



NEWS RELEASE

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Tampa Bay Estuary Program to Receive \$2 Million from Gulf Oil Spill Fines

The Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP) will receive \$2 million to support environmental improvements throughout the bay watershed, as part of the first allocation of oil spill fines distributed by the federal Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council.

The funds will be divided among all seven of the Estuary Program's local funding partners – Hillsborough, Manatee and Pinellas counties; the cities of Clearwater, St. Petersburg and Tampa; and the Southwest Florida Water Management District. Each will receive \$271,430 for shovel-ready habitat restoration, stormwater or wastewater treatment initiatives.

Collectively, the seven projects will reduce nitrogen loadings to Tampa Bay by 16.5 tons per year; restore 268 acres of coastal habitats; and create 200 new acres of seagrass.

“Focusing on our estuaries is an important step in this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to restore and protect the Bay and our Gulf of Mexico,” said U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor, who urged for inclusion by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection of estuaries in this funding list. “Estuaries are essential for clean water as they filter pollutants and provide habitat for species critical to our fisheries, recreational and tourism industries. Estuaries and their wetlands also provide valuable commercial services by serving as buffers against storms, reducing the frequency and intensity of floods and protecting our infrastructure on land.”

The \$2 million allocation for TBEP was among the proposals submitted to the Gulf Restoration Council by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, one of the 10 Gulf Council members. Other Tampa Bay projects that support TBEP's bay restoration goals also are being awarded Phase 1 funds.

Phase 1 is funded by Clean Water Act fines imposed on TransOcean and other companies associated with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico five years ago. Phase 1 does not include the settlement with BP, which still awaits court approval. All the funds are

available because of the federal RESTORE Act passed by Congress in the wake of the Gulf oil spill.

The preliminary Phase 1 list will be finalized after a public comment period, with final approval expected by the end of 2015.

The seven Tampa Bay projects included in the \$2 million for TBEP are:

Cooper's Point Water Quality Improvements (City of Clearwater)

Hydrologic improvements to improve treatment and flushing of stormwater flowing from Cooper's Bayou into Old Tampa Bay. Project includes excavation of a channel to enhance flushing and removal of mounds covered with invasive Brazilian pepper trees.

Biosolids to Energy (City of St. Petersburg)

Biosolids treatment will be upgraded at the Southwest Water Reclamation Facility to optimize generation of methane that will then be used to produce renewable natural gas for vehicle fuel and electricity.

Copeland Park Stormwater Improvements (City of Tampa)

Stormwater pond dredging and subsequent shoreline restoration will occur at this urban park south of Fowler Avenue near the University of South Florida.

Coastal Invasive Plant removal (Hillsborough County)

Eradication of high-priority invasive plants from environmental lands managed by Hillsborough County along Tampa Bay's eastern shore, including Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve, E.G. Simmons Park and Upper Tampa Bay Park.

Robinson Preserve Restoration (Manatee County)

Creation of coastal wetlands and sub-tidal habitats by restoring former farmlands at this county-owned nature preserve near Bradenton.

Fort DeSoto Recirculation Project (Pinellas County)

Removal of a land bridge created for an old access road at the park will re-establish tidal flushing and improve water quality in two backwater bays.

Palm River Restoration Phase II (SWFWMD)

Removal of invasive plants, installation of native plants and construction of three ponds to treat stormwater flowing into McKay Bay from surrounding urban lands.

More information about these projects, and the RESTORE Act, is available on the Gulf Restoration Council website: <https://www.restorethegulf.gov/>