

Collier County RESTORE Act Project Proposal

Enhancing Community Stewardship for Collier County's Gulf Coast: *Environmental Education and Training for Youth and Adults*



Project Sponsors: Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, Collier County Public Schools, Edison State College, Collier County /University of Florida Extension Office, Florida Sea Grant, Florida Gulf Coast University, Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

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Project Type: *Restoration and protection of natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast region; Implementation of a federally approved management plan; workforce development and job creation; Improvements to or on State Parks located in coastal areas; Activities to promote tourism and seafood in the Gulf Coast region.*

Project Location: Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, Collier County .

Project Description: The proposed project is a collaborative effort between six agencies and organizations in Collier County, with the goal of building and sustaining an ethic of environmental stewardship for Gulf Coast natural resources in Collier County through education and training. The project builds upon an existing foundation of successful environmental education activities currently in place, and involving the following project partners: Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (RBNERR), Collier County Public Schools (CCPS), Edison State College (ESC), Collier County/University of Florida Extension, Florida Sea Grant, and Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU).

The project consists of three key elements that link to the County's *Guiding Principles* and to the RESTORE Act's *Allowable Uses* as noted above:

1. **Raising local awareness and appreciation for Gulf Coast fisheries including sport fishing and commercial seafood harvest.** Collier County's Sea Grant extension program, in partnership with RBNERR, Florida Sea Grant, and FGCU, seeks funds to enhance and expand education and training programs that target commercial seafood harvesters, recreational and professional sport fishing interests (e.g. local sport fish guides), and community policymakers. Funds are needed to hire and train a community outreach/training specialist, establish an annually recurring graduate fellowship at FGCU, and develop and conduct education and training programs that enhance local economic development opportunities (e.g. Master Naturalist training and certification for local professional sport fish guides, training for local seafood harvesters on recent advances in harvest technology and rules/regulations to sustain seafood harvest), and educate community residents and local policymakers to raise awareness about the environmental and economic values of Gulf Coast fisheries.
2. **Engaging the next generation in developing and sustaining an environmental ethic for Gulf Coast natural resources and wildlife.** RBNERR, in partnership with Edison State College and Collier County Public Schools, seeks funds to (a) *establish a dual enrollment marine science program for Collier County* that engages high school students from across the County in field-based studies and lab activities designed to increase understanding of the environmental and economic values of Gulf Coast natural habitats and marine wildlife. The program will include the development of an annually recurring intensive Summer Marine Science program to recruit and train high performing students in the fields of coastal ecology, wetlands restoration, and fisheries monitoring; (b) *design and develop a Gulf Coast environmental education exhibit for the Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center* that engages visitors and local residents with hands-on displays and live animals collected from the Gulf of Mexico, and increase their

awareness and appreciation for fragile estuarine ecosystems such as Rookery Bay and the Ten Thousand Islands that help contribute to the Gulf's natural productivity; and (c) develop an annual index of water quality and biological health associated with the Gulf coastal waters of Rookery Bay and the Ten Thousand Islands, translating the results of ongoing cutting edge environmental monitoring and research within RBNERR to visitors, residents, and local policymakers.

- 3. Design and conduct a biennial *State of the Coast* conference and associated website that highlights the results of ongoing environmental research and monitoring in Collier County's Gulf Coast and estuarine waters, and helps to bridge the gap between science and policymaking.** RBNERR, working in close collaboration with FGCU, Florida Sea Grant, Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge, and local researchers, seeks funding to support the development of a "State of the Coast" conference, to be implemented every two years, and an associated website that provides updated information to residents and policymakers on local environmental trends based on the results of ongoing research. The scope of the project includes coastal and estuarine waters of Collier County, and will incorporate outcomes of research conducted by participating federal, state, and local environmental agencies, organizations, and academic institutions. Targeted audiences for the biennial conference include Collier County Commissioners and staff, Naples and City of Marco Council members and staff, Congressional members and staff, and local media. Depending on funding availability, the County's first State of the Coast conference is envisioned for Fall 2014. An anticipated outcome of this project is an enhanced awareness and appreciation of current environmental trends, and environmental and economic values, that can help inform local policy decisions affecting Collier County's Gulf Coast beaches, wetlands, and estuaries.

Project Costs/Matching Funds:

- 1. Gulf Coast fisheries education and training:** *Proposal requests \$85,000 per year for five years*, to cover costs associated with personnel, graduate fellowship, educational supplies/materials, and travel/fuel costs. Cost share/matching funds include Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve \$20,000 per year (office, administrative support, use of vehicles and vessels), and supporting partnerships with Florida Sea Grant and Collier County/University of Florida Extension.
- 2. Establishing a Gulf Coast environmental ethic for Collier County's coastal habitats and marine wildlife:** *Proposal requests \$425,000 in year 1, and \$175,000 per year in years 2 through 5*, to cover costs of personnel, educational materials, data analysis and synthesis, and exhibit design and fabrication (year 1 only). Cost share/matching funds include Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve \$258,500 (year 1, exhibit

fabrication grant in review by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and personnel) \$58,500 per year (years 2 through 5, personnel, facilities), Collier County Public Schools \$10,000 per year, and Edison State College \$20,000 per year.

- 3. Conducting a biennial *State of the Coast* conference and developing/managing a Collier County *State of the Coast* website:** Proposal requests \$185,000 per year to cover costs associated with analysis of research data and synthesis of collected information, planning and implementation of biennial conference, and development and management of Collier County's *State of the Coast* website. Cost share/matching funds include Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve \$85,000 per year (personnel, administrative support, facilities), and supporting partnerships with Ten Thousand Islands NWR Refuge and FGCU.

Project	RESTORE Act Request	Cost Share
Gulf Coast Fisheries	85,000 per year	20,000 (Rookery Bay NERR)
Gulf Environmental Education	Year 1: 425,000 Years 2 through 5: 175,000	Year 1: 285,500 (Rookery Bay NERR) Years 2 through 5: 58,500
State of the Coast Initiative	185,000 per year	85,000 (Rookery Bay NERR)

Year 1 request: \$695,000 Matching/Cost Share: \$390,500

Years 2 through 5: \$445,000 per year Matching/Cost Share: \$163,500

Project Implementation and Timelines

