

14 Guiding Principles for Investing Deepwater Horizon Funds in Mississippi

The Mississippi Environment Focus Group (MEFG)* has identified 14 Guiding Principles for local, state, and federal decision-makers to consider in support of a comprehensive, successful recovery process for Mississippi. The MEFG is committed to helping our leaders achieve meaningful restoration by developing a transparent, accountable decision-making process guided by public input and scientific expertise. These *Guiding Principles* are meant to promote consistency and coordination across restoration programs and to help guide decisions to optimize overall long-term benefits in a complex, and often competitive, environment. *Note: The following are not listed in any particular order.*

- 1 Transparency** Ensure decision-making is open and transparent at all restoration levels, including process development, project solicitation and selection, implementation, and monitoring. Tools such as websites, webinars, and open houses should be used to share information and update the public and stakeholders about these efforts.
- 2 Provide for Public Input** Provide meaningful opportunities for public engagement throughout the decision-making process. In addition to public meetings and workshops, other suggestions include webinars, open house-style events, town hall meetings, and social media opportunities. Approaches and tools used for public engagement should incorporate cultural, socio-economic, and geographic needs.
- 3 Utilize Expert Input** Develop a science and technical advisory committee to support local, state and federal efforts to identify and maximize restoration priorities, inform decision-making, and promote a coordinated, comprehensive restoration vision. Possible committee members could include state/federal agency staff, resource managers, trade groups, nonprofits, and community leaders whose livelihoods depend on healthy resources.
- 4 Develop a Clear, United Vision** Mississippi's forward-thinking effort to invest in developing a coast-wide plan through initial NFWF Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund monies should serve as a foundation for guiding environmental restoration across other DWH funding sources. For example, the MS Comprehensive Ecosystem Restoration Tool (MCERT) can be used to identify priority areas for restoration investment and areas with sensitive or impaired resources that may not be appropriate for economic development and infrastructure projects.
- 5 Leverage Resources** Leverage funds from multiple sources – including those focused beyond Gulf recovery – as well as existing projects, potential partnerships with public and private entities, and technical and scientific expertise. Seek opportunities to coordinate and leverage proposals and projects in a way that complements and increases the net benefits of ecosystem restoration. This approach will ensure restoration efforts avoid duplication and maximize financial impact. Restoration funds should prioritize the coastal resources and communities that were impacted by the DWH disaster and address historical environmental issues that continue to negatively impact the health of the coast and local economy.
- 6 Apply Science-based Decision-making** Restoration projects should have clear, measurable, and achievable goals. Research and monitoring are crucial to project success. Projects should include robust and consistent monitoring protocols, and all projects and programs should have adaptive management plans. These efforts should be coordinated across funding programs. Processes for identifying, vetting, prioritizing, and funding economic and environmental projects and programs should be informed by science.
- 7 Build Stewardship and Awareness** Include educational components and outreach opportunities in projects and programs to increase public awareness and stewardship of natural resources.

- 8 **Emphasize Feasibility and Cost Effectiveness** Consider the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of projects or programs and require detailed budgets for project proposals that include science-based plans for operation, maintenance and monitoring. Details on how projects are feasible and costs are reasonable for the proposed scope of work should be made available when project announcements are made.
- 9 **Promote Sustainability** Projects should be selected and designed with sustainability in mind, considering sea level rise, future storm events, and other persistent or sudden environmental or human-induced stressors that may affect the likelihood of success and longevity of the projects.
- 10 **Reconvene GoCoast 2020 Committees** Reconvene the GoCoast 2020 Committees and provide opportunities for public participation throughout the decision-making process on RESTORE Bucket 1 (Direct Component).
- 11 **Support Equitable Community Benefits** Seek opportunities for cross-sector collaboration during implementation phases to ensure projects create positive economic impacts (i.e., use local workers and provide workforce training opportunities, employ local businesses, support land management for private landowners, etc.) and community benefits (i.e., flood risk reduction, recreational opportunities, etc.). Investments should benefit socially vulnerable communities that tend to experience disproportionate risks and are often left out of decision-making processes.
- 12 **Ensure Environmental Compliance** Where possible, include environmental review documents and permits with each proposal. Require consistency in compliance reporting.
- 13 **Work at the Regional Scale** Realizing that our natural resources do not follow political boundaries, coordinate at watershed and eco-regional scales to address cross-border natural resource management opportunities with counties, up-watershed communities, and adjacent states.
- 14 **Commitment to Do No Harm** The RESTORE Act and other restoration funds should have a positive, lasting benefit for Mississippi's natural resources. Projects or programs should identify any possible harmful effects on environmental resources up front. Investments should avoid adverse environmental impacts: degrading or negatively impacting the natural resources that our coastal economy depends upon and/or reducing or conflicting with ecological restoration investments. Where minor adverse impacts may occur, investments should identify a plan for compensatory mitigation.



**The Mississippi Environment Focus Group (MEFG) is an informal coalition of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) that have been actively working in the Gulf of Mexico region for many decades to support comprehensive conservation programs. Each of our member groups brings a suite of knowledge and expertise to different aspects of the recovery process, from land conservation planning to advocacy to workforce development to community resiliency. The MEFG advocates for funds and penalties resulting from the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster to be invested in Gulf restoration efforts that support a healthy coastal and marine environment, build the resiliency of our communities, and promote a strong economy.*