



Audubon FLORIDA

Testimony of Eric Draper, Executive Director
Audubon Florida

444 Brickell Avenue, Suite 850, Miami, Florida 33131

Before the Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
U.S. Senate

“Gulf Restoration: A Progress Report Three Years After the
Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill”
June 6, 2013

**Chairman Rockefeller, Ranking Member Thune, Presiding Member Nelson and
Members of the Committee:**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the progress on Gulf restoration three years after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. I am Eric Draper, Executive Director of Audubon Florida, the State office of the National Audubon Society. With more than 450 chapters across the country including 44 in Florida, and more than one million members, volunteers and supporters, Audubon has a long history of involvement in protecting and restoring the Gulf of Mexico and its coasts.

A). Impacts of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in Florida and throughout the Gulf

Few images are as iconic of the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon disaster as that of birds struggling against oily muck. We now know that thousands of birds from dozens of species succumbed to the chemical mix during the months when the oil flowed unabated. Many thousands more no doubt have been and will continue to be adversely affected. These birds, and the Gulf of Mexico’s ecosystems, not only were heavily impacted by the oil spill, but also have experienced decades of neglect and degradation. Available habitats for the birds in the Gulf have declined precipitously. Human alteration of the landscape, sea level rise, subsidence, reductions in water quality and habitat mismanagement have all contributed to a growing crisis. In 2010 as the spill occurred, the Florida Legislature was holding hearings on a repeal of a longstanding prohibition on drilling in state waters. Today, along the western Florida panhandle, erosion events are still uncovering oil mats on beaches.

When recovery efforts got under way in Florida, areas marked with postings to protect nesting birds were mistaken as landing zones for helicopters or deposition areas for the Coast Guard for storing boom. Booms to protect the shoreline broke free and affected

marshes on shore. These circumstances exacerbated the problems for wildlife already caused by the spill. Patrols searching for oil unintentionally caused seagrass bed scarring and beaches that previously prohibited driving to protect wildlife suddenly had frequent vehicular traffic used for monitoring and clean-up efforts. These impacts were made even more severe because the spill took place during the nesting season for Brown Pelicans, American Oystercatchers, Least Terns, Royal Terns, Laughing Gulls, Wilson's and Snowy Plovers and other shorebirds and water birds, as well as marine turtles. There existed a heightened risk that response to the spill would wreak havoc on nesting areas.

While some impacts were apparent immediately, we won't know the full long-term impacts of the spill for some time, as the effects continue to trickle up through the food web. Monitoring the long term impacts can be particularly difficult with regard to birds that span the hemisphere through migration because the point in their lifecycle when effects will be manifested cannot be determined with certainty. As a result, much of the conservation work that needs to be done must help buffer these populations, addressing the threats we do understand to help weather the impacts we can't anticipate or reliably predict.

The impacts of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill extended to Florida's economy, including the tourism and fisheries industries. Florida's economic sustainability relies on its \$67 billion tourism economy¹, \$5.2 billion wildlife viewing economy², and over 160,000 boating, fish and wildlife-related jobs³, Florida fishermen catch more than 84 percent of the nation's supply of grouper, pompano, mullet, stone crab, pink shrimp, spiny lobsters and Spanish mackerel, a haul totaling more than \$200 million annually.⁴ The impact to this industry from the oil spill was severe but restoration of Gulf ecosystems would likely maintain and enhance current fisheries production.⁵ Tourism is at the heart of Florida's economy and images of oiled beaches caused a downturn in visitor rates throughout the state at the time of the spill and immediately after. A 2011 survey conducted by Dun & Bradstreet indicated that the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico had the potential to impact 7.3 million businesses throughout Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, affecting 34.4 million employees and \$5.2 trillion in sales volume.⁶

B). Audubon's impact during the Deepwater Horizon oil spill

When the news of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill became public, more than 35,000 people contacted Audubon to volunteer to help clean oil off the beaches, monitor beaches for additional oil, and to act as bird stewards. While the cleanup was conducted through contractors and volunteers were not used, these volunteers did help transport injured wildlife and monitor cleanup activities. This eagerness to lend support in a time of crisis has created a network bird habitat stewards who have continued this work and are strong advocates of restoring the Gulf ecosystems. In addition to

¹ Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force – Appendix B.

² Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

(http://floridabirdingtrail.com/images/pages/vw_economics_report.pdf).

³ National Marine Fisheries Service (www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st5/publication/econ/2008/gulf_ALL_econ.pdf).

⁴ *Gulf oil spill's effects still has seafood industry nervous.* Craig Pittman, Tampa Bay Times, 4/13/13.

⁵ Harold F. Upton. *The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and the Gulf of Mexico Fishing Industry.* Congressional Research Service. February 17, 2011.

⁶ Dun & Bradstreet 2011.

organizing volunteers, Audubon Florida drafted protocols for protecting beach nesting birds and other fragile natural resources while undertaking clean-up efforts, which were subsequently distributed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.⁷ The guidelines included the need to leave natural debris undisturbed and to use only approved access points.

C). Remedies Underway Since the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

1). Natural Resources Damages Assessment

The Oil Pollution Act authorizes certain federal agencies, states, and Indian tribes—collectively known as natural resource trustees—to evaluate the impacts of oil spills, ship groundings, and hazardous substance releases on natural resources. After this analysis takes place, a workplan is developed to determine restoration activities that best benefit the impacted natural resources and in this case, economic damages. In Florida, early ecosystem restoration projects have included many projects, the most significant of which for conservation have been coastal bird management and projects to protect sea turtles. Projects to improve the economy and make the coast more resilient have included boat ramps and sand dune restoration. Audubon Florida was the successful bidder on the Natural Resources Damages Assessment (NRDA) project to help manage coastal bird habitat at 19 sites in the Florida Panhandle, including posting protected areas for beach nesting birds, monitoring, surveying and stewarding these vulnerable sites. Stewardship is Audubon’s signature management tool for these beach-dependent species wherein volunteers chaperone colonies on busy warm weather weekends, literally intercepting beachgoers before they disturb nesting birds, resulting in the death of chicks or eggs and ultimately colony failure. This project is slated to span 5 years and has a rigorous deliverable schedule. Audubon Florida is contracting with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and Florida Department of Environmental Protection to use NRDA funds to monitor and manage shorebird nesting sites along Northwest Florida. Audubon’s biologists work with public lands managers and with volunteers to collect data and recommend approaches to stewarding nesting sites. These actions help to recover bird habitat that was affected by the spill. During the recent Memorial Day weekend the presence of shorebird stewards limited, but did not stop all of the damage caused to shorebird colonies by human intrusion.

2). Gulf Ecosystem Restoration Task Force

The Gulf Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (Task Force) was created by Executive Order 13554.⁸ In December 2011, the Task Force released its Gulf of Mexico Regional Ecosystem Restoration Strategy.⁹ The strategy focused on projects grounded in science that emphasized the increasing the resiliency of the Gulf through collaboration among state and federal task force members. Audubon supported the work done by the Task Force under the leadership of its Executive Director John Hankinson as a scientifically sound and comprehensive approach to Gulf restoration. The task force set four

⁷ <http://audubonoffloridanews.org/index.php?s=safe+tips+for+beach+cleaning&submit.x=0&submit.y=0> (Last visited June 3, 2013).

⁸ Executive Order 13554 (President Obama). Establishing the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force. October 5, 2010.

⁹ http://www.epa.gov/gcertf/pdfs/GulfCoastReport_Full_12-04_508-1.pdf (Last visited June 4, 2013).

overarching goals for Gulf Coast restoration and within those goals specified actions requiring immediate attention. The Strategy provided a foundation for partnerships of communities, states and federal agencies:

- Restore and conserve habitat
- Restore water quality
- Replenish and protect living coastal and marine resources
- Enhance community resilience

The task force's leadership created an essential foundation for the important planning work now being undertaken by the RESTORE council governing disbursement of key funding from the RESTORE Act.

3). Funding through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Oil skimmed from the water during the cleanup was recovered and sold. Some proceeds from the sale of the oil were granted to Audubon Florida by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) for the purchase of Lanark Reef, a privately held island that hosts the largest Brown Pelican nesting site along Florida's Gulf coast. The island also provides nesting for other shorebirds and is a major stopover and wintering site for migrating birds. NFWF is also responsible for distributing funds from a settlement under criminal litigation between the US Department of Justice and BP. Lanark Reef is just one example of beneficial projects that can be funded through NFWF to restore the Gulf. In Florida, NFWF is working closely with our trustees and particularly the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission when setting priorities for funding.

4). The RESTORE Act

The Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act of 2012 (RESTORE Act) was signed into law on July 6, 2012.¹⁰ This first of its kind legislation establishes the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Trust Fund within the U.S. Treasury that will control 80% of Clean Water Act Penalties paid by BP. The funds remain until expended and they are not subject to appropriations. Those funds will be distributed by a formula set in law with:

- 35 percent equally divided among the five States for ecological restoration, economic development, and tourism promotion. In Florida 75% of funds go to the 8 most affected counties, 25% of funds go to other coastal counties based on an allocation formula;
- 30 percent plus interest managed by the Council for ecosystem restoration under the Comprehensive Plan;
- 30 percent divided among the States according to a formula to implement State expenditure plans, which require approval of the Council;
- 2.5 percent plus interest for the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Science, Observation, Monitoring and Technology Program within the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); and

¹⁰ Public Law 112-141, Title 1, Subtitle F (2012).

- 2.5 percent plus interest allocated to the States for Centers of Excellence Research grants, which will each focus on science, technology, and monitoring related to Gulf restoration.

It was through the leadership of Senator Bill Nelson and other Gulf state Senators that this historic legislation was passed with the goal of returning Clean Water Act penalties to the Gulf states for efforts at restoring ecosystems and making the region more resilient. A recent bipartisan poll conducted by FM3 and Public Opinion Strategies shows that three-quarters of Gulf coastal voters (76 percent) favor using the money collected from the RESTORE Act primarily for restoration of beaches, wildlife habitat, coastal areas, rivers and other waters that affect the Gulf Coast. Voters across every major demographic subgroup of the electorate indicate a strong preference for using these funds for restoration of the Gulf's lands and waters, including solid majorities in every state.

a. *The Gulf Ecosystem Restoration Council*

The Gulf Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) has been an excellent source of transparent public meetings about potential future restoration. The Council's draft plan for restoring the Gulf of Mexico has recently been released and is an important step in outlining objectives and the criteria for selecting restoration projects in the Gulf. Our members are participating in the field hearings. Audubon is grateful for the efforts of the Council in putting together this draft plan and we look forward to working with the Restoration Council to continue developing a comprehensive plan that realizes the vision of Congress and supports comprehensive ecosystem restoration.

b. *Florida's State Trustees*

Governor Rick Scott represents Florida on the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission are responsible for service as trustees and for responding to impacts of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill along Florida's shoreline. These trustee agencies and state emergency management officials continue to coordinate with federal, state and local partners to ensure that any continued impacts to Florida's coastline are removed quickly and efficiently.

c. *Florida's Gulf Consortium*

In Florida, 75% of the equal-share allocation of funding from the RESTORE Act goes directly to the affected counties. And a consortium of local governments will recommend the use of the Impact Based Allocation. The Consortium is organized by the Florida Association of Counties and has representation from 23 affected counties and recently reached an agreement with Governor Rick Scott to allow the Governor to appoint additional members to the Consortium who will be able to review the final plan. The Consortium intends to prepare one plan that will serve as both the Consortium's plan for the impact-based State pot and the State plan to be used in the Council's decisions. The Consortium is accepting suggestions from the public to help develop a scope for the plan.

D). A Vision for the Gulf

Audubon is working closely with the Florida Wildlife Federation, The Nature Conservancy, the Ocean Conservancy and the National Wildlife Federation to support efforts by the Council and state agencies to implement a Gulf restoration strategy. Our groups have made the following recommendations for all restoration plans:

1). Environmental Impact

- The Florida plan should promote restoration and long-term health and sustainability of coastal habitats, fisheries, marine resources and vulnerable species – restoring natural ecosystem function to the maximum extent possible;
- The Florida plan should include regional projects that advance state priorities toward achieving identified restoration goals (e.g. water quality, land protection, living shoreline, bird, sea turtle, and critical fish habitats and populations) that enhance watersheds and estuaries along Florida’s Gulf Coast;
- The plan should identify land acquisition projects that provide ongoing benefit to the Gulf of Mexico including projects that protect water quality and wildlife habitat, provide the public with new or improved outdoor recreation opportunities, and buffer military bases;
- The Florida restoration plan should include a significant marine resource protection focused on fisheries, habitats and wildlife to complement coastal restoration priorities;
- No project should be approved for funding that would result in further damage to Gulf ecosystems; and,
- Consideration should be given to restoration projects that incorporate strategic retreat from vulnerable coastal areas over those that would place additional infrastructure in hazardous locations.

2). Fisheries Management

Strategic investments should be made in scientific efforts that provide for long-term sustainability of commercial and recreational fisheries. Marine restoration projects involving changes to fisheries management or investment in scientific initiatives should involve the input of fishermen and aim to maximize long-term sustainability of commercial and recreational fisheries and communities that depend on healthy resources. Efforts to restore coastal habitats compliment efforts to regulate and rebuild fish stocks.

3). Wildlife Resource Enhancement

In addition to habitat acquisition, Florida’s coastal wildlife requires management to restore their populations. RESTORE provides our state with an unprecedented opportunity to manage these species for population health, buoying the nature-based economies they support while diminishing their degree of imperilment and reducing the

need for regulation. These projects also help ensure the sustainability of coastal recreational activities among vulnerable wildlife populations.

4). Community Resilience

The extent to which projects reduce the vulnerability of communities to hurricanes and other disasters should be considered in project selection. Projects that restore and preserve marshes, wetlands, reefs and other coastal habitats can provide our best approach to mitigate storm surge, erosion and coastal flooding, and thereby help reduce insurance costs and disaster relief in the future.

E). Gulf Restoration Project Recommendations

For Florida's restoration program to be successful, it is critical that a comprehensive, integrated ecosystem approach be the focus that strives for results that are greater than the sum of the individual projects by addressing everything from the watersheds supporting our estuaries, to essential coastal uplands, to the offshore marine environment. In Florida, our ecology IS our economy, and we know that the integrity of the Gulf and its habitats supports our economic well-being. Restoration efforts yield huge economic benefits. For example, a 2010 study conducted by Mather Economics found a greater than 4 to 1 return on investment in funding for Everglades restoration based on benefits that include groundwater purification, real estate, park visitation, open space, commercial and recreational fishing and hunting, and wildlife habitat.¹¹ Other Gulf restoration projects would likely yield similar benefits.

Audubon Florida is focused on projects that protect and restore the integrity of the Gulf and its bird populations. Audubon's recommended projects in Florida are grouped into five categories:

- Large-scale land conservation to protect the watersheds that drain to the Gulf;
- Conservation of strategic parcels critical to the protection coastal bird species;
- Everglades restoration, to improve the quality, quantity and timing of freshwater inputs to the Gulf including through the Caloosahatchee Estuary and Florida Bay;
- Habitat restoration to improve the condition of coastal habitat;
- Ongoing resource management and monitoring, because land acquisition alone cannot ensure the persistence of key species and habitat type.

1). Watershed-Scale Land Conservation

Whether full or less-than-fee, these willing-seller acquisitions have been assembled from the Florida Forever ecological acquisition list as well as federal inholdings and acquisitions to protect the integrity of Florida's national wildlife refuges and seashores. In addition to protecting wildlife, habitat and water quality, these places support vibrant

¹¹ Mather Economics. 2010. *Measuring the Economic Benefits of America's Everglades Restoration*.

resource-based economies and buffer military operations which are of substantial importance to local Panhandle economies.

Florida Forever Projects Relevant to Gulf Conservation, by County:

Bay	Bear Creek Forest (also Calhoun and Gulf)
Bay	St. Joe Timberland (also Franklin, Gulf, Jefferson, Taylor, Wakulla, Walton and 4 others)
Bay	West Bay Preservation area
Charlotte	Charlotte Harbor Estuary (also Lee and Sarasota)
Charlotte	Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods (also Lee)
Charlotte	Hall Ranch
Citrus	Annutelliga Hammock
Citrus	Florida Springs Coastal Greenway
Citrus	Rainbow River Corridor (also Marion)
Collier	Belle Meade
Collier	Save Our Everglades
Desoto	Peace River Refuge
Dixie	Lower Suwannee River and Gulf Watershed
Escambia	Lower Perdido River Buffer
Escambia	Perdido Pitcher Plant Prairie
Gadsden	Neal Land & Timber Apalachicola River Corridor (also Liberty and Calhoun)
Gadsden	Ochlockonee River Conservation Area (also Leon)
Jackson	Middle Chipola River (also Calhoun)
Jackson	Apalachicola River (also Gadsden, Liberty and Calhoun counties)
Jefferson	Wacissa/Aucilla River Sinks
Jefferson	West Aucilla River Buffer
Lee	Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (also Collier)
Lee	Estero Bay

Leon	Ayavalla Plantation
Levy	Caber Coastal Connector
Levy	Gulf Hammock
Manatee	Terra Ceia
Monroe	Coupon Bight/Key Deer
Monroe	Florida Keys Ecosystem
Monroe	North Key Largo Hammocks
Okaloosa	Shoal River Buffer
Pasco	Cross Bar/Al Bar Ranch
Pasco	Green Swamp- Withlacoochee River Headwaters (also Lake and Polk)
Polk	Green Swamp- Peace River Headwaters
Santa Rosa	Clear Creek/Whiting Field
Santa Rosa	Garcon Ecosystem
Santa Rosa	Wolfe Creek Forest
Sarasota	Myakka Ranchlands
Taylor	San Pedro Bay (also Madison)
Wakulla	Dickerson Bay/Bald Point (also Franklin)
Wakulla	Upper Saint Marks River Corridor (also Leon and Jefferson)
Wakulla	Wakulla Springs Protection Zone (also Leon)
Washington	Sand Mountain Econfina Creek Watershed (also Bay)
Walton	Seven Runs Creek
Walton	South Walton County Ecosystem
Walton	Upper Shoal River

2). *Additions, Inholdings, or Complements to Federal Lands*

St Vincent National Wildlife Refuge: St. Vincent Sound to Lake Wimico Ecosystem (Gulf and Franklin counties): The 40,000 acres south of Lake Wimico known as the St. Vincent Sound to Lake Wimico Ecosystem would afford water quality and quantity benefits to the Lake, as well as Apalachicola and St. Joseph bays and St. Vincent Sound, buffering ABNEER, Aquatic Preserve and public landscapes.

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge: In addition to the Upper St. Marks River Corridor Florida Forever project, there are an additional four tracts that would help protect the Refuge and Apalachee Bay watershed:

- Sam Shine Tract (Wakulla County) 8,117 acres
- Five Smooth Stones Tract (Wakulla County) 930-acre easement
- JLT Tract (Wakulla County) 1,230-acre easement
- The Nature Conservancy Tract (Jefferson and Wakulla Counties), 7,699 acres

Strategic River & Bay Watersheds - DOD NW Florida Coastal Base Missions Knight Family Trust Choctawhatchee River and Bay Watershed (Washington County): This proposed 40,000-acre easement would complete the riparian public lands conservation corridor from Alabama to Choctawhatchee Bay, and preserve sandhill aquifer recharge areas feeding springs and major creek headwaters for both Choctawhatchee and St Andrews Bays.

3). *Everglades Restoration*

Tamiami Trail Next Steps project (Miami-Dade): Bridging Tamiami Trail will remove the barriers to sheetflow that have dissected Sharkriver Slough. This slough historically began north of Tamiami Trail and continued all the way to the 10,000 islands region along the Gulf coast. Reconnecting this natural pattern and hydrating this region of the Gulf coast will prevent further salt water intrusion and improve habitat in this mangrove labyrinth.

C-43 Caloosahatchee Storage Reservoir (Lee): When Lake Okeechobee reaches high levels, large pulses of nutrient-rich freshwater are released to the east and west of the Lake and out to coastal estuaries, often resulting in a drought during dry years because of lack of storage capacity. This reservoir will provide storage in wet years to prevent discharges and a source of water during droughts or to be released during disasters. This benefits the estuary that is home to nearly 40% of Florida's rare, threatened and endangered species.

Cape Sable Canal Filling (Monroe): Twentieth century canals dredged through the marl ridge of Cape Sable exposed the cape's interior marshes and lakes to Florida Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. Incoming tides now push marine waters and sediments inland, increasing salinity and transporting sediments to lakes and marshes. Outgoing tides drain freshwater from marshes north of the marl ridge and transport sediments toward Lake Ingraham and Florida Bay, resulting in a substantial loss of coastal habitat. The expansion of these canals has exacerbated sediment deposition in the cape's open

waters and is converting Lake Ingraham into a tidal mud flat. Plugging House Ditch, Slagle's Ditch and the Raulerson Brothers Canal will restrict tidal flow into the interior marsh, protecting it from further erosion, and reducing open water sedimentation.

4). Strategic Bird Habitat Acquisitions and Habitat Restoration Projects

A handful of private coastal sites have substantial importance to imperiled beach-dependent bird species. Acquisition of the following sites would be strategic, if willing sellers can be identified:

Big Sabine, Escambia County: This University of West Florida inholding in Gulf Islands National Seashore on Santa Rosa Island has been proposed for development in the last year. Its high quality habitats would be better and more economically managed if conveyed or acquired and added to the National Seashore.

Shell Island, Bay County: Much of this barrier island is held by Tyndall Air Force Base and St. Andrews State Park, and is of vital importance to nesting, beach-dependent birds, especially state threatened Snowy Plovers. Platted but undeveloped lots present challenges to management of the island; their acquisition would help make management more economical and effective.

Smith Island, Wakulla County: This private inholding in St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge hosts substantial numbers of breeding pelicans and other waterbirds. Acquisition and conveyance to the National Wildlife Refuge would ensure its future for these species.

Hunter Property, Pinellas County: Acquisition of this private parcel on the southern boundary of Honeymoon Island State Park would help buffer the park and its beach-nesting birds from use to the south.

Habitat restoration projects include:

Alafia Banks Restoration (Hillsborough): Storms and ship wakes have eroded these waterbird rookery islands in Hillsborough Bay, jeopardizing habitat for the sanctuary's thousands of nesting pairs of 18 waterbird species. While 1,675 feet of erosion control structures have already been installed, another 5,125 feet are needed to protect this Globally Important Bird Area.

Greater Tampa Bay Rookery Island Restorations (Hillsborough, Pinellas and Manatee): A total of 3,250 feet of reef balls and/or wave attenuation devices are needed to stave off the catastrophic erosion of the following waterbird rookeries in West Central Florida: Dogleg Key, Sand Key Dune on West Bird Island, Dot Dash Bird Islands and Cortez Key Bird Sanctuary.

5). Resource Monitoring and Management

Coastal Bird Perpetual Management Fund (Gulf-wide): The establishment of a coastal bird adaptive management investment trust fund, along with an accepted safe

withdrawal rate, will provide long-term support for conservation strategies critical to long-term recovery of coastal bird populations. These include robust survey and monitoring efforts, posting nesting areas, predator control, and stewarding efforts to reduce disturbance. An investment trust fund of \$150-\$175M Gulf-wide could provide \$4.5-\$7M annually to supplement ongoing management and monitoring efforts.

Panhandle Watershed Monitoring: While the bays of Florida's peninsular Gulf Coast have the benefit of National Estuary Programs to monitor their health and coordinate restoration, the bays of the Panhandle have less coordinated support. As a result, volunteer partnerships have emerged around the Pensacola Bay, Choctawhatchee and St. Andrews basins, to monitor and safeguard watershed health. Funding support for long-term, coordinated and professionalized monitoring is essential to not only measure restoration progress, but determine the baselines still lacking for many Panhandle waters.

F). Conclusion

Audubon is encouraging decision-makers to think like investors in the long-term sustainability of our coastal ecosystems. By implication that means investment in the economy, since the two are inextricable. The committee and Congress can encourage that long-term thinking. We will live with the impact of the spill for a long time, we need to make sure that penalties are used in a long-term way. A final and good example is Florida's Big Bend coast. The working forests between the St Vincent - St Marks and Lower Suwannee River National Wildlife Refuges have long fed our pulp and paper mills, provided jobs and been ecologically and hydrologically significant to fish and wildlife and estuarine habitats, both freshwater and estuarine. The Apalachicola, which suffers from reduced water flows, provides an example of why we should protect upstream freshwater resources. Funds spent on sustainable land uses upstream of our coastal estuaries may be the most important long-term investment. The southern pine forests that still inhabit so much land along the coast are part of what makes for fishing and ecotourism economies downstream.

On behalf of the Audubon family and our Gulf-based members and conservation colleagues, I greatly appreciate your consideration of our views.