

NOAA Science Advisory Board

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Science Program Advisory Working Group (RSPA WG)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Background

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Science Program is being developed per Section 1604 of the RESTORE Act¹ using 2.5% of the total amount made available for each fiscal year from the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund and 25% of annual Trust Fund earned interest and investment proceeds. Legislative intent of the science program is “to achieve an integrative, holistic understanding of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem and support, to the maximum extent practicable, restoration efforts and the long-term sustainability of the ecosystem, including its fish stocks, habitat, and fishing industries.” As specified under the Act, grant or contract funds provided under the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Science Program may not be used for any existing or planned research led by NOAA, unless agreed to in writing by the grant recipient; implement existing regulations or initiate new regulations promulgated or proposed by NOAA; or develop or approve a new limited access privilege program

The RESTORE Act articulates several broad categories of activities including marine and estuarine research; marine and estuarine ecosystem monitoring and ocean observation; data collection and stock assessments; pilot programs for fishery independent data and reduction of exploitation of spawning aggregations; and cooperative research. Focusing the activities supported by this program will help ensure that the research, observations, science, and technology are coordinated, complement existing and future efforts (e.g., Natural Resource Damage Assessment science, RESTORE Council, RESTORE State Centers of Excellence), and address the critical knowledge needs facing the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem restoration and management in an integrated and holistic manner.

Focus on the implementation of the Act will be maintained through several bodies: an Administrative body to be directed by NOAA’s National Ocean Service, a Restoration Science Program Executive Oversight Board (including representation from five NOAA Line Offices and the US Fish and Wildlife Service), and the body referred to in this text, the Restoration Science Program Advisory Working Group [proposed to be established under NOAA’s Science Advisory Board (SAB)]. The primary function of the Oversight Board is to provide direct scientific, programmatic, and financial oversight to the leadership of the NOS Administrative body in the implementation of the program through its duration. The Restoration Science Program Advisory Working Group’s primary function is to provide informed regional advice on Gulf of Mexico RESTORE related ecosystem science and monitoring to both the Administrative Body and the Oversight Board for implementation of NOAA’s RESTORE science program.

¹ Signed by President Obama as part of the Omnibus Transportation Bill in July 2012

Purpose

This standing SAB Working Group will be known as the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Science Program Advisory Working Group (RSPA WG). It shall provide independent guidance and review of the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Science Program along with general programmatic advice and recommendations. The RSPA WG will also provide a mechanism for formal coordination between the multiple organizations conducting RESTORE related science within the Gulf of Mexico.

The RSPA WG will focus on the broad research, and monitoring components of the RESTORE Act science portfolio as implemented by NOAA's Restoration Science Program, as well as on the underlying observations and data management issues. In all its activities the RSPA WG will take into consideration the four themes set forth for the RESTORE Act program: 1) "State of health" for the Gulf (e.g., ecosystem assessment), incorporating environmental, socio-economic, and human well-being benefits and elements, 2) integrated analysis and synthesis of data, 3) ecosystem processes, functioning and connectivity studies, and 4) holistic approaches to observing and monitoring. Moreover, as a WG of the SAB, the RSPA WG will consider the eight principles set forth by the NOAA SAB: 1) Quality, Creativity and Credibility; 2) Timeliness and Scale; 3) Science Connected to the Application and Operational Implementation of Policy; 4) Capacity Building; 5) Education and Outreach; 6) Efficiency; 7) Social Science Integration; and 8) Diversity.

The RSPA WG, in its role as a sanctioned, standing working group of the NOAA SAB, will report to the SAB on the condition and capabilities of NOAA's RESTORE program, and submit formal reports to the SAB after each of their scheduled meetings. In this capacity, the RSPA WG will provide advice to the SAB and the SAB will then provide advice to the RESTORE Science Administrative Program (functioning within NOAA's National Ocean Service), and the RESTORE Science Oversight Board to: 1) foster ongoing dialogue, 2) enhance communication with external partners and stakeholders, and 3) provide advice and input for program implementation. As such, the RSPA WG will assist NOAA's RESTORE program in establishing plans, assessing progress, and reviewing priorities on a continuing basis. The RSPA WG will also provide a formal forum for the discussion and coordination of RESTORE related science outside of NOAA's program.

The RSPA WG will coordinate with other SAB Working Groups, and in particular with the Ecosystem Science and Management Working Group (ESMWG). A member of the ESMWG will act as liaison to RSPA WG, and a RSPA WG member will be designated as liaison to ESMWG.

The RSPA WG will not be involved in the development of NOAA's RESTORE science program funding initiatives or in the award of the program's contracts or grants.

Membership

The RSPAWG shall be composed 15-20 individuals from two groups of outstanding scientists and leaders with a broad interest in Gulf of Mexico RESTORE related activities—a permanent group representing science related organizations in the Gulf of Mexico, and a rotating group composed of subject matter experts.

The first group, meets a requirement under the RESTORE Act for coordination between NOAA and other Gulf of Mexico science programs, and will include scientists representing organizations with active Gulf of Mexico science programs which have a need to collaborate and coordinate RESTORE science activities. These organizations include those linked to RESTORE activities as called out in the actual RESTORE Act:

- Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
- Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
- RESTORE Centers of Excellence for Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas

Each of these organizations would be permanently represented as voting members of the RSPAWG, with single individuals designated by the organization as its representative to the RSPAWG. Additional funding organizations may participate as ex-officio members, including:

- Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative
- National Academy of Sciences
- Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Again, each organization would designate a single scientist as its representative to the RSPAWG.

The second group of individuals will include subject matter experts from a variety of disciplines whose collective knowledge can identify science gaps and needs related to the application of RESTORE related in the Gulf of Mexico. Members will have expertise in disciplines relevant to Gulf of Mexico marine, coastal, and estuarine ecosystem-based science, a credible background in science or the application of science in a marine/estuarine management context, and knowledge of federal agencies and interactions with state and local partners. These individuals will be appointed for one three-year term, which is renewable for one additional three-year term. Working with NOAA the RSPAWG may provide suggestions of membership through the RSPAWG Chair to the NOAA SAB for consideration.

The RSPAWG Chair or Co-Chairs will be determined by the need of the RSPAWG. The organizing committee will bring this recommendation to the full SAB along with the proposed RSPAWG membership. The Chair ensures that meetings are run according to the provisions of these Terms of Reference and other agreed-to meeting practices. The Chair will work closely with the SAB Liaison and NOAA support staff between meetings to develop meeting agendas, make meeting arrangements, identify materials for distribution, identify information or experts needed for meetings, and other matters related to the review of RESTORE

scientific activities. Additionally, the Chair will prepare, sign, and formally transmit recommendations from the RSPAWG to the SAB.

The RSPAWG will convene in person 2-3 times per year, and by electronic means as frequently as necessary.