**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF**
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**DEPUTY SECRETARY**
**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**OVERSIGHT HEARING ON**
**"REVISITING THE RESTORE ACT: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN GULF RESTORATION POST-DEEPWATER HORIZON"**

**COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION**
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON OCEANS, ATMOSPHERE, FISHERIES, AND COAST GUARD**
**U.S. SENATE**
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## Introduction

Good morning Chairman Nelson, Ranking Member Rubio, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting the Department of Commerce to testify before you today on the successes and challenges in restoring the Gulf Coast region's environment and economy following the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill.

The Administration is strongly committed to restoring the Gulf Coast region, and I want to thank you for being a champion of Gulf restoration. The Gulf Coast region is vital to our Nation and our economy, providing valuable energy resources, abundant seafood, extraordinary beaches and recreational activities, and a rich cultural heritage. Over twenty-two million Americans live in Gulf coastal counties and parishes – working in important U.S. industries like commercial seafood, shipping, tourism, and oil and gas production. The region also boasts ten of America's fifteen largest ports accounting for nearly a trillion dollars in trade each year. Its waters and coasts are home to one of the most diverse environments in the world – including over 15,000 species of sea life. Over the past century, the Gulf Coast has experienced the loss of critical wetland habitats, erosion of barrier islands, imperiled fisheries, and water quality degradation. Amplifying these issues, the region has endured significant natural and man-made catastrophes in the last decade, including major hurricanes such as Katrina, Rita, Gustav, and Ike, and the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill.

In response to the oil spill, and building on prior efforts to help ensure the long-term restoration and recovery of the Gulf Coast region, several large scale restoration initiatives have begun, including work under the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act of 2012 (RESTORE Act); the Natural Resources Damage Assessment process; and projects through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. While each process is subject to different requirements for investing resources and each is overseen and managed by a unique set of governance arrangements, funding from all of these efforts will be directed to Gulf restoration. These efforts are at different stages of maturity and implementation. As a practical matter, the total amount of funding that ultimately will be

available for restoration under the RESTORE Act and the Natural Resource Damage Assessment process and the timing of those funds is still unknown.

The Department of Commerce, along with our state and federal partners, plays an important role in each of these initiatives. We understand the importance of and are committed to coordination across these Gulf restoration initiatives and will work closely with our partners to advance common goals, reduce duplication, and maximize the benefits to the Gulf Coast region. We recognize this unique and unprecedented opportunity to implement a coordinated Gulf region-wide restoration effort in a way that restores and protects the Gulf Coast environment, reinvigorates local economies, and creates jobs in the Gulf region. Our goal and commitment is not simply to address the damage caused by the spill - it is to enhance the long term environmental health and economic prosperity of the Gulf Coast region for generations.

**The RESTORE Act**

The RESTORE Act was passed by Congress on June 29, 2012, and signed into law by President Obama on July 6, 2012. The RESTORE Act provides for planning and resources for a regional approach to the long-term health of the valuable natural ecosystems and economy of the Gulf Coast region. The RESTORE Act dedicates 80 percent of any civil and administrative penalties paid under the Clean Water Act, after the date of enactment, by responsible parties in connection with the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill to the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund (the Trust Fund) for ecosystem restoration, economic recovery, and tourism promotion in the Gulf Coast region. The RESTORE Act divides the Trust Fund into five components and sets parameters for how these funds will be spent:

- 35% of the funds are divided equally among the five Gulf Coast states for ecological and economic restoration. Eligible activities include: restoration and protection of natural resources; mitigation of damage to natural resources; workforce development and job creation; improvements to state parks; infrastructure projects, including ports; coastal flood protection; and, promotion of tourism and Gulf seafood.
- 30% of the funds will be administered for restoration and protection according to the Comprehensive Plan developed by the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council).
- 30% of the funds are dedicated to the Gulf Coast states based on the Oil Spill Impact Formula set out in the RESTORE Act. This formula will be based on the number of miles of shoreline that experienced oiling, the distance from the *Deepwater Horizon* mobile drilling unit at the time of the explosion, and the average population as of the 2010 Census. Each state is required to have a Council-approved plan in place for use of these funds.
- 2.5% of the funds are dedicated to the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Science, Observation, Monitoring and Technology Program. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) will establish a Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration, Science, Observation, Monitoring and Technology Program for marine and estuarine research, ecosystem monitoring and ocean observation, data collection and stock assessments, and cooperative research.
- 2.5% of the funds are dedicated to the Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program. The Centers of Excellence Research Grants funding is distributed through the states to nongovernmental entities to establish centers of excellence that will focus on the

following disciplines: coastal and deltaic sustainability; restoration and protection; fisheries and wildlife ecosystem research and monitoring; offshore energy development; sustainable and resilient growth; and comprehensive observation, monitoring and mapping in the Gulf.

In addition, interest generated from the funds in the Trust Fund is allocated among the NOAA Science Program, the Centers of Excellence, and Council implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.

The Department of Commerce plays a key leadership role in implementation of the RESTORE Act. The Secretary of Commerce serves as a member and is honored to serve as the Chairperson of the Council. In this role, the Department has brought together a diverse range of expertise and experience from across our bureaus, including NOAA's expertise in science-based natural resource restoration, the Economic Development Administration's expertise in sustainable economic development, and International Trade Administration's expertise in travel and tourism promotion, to help implement the integrated approach to Gulf restoration envisioned by the RESTORE Act. In addition, the Department of Commerce through NOAA is responsible for establishing and implementing the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration, Science, Observation, Monitoring and Technology Program.

*Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council*

The RESTORE Act established the Council to help restore the ecosystem and economy of the Gulf Coast region by developing and overseeing implementation of a Comprehensive Plan and carrying out other responsibilities. The Council is comprised of the Governors of the States of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas and the Secretaries of the U.S. Departments of Commerce, Agriculture, Army, Homeland Security and the Interior, and the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The Council has oversight over the expenditure of sixty percent of the funds made available from the Trust Fund: thirty percent will be administered for restoration and protection according to the Comprehensive Plan developed by the Council and thirty percent will be allocated to the states according to a formula set forth in the RESTORE Act and spent according to individual state expenditure plans to contribute to the overall economic and ecological recovery of the Gulf. The state expenditure plans will be consistent with the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan and are subject to the Council's approval. The Council will oversee and implement this funding with the goal of a coordinated federal, state, and local long-term recovery approach.

The Council is committed to working with Gulf communities and partners to invest in actions, projects, and programs that will ensure the long-term environmental health and economic prosperity of the Gulf Coast region. To guide these investments, the Council has adopted five overarching 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.

*Implementation – Progress and Challenges*

The Council is by design a unique state-federal partnership that fosters deliberative decision-making, allows for the coordinated use of the expertise of its members, and provides a mechanism to maximize the opportunity for collaboration and ultimate success. One of the Council's strengths is its ability to bring together each state and federal agency's capabilities and expertise; however, with eleven members with diverse views, and sometimes competing interests, decision-making requires cooperative effort and can take time. Nonetheless, the Council and its members continue to proceed with deliberate speed and concerted effort to meet key milestones and achieve common goals.

The Department of Commerce recognizes that it is imperative that the Council move forward efficiently to achieve its critical mission. Under the Department's leadership, the Council has made significant progress in setting up a strong foundation to restore the Gulf coast. During the first year, the Council established basic processes; assembled a transition staff; developed and published a proposed Comprehensive Plan; developed and published an Initial Comprehensive Plan and accompanying environmental compliance documents; hosted public listening sessions in all five Gulf Coast states with over 2,000 individuals in attendance; and hired key management positions, including an Executive Director and Chief Financial Officer. Since the Comprehensive Plan was approved in late August 2013, the Council has taken important steps to implement the Comprehensive Plan and fund projects under the Plan. During the past year, the Council also has worked on developing a regulation for the Oil Spill Impact Formula Component and is preparing to review and fund projects under state expenditure plans.

*Standing up a New Independent Entity in the Federal Government*

One of the major challenges of standing up the new independent entity has been the lack of dedicated resources. Most of the Council's efforts to date have been undertaken by leveraging existing resources and personnel from Council members and outside sources. The Department of Commerce has dedicated significant Departmental resources to help the Council in this start-up period. We have contributed both personnel and basic support services to the Council, including human resources, IT, payroll, legal and contracting. While awaiting the Treasury regulations, the Department of Commerce worked with the Department of Treasury and the Council to make initial funding accessible to the Council to begin hiring core staff, put basic operations in place, and to make further progress on implementation. This fiscal year, the Council continued to focus on building operational capacity, establishing institutional procedures and infrastructure, and implementing key milestones to enable it to be prepared to begin selecting and funding projects. Justin Ehrenwerth, the Council's Executive Director, will go into more detail about this. The Council is still administratively housed within the Department with the goal of establishing an operationally independent Federal entity by the end of this fiscal year. To that end, the Council has begun recruiting for key staff positions and selecting a more permanent office in the Gulf region.

*Developing a Comprehensive Plan and Funded Priorities List Under the Plan*

After extensive public input, the Council unanimously approved the Initial Comprehensive Plan on August 28, 2013. This major accomplishment provides a framework to implement a

coordinated, Gulf Coast region-wide restoration effort in a way that restores, protects, and revitalizes the Gulf Coast. The Council deferred developing a Funded Priorities List and Ten-Year Funding Strategy (i.e., a description of the allocation of the amounts from the Trust Fund projected to be made available to the Council to implement the Plan for the next ten years). Over the past several months, the Council has built the necessary steps to operationalize the project selection and vetting process described in the Comprehensive Plan. This project selection and vetting process provides for a merit-based selection of projects to achieve comprehensive ecosystem restoration. It incorporates an independent peer review evaluation to ensure projects are grounded in science, provides for coordination at a project level with other restoration efforts, and gives the highest priority to projects that meet one or more of the evaluation criteria enumerated in the law. The Council also developed project submission guidelines. The Council anticipates releasing the project submission guidelines and beginning review of the submissions in August. Using this process, the Council will develop the draft Funded Priorities List. The Council will publish the draft list for public review and comment before finalizing the list and incorporating it into the Plan. It should be noted that the Council faces the challenge of making strategic funding decisions that will achieve comprehensive Gulf-wide restoration without knowing the total amount of money that will be available.

*Progress on Implementing Oil Spill Impact Formula Component*

The Council has begun a two-part rulemaking to implement the Oil Spill Impact Formula Component. The first part will take the form of an interim final rule that would provide access to the states and Florida counties of up to 5% of funds for planning. The Council anticipates releasing this rule in the next two months. Concurrently, the Council is developing a proposed rule and guidelines that will implement the oil spill impact formula. The proposed rule will be published for public notice and comment. This approach will allow access to funds to develop a state expenditure plan while providing a fair and transparent rulemaking process.

**RESTORE Act Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Science, Observation, Monitoring, and Technology Program**

In addition to the Department's work within the Council, another key element of the Department's efforts to implement the RESTORE Act is the responsibility to establish a Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Science, Observation, Monitoring, and Technology Program (NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program or the Program). In January 2013, NOAA established this Program. The Program will receive 2.5% of the funds, plus 25% of the interest, from the Trust Fund.

To develop the Program, NOAA worked diligently with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and with key stakeholders including the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (FMC), the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission), the five Gulf states, federal partners, academic institutions, non-profit organizations and other entities across the Gulf region. The Program seeks to achieve a 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, habitats, and fishing industries.

*Program Engagement and Coordination*

To be successful, the NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program must harness the expertise of the scientific community in the Gulf of Mexico and beyond, and link it to the region's pressing science needs. An engagement process that connects researchers, resource managers, and resource users and allows their collective knowledge to inform the Program's direction is required. NOAA, working with its USFWS partners, initiated this engagement process early in the program development phase and has continued it as it moves to early stages of implementation. NOAA and USFWS have already held over 100 meetings with stakeholders including representatives from the Commission, the FMC, universities, federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations. These meetings shaped the Program's current framework and continued engagement is shaping the development of the Program's science plan.

It is important to keep in mind that this Program is one of several recently created research programs focused on increasing our understanding of the Gulf of Mexico. Others include the Gulf Research Program at the National Academies, the Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative, and the State Centers of Excellence also authorized in the RESTORE Act. These programs will add their activities to the existing federal and other research programs already active in the Gulf of Mexico. NOAA is actively engaging and coordinating with these other new initiatives, as well as with existing research programs.

*Program Organization and Next Steps*

The Program is housed within the National Ocean Service's National Center for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS). NCCOS's experience running grant programs focused on pressing coastal and ocean issues, its experience working in the Gulf of Mexico, and its demonstrated ability to transfer the results of researchers to resource managers make it a logical home for the Program. An Executive Oversight Board internal to NOAA and the USFWS will keep the program connected to the other research programs within NOAA and the USFWS. An Advisory Working Group established under NOAA's Science Advisory Board and comprised of subject matter experts as well as representatives of various Gulf of Mexico science programs including the Commission, FMC, and RESTORE Act Centers of Excellence will keep the Program connected to the larger science community. A Gulf-based director for the Program will keep the Program grounded in the region.

The Program currently is developing a science plan that will guide program implementation and anticipates releasing the draft plan for public comment by Fall 2014. In addition to providing additional detail on the structure and administration of the Program, the science plan will lay out the science priorities for the Program, the connection of those priorities to management needs, and the expected outputs and outcomes that will result from the activities competitively funded under each priority. The priorities are being drawn from prior science and research needs assessments for the Gulf of Mexico and from input the Program received from stakeholder engagement. Once finalized, the science plan will guide the development of the competitive federal funding opportunities the Program will support.

Early in the development of the Program, it became apparent that there was a pressing need to provide support for short-term projects whose results would inform the future direction of the Program, as well as the other science and restoration initiatives underway or being planned for

the region. As a result, the Program has developed an initial federal funding opportunity around the short-term priorities identified in the Program's science plan framework. Those short-term priorities are:

- Comprehensive inventory and assessment (i.e., strengths and weaknesses) of ongoing ecosystem modeling efforts (conceptual and quantitative);
- Identification of currently available health/condition indicators of Gulf of Mexico ecosystem components, including humans, followed by comparative analysis of strengths and weaknesses and design and testing of additional indicators; and,
- Assessment of monitoring and observation needs and development of recommendations to build off existing assets to establish a Gulf wide monitoring and observation network.

This opportunity will be available once the Treasury regulations are in effect. The NOAA RESTORE Science Program represents an opportunity and capacity to help integrate the disparate science efforts across the Gulf and advance overall understanding of the Gulf of Mexico as an integrated ecosystem. The Program will contribute to the science needed for the long-term sustainability of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem, including its fisheries, and help inform restoration and management efforts.

**The Department of Commerce's Natural Resources Damage Assessment Role**

Another important Gulf restoration effort is the Natural Resources Damage Assessment (NRDA) process. The Department of Commerce, represented by NOAA, has a critical role under the Oil Spill Pollution Act (OPA) serving as a natural resource trustee. NOAA, along with its co-trustees, is charged under the Act with conducting a Natural Resource Damage Assessment to assess the natural resources and the damage to them caused by the oil spill and the response, as well as the value of the lost use of those resources until they are restored. This is an injury to the public, and the public availability of those resources, and is in addition to any individual injury caused by the spill. The OPA requires the Trustees to use the damage assessment as the basis for developing a restoration plan with public review and input. The Trustees then present the restoration plan to responsible parties (primarily BP Exploration and Production Inc. (BP)) for funding, and either BP agrees to fund it or the Trustees file it with the Court as a claim for litigation. The essence of the process is to identify and quantify the injury to resources caused by the spill, determine the type and amount of restoration needed to restore the resources to their pre-spill state or provide equivalent alternative resources, and compensate for their interim lost use. Inherent in this process is the need to assess the injuries to natural resources that are caused by the oil spill itself, as well as those caused by actions carried out as part of the oil spill response. For restoration, OPA requires the trustees to restore, rehabilitate, replace, or acquire the equivalent of the injured natural resources and services and in doing so there must be a nexus between the types and magnitude of the injury and the restoration.

In general, stewardship of the Nation's natural resources is shared among several federal agencies, states, and federally recognized tribes. NOAA, acting on behalf of the Secretary of Commerce, is the lead federal trustee for many of the Nation's federal coastal and marine resources.

The *Deepwater Horizon* NRDA Trustees (NRDA Trustees) are, in addition to NOAA, the trustee agencies from the States of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas; and the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). These nine entities (five states and four federal agencies) have formed a Trustee Council that has worked cooperatively since shortly after the *Deepwater Horizon* spill to assess compensable injuries caused by the spill, and to develop a restoration plan to restore affected Gulf resources, compensate for lost uses including lost human uses, and to implement those plans. We note that two of the federal agencies — EPA and USDA — were added by Executive Order in September, 2012, and have joined the cooperative efforts since that time.

NRDA regulations explicitly seek participation in the assessment and restoration planning by responsible parties and the NRDA Trustees to facilitate the restoration of natural resources and their services injured or lost by oil spills. The nature and extent of participation in restoration planning is left to the discretion of the NRDA Trustees. OPA also encourages compensation of injured natural resources in the form of restoration, with public involvement in determining the types and magnitude of the restoration. Indeed, public involvement is an important component of the OPA and of the National Environment Policy Act Environmental Impact Statement processes that work together to inform decisions about restoration plan development and implementation.

Assessing injury to natural resources in this context is challenging. Understanding complex ecosystems, the services these ecosystems provide, and the injuries caused by the release of oil and the response takes time – often years. The time of year the resource was injured, the type and source of oil, the amount and duration of the release, the location, and the nature and extent of clean-up are among the many diverse factors that affect how quickly injury to resources can be assessed, and restoration and recovery planning and implementation can occur. The OPA requires that trustees be able to demonstrate connections between the release of the oil, exposure of the resources to the oil, and, finally, a causal connection between exposure and resource injury. Exposure and its effects on the resource can be direct and/or indirect. For example, the health of a dolphin might be adversely affected by being directly exposed to the oil in the water. It may also be exposed and affected indirectly by eating prey that becomes contaminated by the oil.

In addition, because the NRDA forms the basis for a restoration plan that may be litigated, an especially careful level of scientific rigor is required for the studies that are to demonstrate these connections in order to ensure that our studies will be accepted by a court as evidence in the case. For all of these reasons, the assessment and the restoration plan based on it may take a number of years to complete and even more time to implement. For example, the implementation of the restoration plan for the Exxon Valdez oil spill that occurred in 1989 is still ongoing. The NRDA process requires an objective, scientifically rigorous, and cost-effective assessment of injuries – and development of a restoration plan with public input that assures that harm to the public's resources is fully addressed.

*Natural Resource Damage Assessment Early Restoration*

In April 2011, the NRDA Trustees announced an agreement under which BP would provide $1 billion toward implementation of early restoration projects. This agreement is called the

Framework Agreement for Early Restoration Addressing Injuries Resulting from the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill (Framework Agreement). A separate agreement among the NRDA Trustees allocated that $1 billion as follows: the five state trustees, DOI, and NOAA are each allocated $100 million for funding early restoration projects pertaining to injury to their primary trust resources. The remaining $300 million is to be used to fund additional state-proposed restoration projects as selected by NOAA and DOI. All projects must be approved by the NRDA Trustee Council and are subject to BP approval through its agreement to stipulations that all Trustees sign and BP agrees to. The Framework Agreement represents an initial step toward fulfilling BP's obligation to fund the complete restoration of injured natural resources and compensate for lost use of those resources.

The NRDA Trustees' key objective in pursuing early restoration is to achieve tangible recovery of natural resources and natural resource services for the public's benefit while the longer-term injury and damage assessment and restoration plan development is under way. As with the more complete assessment and restoration planning process, a restoration plan with opportunity for public input must accompany early project selection.

*Phase I and Phase II Early Restoration*

The first early restoration plan, the Phase I Early Restoration Plan & Environmental Assessment (Phase I ERP/EA), was presented for public review and comment in December 2011 and finalized by the NRDA Trustees in April 2012. The eight projects included in the Phase I ERP/EA are now being implemented and collectively will provide marsh creation, coastal dune habitat improvements, near-shore artificial reef creation, and oyster cultch restoration, as well as the construction and enhancement of boat ramps to compensate for lost recreational use of resources. The total estimated cost for the Phase I ERP/EA is $62 million.

The NRDA Trustees presented the Phase II Early Restoration Plan & Environmental Review (Phase II ERP/ER) for public review and comment in November 2012 and finalized it in December 2012. The Phase II ERP/ER projects, of which there are two, will help restore nesting habitats for beach-nesting birds and sea turtles harmed as a result of spill response activities. The total estimated cost for these two projects is $9 million. Implementation of both of these projects has begun and, for some project components, construction is in progress.

*Phase III Early Restoration*

To initiate the third phase of early restoration, the NRDA Trustees in December 2013 released a draft plan that proposed more than $600 million in new restoration projects across the Gulf states. The Draft Programmatic and Phase III Early Restoration Plan and Draft Early Restoration Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Draft Phase III ERP/PEIS) were available for public review and comment through Feb. 19, 2014. The NRDA Trustees held a total of nine public meetings across the Gulf Coast during this public comment period to spur public engagement, and also accepted comments on the draft plan via numerous other avenues, including the Trustees' website, email, and U.S. Mail. In June 2014, the federal natural resource trustee agencies and the state natural resource trustee agencies from Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi released the Final Programmatic and Phase III Early Restoration Plan and Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Final Phase III ERP/PEIS) and associated environmental analyses to the public. The plan outlines 44 proposed projects totaling an

estimated $627 million. Projects focused on ecological restoration represent 63% of the total dollar amount of projects, while the remaining 37% focus on restoring lost recreation uses of natural resources. The Plan also identifies a preferred programmatic strategy for early restoration actions. This programmatic strategy may also serve as the base document from which to tier subsequent environmental compliance evaluation for future early restoration plans. More information is available at www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov.

Final decisions on both the programmatic early restoration plan alternatives and each of the 44 projects will be documented in a final record of decision. The record of decision for the Final Phase III ERP/PEIS will provide and explain the NRDA Trustees' decisions regarding the selection of a programmatic early restoration alternative and specific early restoration projects. The NRDA Trustees will issue the record of decision no earlier than 30 days after the Environmental Protection Agency publishes a notice in the Federal Register, which occurred on June 27, 2014, announcing the availability of the Final Phase III ERP/PEIS.

**National Fish and Wildlife Foundation- Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund**

In early 2013, a U.S. District Court approved two plea agreements resolving certain criminal cases against BP and Transocean which arose from the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* explosion and oil spill. The agreements direct a total of $2.544 billion to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to fund projects benefiting the natural resources of the Gulf Coast that were impacted by the spill. Pursuant to the plea agreements, NFWF is required to consult with natural resource management agencies, including NOAA and USFWS, on the identification and prioritization of appropriate projects for Gulf of Mexico restoration.

Over the next five years, NFWF's Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund will receive a total of $1.272 billion for barrier island and river diversion projects in Louisiana, $356 million each for natural resource projects in Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi, and $203 million for similar projects in Texas.

**Conclusion**

It has been four years since the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. Much progress has been made, and there is still much to be done. The Department of Commerce, through our roles in all of these large Gulf restoration efforts, is committed to continuing to work with the citizens of the Gulf Coast to make smart investments and use available resources wisely to restore the region's ecosystem and economy. Although the Council faces challenges implementing portions of the RESTORE Act, the Department is committed to ensuring that this Council continues to work with deliberate speed and focused effort to help restore the Gulf Coast region's environment and economy.

Thank you again, Chairman Nelson and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to discuss the Department of Commerce's role in Gulf of Mexico restoration. I appreciate the Committee's time and attention, welcome any questions, and look forward to working with you further on this important effort.