect water quality and wildlife habitat conditions within the Gulf Coast Region. Outcomes will include direct improvements in water quality, wetland and upland wildlife habitat, and forest health. "ACT" principles to "Avoid, Control, and Trap" nutrients and sediments will be used. 1) avoiding excess nutrient loss; 2) utilizing conservation practices that control runoff losses in-field; and 3) trapping nutrient and sediment losses that cannot be avoided or controlled.

*Metrics:*

Metric Title: COI003 : Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance - # people enrolled -

BMPs

Target: 50

Narrative: Enrollment of agricultural landowners (program enrollment).

Metric Title: COI002 : Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance - # people reached

Target: 100

Narrative: Outreach and Technical Assistance to agricultural landowners.

Metric Title: HC002 : Conservation easements - Miles of shoreline under long-term easement

Target: 5000

Narrative: Acres benefited by conservation/restoration.

*Risk and Uncertainties:*

The public is familiar with the restoration/conservation approach associated with this program. There are no anticipated long-term adverse impacts associated with the implementation of conservation and best management practices.

The proposed program is voluntary, and is therefore subject to the interest and capacity of

agricultural landowners to implement conservation/restoration practices.

*Monitoring and Adaptive Management:*

Practice implementation practices will be monitored for performance with respect to the NRCS conservation practice standards and planned conservation practice physical effect analysis. Corrective actions will be performed where deemed necessary to ensure that applied practice adequately address the natural resource concerns.

*Data Management:*

Data for this project will be managed according to RESTORE Council policy and procedures.

*Collaboration:*

USDA will continue to collaborate and coordinate through an extensive network of conservation partners, including DWH Trustees, other state and local agencies, and private for- and nonprofit organizations. More specifically, USDA will engage its network of public and private partnerships that work collaboratively with farmers, ranchers, and private landowners to plan and install an array

of conservation measures to address water quality and wildlife habitat concerns along the Gulf. This

network is well-suited to provide cost effective and timely assistance to benefit the Gulf ecosystem restoration effort. USDA will work closely with state and federal agencies in all states to

help guide the prioritization and planning of GCCRP implementation.

*Public Engagement, Outreach, and Education:*

USDA will engage private landowners to introduce and encourage the adoption of conservation practices.

*Leveraging:*

N/A

*Environmental Compliance:*

Continuation of the program from the initial FPL. The USDA - NRCS Service has categorical exclusions (CEs) which are actions that the Agency has determined do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and, thus, should not require preparing an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

In addition to the programmatic evaluations discussed above, NRCS undertakes site specific environmental evaluations (EE) to address NEPA requirements, other requirements for protection of the environment, and NRCS regulations. This evaluation will be documented in the CPA-52 (the NRCS EE form) before conservation/restoration implementation is initiated. The EE assesses the effects of conservation alternatives and provides information for the purpose of determining the need for additional consultation.

In situations where a single conservation practice may result in increased risk to the condition of another resource, additional conservation practices are integrated into the conservation plan to avoid creating new resource concerns. The EE process helps to ensure that all potential impacts to natural resources are identified, and appropriate alternatives and practices are available to the landowner. Each conservation plan and contract/agreement will be accompanied by an EE.

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## **Budget**

### *Project Budget Narrative:*

The United States Department of Agriculture is proposing \$3 Million in Council-Selected Restoration Component funding for the Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program (GCCRP). The sponsor is the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This includes planning and implementation funds as FPL Category 1. The GCCRP was established through the Council's 2015 Initial Funded Priorities List. USDA is currently implementing the program in Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida for the purpose of protecting and restoring critical wildlife habitat and improving water quality through the development of wildlife habitat, conservation, and forest management plans.

The GCCRP for FPL4 (Alabama and Texas) will build upon the restoration and conservation progress made through the initial program funding, and will support the primary RESTORE Comprehensive Plan goal to restore water quality and quantity through the implementation of conservation practices and restoration activities to address the priority resource concerns identified in the planning phase.

### *Total FPL Project/Program Budget Request:*

\$ 3,000,000

*Estimated Percent Monitoring and Adaptive Management: 5 %*

*Estimated Percent Planning: 10 %*

*Estimated Percent Implementation: 75 %*

*Estimated Percent Project Management: 5 %*

*Estimated Percent Data Management: 5 %*

*Estimated Percent Contingency: N/A*

### *Is the Project Scalable?:*

Yes

*If yes, provide a short description regarding scalability.:*

Program scalability is subject to acres to be treated and conservation/restoration practices to be applied.

This program is scalable; however, it may not be feasible to fund the project below the \$1 million dollar threshold for a particular state. The demand for technical and financial assistance to implement conservation will exceed the available funding. The number of landowner contracts and acres treated will be a function of funds invested.

## Environmental

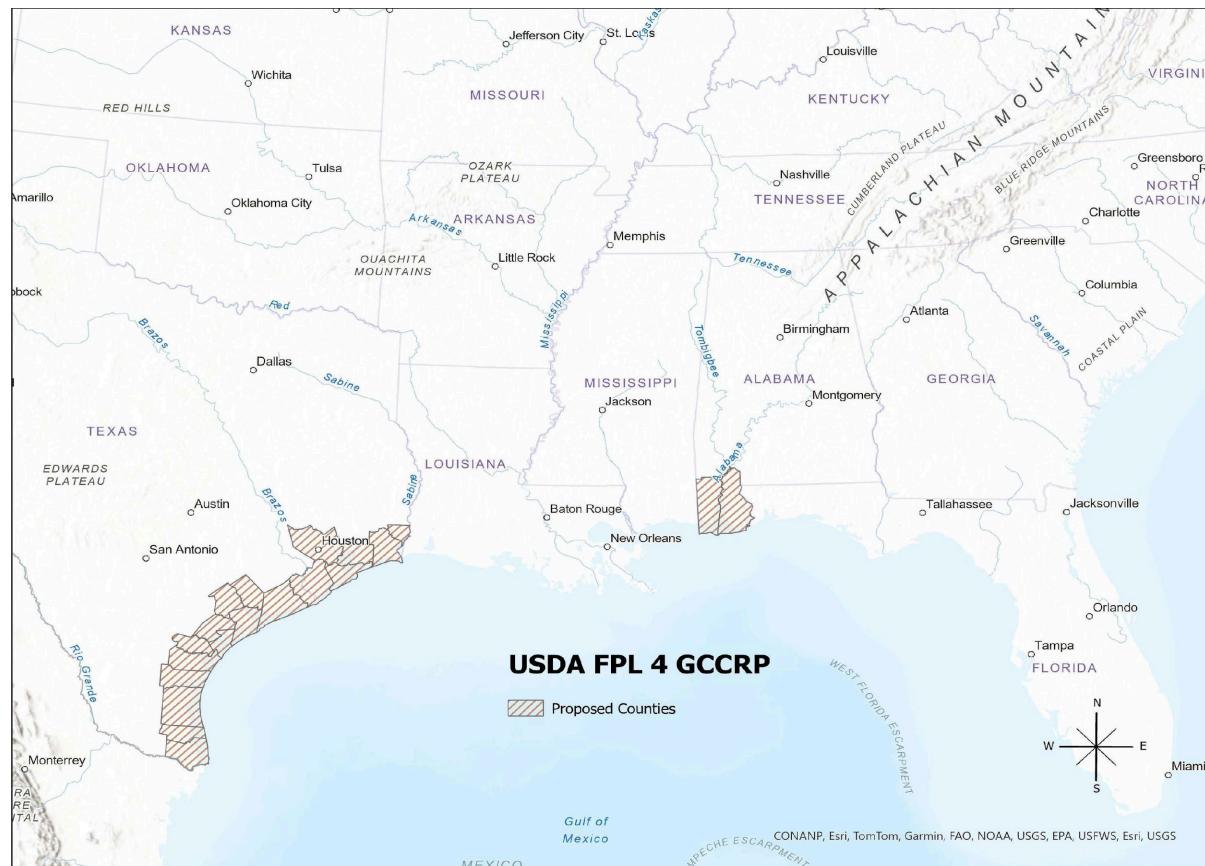
Environmental Requirement	Has the Requirement Been Addressed?	Compliance Notes (e.g., title and date of document, permit number, weblink etc.)
<b>National Environmental Policy Act</b>	Yes	Continuation of the program from the initial FPL. The USDA - NRCS Service has categorical exclusions (CEs) which are actions that the Agency has determined do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and, thus, should not require preparing an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Site specific environmental evaluations (EE) to address NEPA requirements.
<b>Endangered Species Act</b>	Yes	Continuation of the program from the initial FPL. The USDA - NRCS Service has categorical exclusions (CEs) which are actions that the Agency has determined do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and, thus, should not require preparing an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Site specific environmental evaluations (EE) to address NEPA requirements.
<b>National Historic Preservation Act</b>	Yes	Continuation of the program from the initial FPL. The USDA - NRCS Service has categorical exclusions (CEs) which are actions that the Agency has determined do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and, thus, should not require preparing an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Site specific environmental evaluations (EE) to address NEPA requirements.
<b>Magnuson-Stevens Act</b>	N/A	Note not provided.
<b>Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act</b>	Yes	Continuation of the program from the initial FPL. The USDA - NRCS Service has categorical exclusions (CEs) which are actions that the Agency has determined do not

		individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and, thus, should not require preparing an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Site specific environmental evaluations (EE) to address NEPA requirements.
<b>Coastal Zone Management Act</b>	Yes	Continuation of the program from the initial FPL. The USDA - NRCS Service has categorical exclusions (CEs) which are actions that the Agency has determined do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and, thus, should not require preparing an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Site specific environmental evaluations (EE) to address NEPA requirements.
<b>Coastal Barrier Resources Act</b>	Yes	Continuation of the program from the initial FPL. The USDA - NRCS Service has categorical exclusions (CEs) which are actions that the Agency has determined do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and, thus, should not require preparing an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Site specific environmental evaluations (EE) to address NEPA requirements.
<b>Farmland Protection Policy Act</b>	Yes	Continuation of the program from the initial FPL. The USDA - NRCS Service has categorical exclusions (CEs) which are actions that the Agency has determined do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and, thus, should not require preparing an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Site specific environmental evaluations (EE) to address NEPA requirements.
<b>Clean Water Act (Section 404)</b>	Yes	Continuation of the program from the initial FPL. The USDA - NRCS Service has categorical exclusions (CEs) which are actions that the Agency has determined do not

		individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and, thus, should not require preparing an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Site specific environmental evaluations (EE) to address NEPA requirements.
<b>River and Harbors Act (Section 10)</b>	N/A	Note not provided.
<b>Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act</b>	N/A	Note not provided.
<b>Marine Mammal Protection Act</b>	N/A	Note not provided.
<b>National Marine Sanctuaries Act</b>	N/A	Note not provided.
<b>Migratory Bird Treaty Act</b>	Yes	Continuation of the program from the initial FPL. The USDA - NRCS Service has categorical exclusions (CEs) which are actions that the Agency has determined do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and, thus, should not require preparing an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Site specific environmental evaluations (EE) to address NEPA requirements.
<b>Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act</b>	Yes	Continuation of the program from the initial FPL. The USDA - NRCS Service has categorical exclusions (CEs) which are actions that the Agency has determined do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and, thus, should not require preparing an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Site specific environmental evaluations (EE) to address NEPA requirements.
<b>Clean Air Act</b>	Yes	Continuation of the program from the initial FPL. The USDA - NRCS Service has categorical exclusions (CEs) which are actions that the Agency has determined do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and, thus, should not require preparing an environmental

		assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Site specific environmental evaluations (EE) to address NEPA requirements.
<b>Other Applicable Environmental Compliance Laws or Regulations</b>	N/A	Note not provided.

## Maps, Charts, Figures



Caption : GCCRP Map FPL4

## Other Uploads

## GIS Data\_1: RESTORE\_GIS\_Template.gdb.zip



## Council Staff Review: Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program

### FPL Internal Staff Review

Project/Program	Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program		
Primary Reviewer	Amy Newbold	Sponsor	USDA
EC Reviewer	John Ettinger	Co-Sponsor	TX and AL
<p>1. Is/Are the selected Priority Criteria supported by information in the proposal?</p> <p>Notes      This is a continuation of an existing FPL funded program.</p>			
<p>2. Does the proposal meet the RESTORE Act geographic eligibility requirement?</p> <p>Notes</p>			
<p>3. Are the Comprehensive Plan primary goal and primary objective supported by information in the proposal?</p> <p>Notes</p>			
<p>4. Planning Framework: If the proposal is designed to align with the Planning Framework, does the proposal support the selected priority approaches, priority techniques, and/or geographic area?</p> <p>Notes</p>			
<p>5. Does the proposal align with the applicable RESTORE Council definition of project or program?</p> <p>Notes</p>			
<p>6. Does the budget narrative adequately describe the costs associated with the proposed activity?</p> <p>Notes      Please provide more information in the budget narrative regarding the breakdown of funding between AL and TX and how that funding will be utilized in each state. Note: Restore Council staff worked with the state to resolve these comments.</p>			
			More information needed

7. Have three external BAS reviews been completed and has the proposal sponsor provided their response?	Yes
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Notes	USDA applied BAS reviews that were completed upon proposal of the program in previous FPL. This is justified due to the methods remaining largely the same and the scientific integrity of the program potentially increasing.
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8. Have appropriate metrics been proposed to support all primary and secondary goals?	Yes
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Notes	
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9. Environmental compliance: If FPL Category 1 has been selected for the implementation component of the project or program, does the proposal include environmental compliance documentation that fully supports the selection of Category 1?	More information needed
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Notes	More EC information needed. Proposal indicates USDA seeking Cat 2 status for implementation funds, but narrative and EC checklist indicates USDA proposes to use CE and associated EC documentation from FPL 3b. If the latter is the case, USDA needs to modify the proposal to indicate Cat 1 implementation funds are being sought and provide the CE and associated environmental documentation to support this status. If the FPL 3b documentation remains valid, then the Council can re-adopt that documentation.
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Note: Restore Council staff worked with the state to resolve these comments.

## **Summary of Best Available Science Review: Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program**

This program was reviewed for BAS under FPL 3b. Under the 2026 FPL, USDA is proposing a continuation of the program.

The original BAS review as well as USDA's response to the BAS comments can be found on the [Council's 2026 FPL webpage](#).