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The Honorable Dr. Kathryn Sullivan
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Herbert C. Hoover Building, Room 6811
14th Street & Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Sullivan:

On behalf of the NOAA Science Advisory Board (SAB), I am pleased to transmit to you the review report, "Initial Comments and Recommendations on the NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program Draft Science Plan." The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Science Program Advisory Working Group (RSPA WG) prepared this report on behalf of the SAB, which then reviewed and approved it at the July 2014 SAB meeting.

The RSPA WG is charged to provide independent guidance and review of the RESTORE Act Science Program, as well as provide a mechanism for formal coordination between the multiple organizations conducting RESTORE-related science within the Gulf of Mexico. The first formal charge of the Working Group was to review the first draft of the NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program Science Plan (Science Plan hereafter). The goals of the Science Plan are to support the science necessary for better understanding and management of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem, specifically: healthy, diverse, sustainable, and resilient estuarine, coastal, and marine habitats; healthy diverse, sustainable, and resilient coastal and marine resources, including fisheries; and resilient and adaptive coastal communities.

The review report highlights several initial overarching comments and recommendations on the Science Plan, and specific recommendations on its organization and structure. Key overarching recommendations were that the Science Plan should focus on the identification and articulation of the science needs to improve understanding in support of informed decision-making and management, consider funding constraints and limitations in the prioritization of research activities, and address the higher-level science needs for the entire Gulf of Mexico region. The report also states that a comparison between the RESTORE Act elements 1603, 1604, and 1605 is critical to identify gaps and reduce redundancies in research prioritization. The RSPA WG and SAB strongly recommend the Science Plan incorporate discussion of how element 1604 will compliment, reinforce, or compete with the other sections of the RESTORE Act.

Specific suggestions for the restructuring of the Science Plan focus areas are provided in the enclosed "Annotated Draft Science Plan." The report suggests that the Program should recognize that all Focus Areas are of equal importance. The prioritization of Focus Areas may differ regionally based upon the science needed to inform restoration, guidance, policy, or regulation by decision-makers and related programmatic sections of the Act. The Science Plan should include a narrative describing how science-to-inform management will be conveyed and integrated into the management decision-making processes across federal and state agencies. Furthermore, the RESTORE Act Science Program should consider the role of social science and economics in the Science Plan.

The SAB recognizes that the RESTORE Act Science Program operates within the construct of the RESTORE Act, and suggests that the Science Plan include a preface that outlines this context and constraints on the Plan as

a result of it. Furthermore, the SAB recommends that the Science Plan should clearly state the vision and expected outcomes for the NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program.

The SAB strongly encourages the NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program to incorporate these recommendations into the final version of the Science Plan. Given the expected time frame for finalizing the NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program Science Plan (September-October, 2014), the SAB respectfully requests a response from NOAA to these recommendations at the Fall 2014 SAB meeting (November 17-18, 2014).

Please let me know if you have any questions, comments or concerns.

Sincerely,



Lynn Scarlett
Chair, NOAA Science Advisory Board
Managing Director for Public Policy, The Nature Conservancy

Attachments

cc: Jean May-Brett
Michael Donahue
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