

PLANNING FOR LARGE-SCALE COASTAL RESTORATION: DEVELOPMENT OF THE FLORIDA STATE EXPENDITURE PLAN

Doug Robison, M.S., PWS
Environmental Science Associates



INTRODUCTION

The 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill was an ecological and economic disaster for the Gulf of Mexico and the myriad of stakeholders who depend on the Gulf for their livelihood. In 2010 Congress passed the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economy of the Gulf Coast Act (RESTORE Act) that provides a mechanism to hold the responsible parties financially accountable for restoring the Gulf in the wake of the oil spill. The RESTORE Act was signed into law in 2012, and in April 2016 a formal settlement was reached with BP, the primary responsible party. The passage of the federal RESTORE Act established an unprecedented funding source and a unique opportunity for Gulf Coast states and local governments to implement coastal zone projects over the next two decades that address five strategic goals:

- Restore and Conserve Habitat;
- Restore Water Quality;
- Replenish and Protect Living Coastal and Marine Resources;
- Enhance Community Resilience; and
- Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy.



Among the five affected states, Florida is unique with regard to the large geographic extent of its coastline and the associated diversity of ecosystems and affected communities. In addition, implementation of the Spill Impact Component of the RESTORE Act will be different in Florida than the other four Gulf Coast states. Working under a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Governor, responsibility for the development of Florida's State Expenditure Plan (SEP) has been delegated to the Gulf Consortium, an organization composed of an elected official from each of Florida's 23 Gulf Coast counties, and six Governor-appointed representatives. The Florida SEP will specify the projects, programs and activities to be implemented using the approximate \$300 million that is Florida's share of the Spill Impact Component.

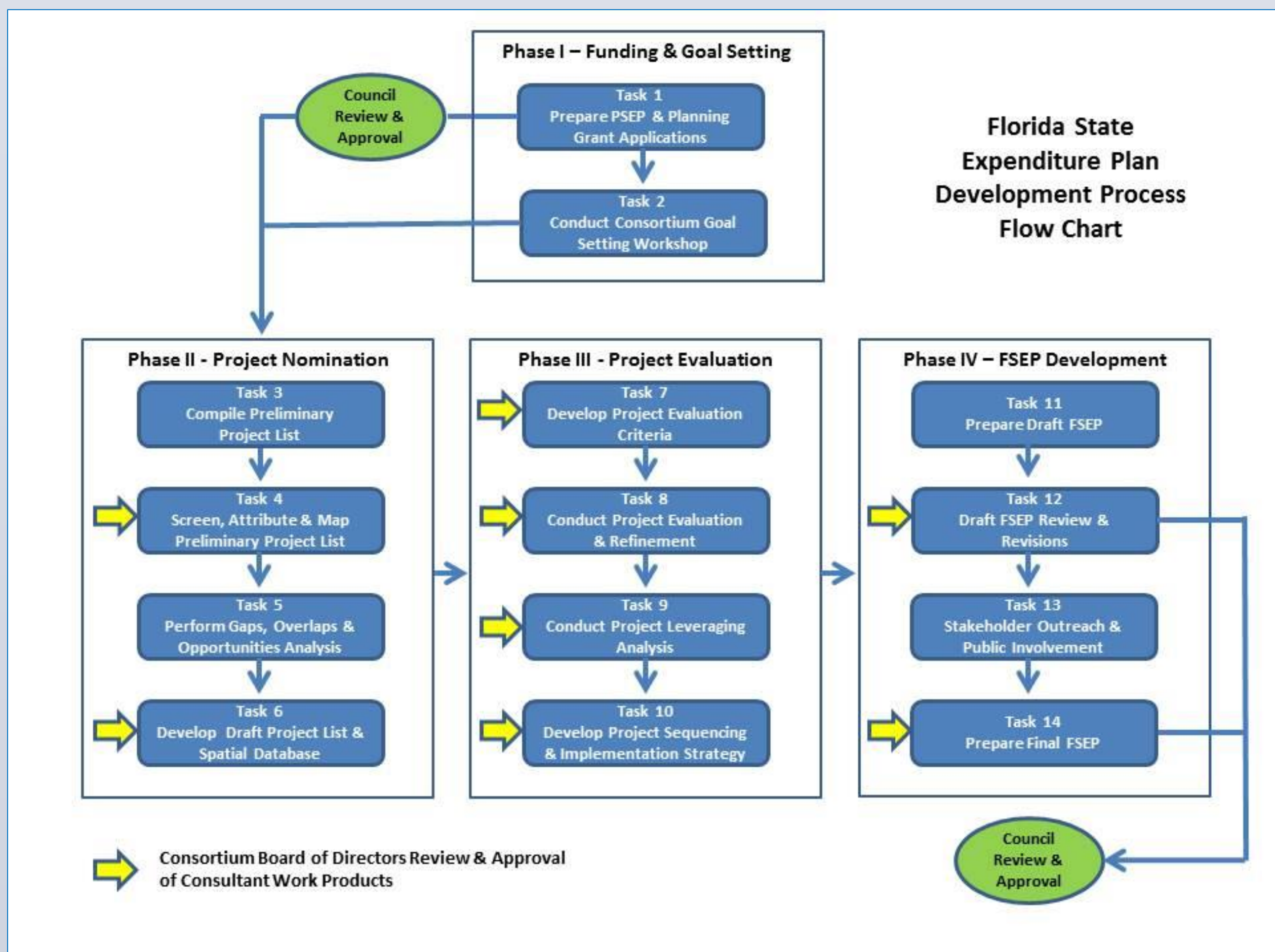
In 2014 the Gulf Consortium selected Environmental Science Associates (ESA) to prepare the Florida SEP. The first task involved preparing and negotiating a \$4.4 million administrative grant application to support the SEP development process as well as to fund the Gulf Consortium operations for two years. The second task involved the conduct of a Goal Setting Workshop. At the workshop the Gulf Consortium voted to:

- Adopt the goals and objectives of the Restoration Council;
- Not define a predetermined split between environmental and economic projects; and
- Define a predetermined even split of the available Spill Impact Component funds amongst the 23 member counties of the Consortium.

This latter vote resulted in the decision to proceed with in a "County-driven" process whereby the suite of projects included in the Florida SEP will be dictated by the counties rather than regional or state agencies. This is a distinctly different than the "State-driven" processes being followed or proposed by the other four Gulf states.

PLANNING PROCESS

The flow chart below shows the process that will be utilized to develop the Florida SEP. Phase I – Funding and Goal Setting – has been effectively completed, and approval of the grant request is anticipated in June 2016, upon which Phase II – Project Nomination - will be initiated.



Project Phases II, III and IV are summarized in the sections that follow.

PROJECT NOMINATION

In Phase II the ESA consultant team will conduct planning meeting with each of the 23 counties to assist them in identifying and/or prioritizing their preliminary project concepts. Project concepts proposed by the counties could include the following:

- Environmental and economic projects identified as part of County Direct Component activities through coordination with local RESTORE Act citizen and stakeholder committees;
- Environmental projects identified in existing coastal resource and watershed management plans (e.g., National Estuary Program CCMPs; Water Management District SWIM Plans, etc.); and/or
- Applicable County projects identified in Capital Improvement Programs or other County economic development initiatives.

The preliminary project list will be attributed and converted into a GIS spatial database. Attribution will include such parameters as: project type; area affected by the project; project benefits; project costs; leveraging potential; project partners; etc. In addition, the screened preliminary project list will be digitized (e.g., project type; area affected; project cost; etc.) so that the full range and scope of the preliminary project list can be visually depicted in a map series.

The ESA consultant team will conduct an analysis of the preliminary project list to determine if there are substantial gaps in geographic coverage or project type focus. In addition, this analysis will explore opportunities to combine similar nearby projects into larger single projects to improve cost-effectiveness; as well as, opportunities to modify or enhance projects in ways that will increase leveraging potential and/or streamline regulatory approvals. Following this analysis, a draft project list will be developed and mapped. This draft project list will be taken into Phase III – Project Evaluation.

PROJECT EVALUATION AND REFINEMENT

In Phase III the ESA consultant team will develop detailed project evaluation criteria to comparatively assess each project. Detailed evaluation criteria for environmental projects will focus on three key project attributes as summarized below.

- **Technical basis and justification:** Evaluating the technical basis of proposed actions will be based on best professional judgment. This attribute will be assessed in terms of whether or not proposed projects are based on best available science and/or engineering principles, as required by the Council, and whether they have a clearly defined technical rationale and justification - that is, is there a demonstrated need for the project?
- **Feasibility:** Evaluating the feasibility of proposed projects will essentially constitute a "reality check" also based largely on best professional judgment. The feasibility attribute will be assessed in terms of numerous factors including but not limited to: technical efficacy (both science and engineering) workability, permitability, constructability, cost-effectiveness, and public acceptance.
- **Leveragability:** Evaluating leveragability will involve an assessment of the ability for the project to attract leveraged funding from a range of sources, the primary focus of which will be on funding streams associated with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill settlements (e.g., NRDA, NFWF, etc.).

It should be noted that the purpose of the project evaluation process is not necessarily to eliminate projects, or to prioritize some projects over others, but rather to improve and refine each project included in the final project list to maximize its impact, cost-effectiveness, and grant readiness. Towards that end, the ESA consultant team will assess other funding sources applicable to the final suite of projects, and will link individual projects to potential sources of leveraged funding. In addition, an implementation strategy will be developed that considers multiple alternatives for managing the accounting of Spill Impact Component funds amongst the 23 counties over the 15-year payout schedule to ensure that each county is making implementation progress on annual basis.

SEP DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW

In Phase IV the ESA consultant team will prepare the draft SEP document, conduct a legal review, facilitate multiple agency reviews, and implement a stakeholder outreach and public involvement program. The ultimate goals are approval by the Governor and the Restoration Council. It is anticipated that the completion of Phases II through IV will require approximately two years, as shown in the project schedule below.

Task No.	Months from Planning Grant Award																								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
1	Complete Pending Approval of Revised AGA																								
2	Complete																								
3																									
4																									
5																									
6																									
7																									
8																									
9																									
10																									
11																									
12																									
13																									
14																									
15																									