MISSISSIPPI TO SUBMIT FOUR PROPOSALS FOR SPILL FUNDING

Posted by Evelina Burnett

Some environmental groups say Mississippi is moving in the right direction with its proposals for the latest round of post-BP oil spill funding under the Restore Act.

Mississippi plans to submit four proposals for the competitive first round of funding selected by the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council.

Five states and 10 federal agencies will be competing for this first round of funding selected by the Gulf Coast Restoration Council. Robbie Kroger, who is an advisor to the
Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, says this first round will total around $150 to $180 million dollars.

"There's no allocation of funds for each Council members in 'bucket 2,' so there's no amount of funds guaranteed for the state of Mississippi," he says. "This is a true competitive process for selecting projects that truly represent foundational projects and programs towards Gulf-wide ecosystem restoration."

Three of the projects Mississippi proposes are Gulf-wide, including two land conservation programs and a proposal to put dredged sediment to beneficial use. The fourth project would create a Mississippi Sound estuary program.

"These are strong themes, in general terms, and we'd like to see the details filled in using the best possible practices and research," says Andrew Whitehurst, water policy director at Gulf Restoration Network.

The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality held two webinars last week, in English and Vietnamese to present its proposals and ask for public feedback to help fill in some of those details before the deadline to submit proposals on November 17.

Jill Mastrototaro, a Gulf policy specialist with the National Wildlife Federation, says the public engagement is encouraging.

"A lot remains to be seen in terms of the project design, so it's imperative for the public, environmental groups, business interests and the many other stakeholders to really take a look at those questions and provide the state with some substantive thought, so that Mississippi puts together the best project proposals possible that ensure our water and our lands are going to be restored and that the money is going to be spent in a way that will last for generations to come," she says.
The agency says 145 people listened to the webinars. The presentations, a recording of the call, and information on submitting feedback are all on the state's restoration website, [http://www.restore.ms/archived-webinar/](http://www.restore.ms/archived-webinar/).

"Conceptually, the state of Mississippi is on the right track," Mastrototaro adds. "The four projects all relate to habitat and water quality. The state is really emphasizing the collaborative nature, for the most part, on the projects, and engaging with the other Council members to benefit the Gulf of Mexico as an ecosystem."

This first round of funding is expected to total between $150 and $180 million dollars.