

**Proposed Modified Scope of Work for 2021
if No-Cost Extension Request Approved by NOAA Grants Management Division
based on FY2015-2019 Activities**

Ecosystem

In 2018, the Council began work on developing a Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) to work toward ecosystem-based fishery management in the Gulf of Mexico. An FEP is a guiding document that provides a framework to incorporate ecosystem-aspects into fishery management decisions. Each regional management Council has been tasked with the development of an FEP and the extent and depth of the FEP can vary by regional management Council. This type of document can outline and prioritize management goals of the Council, provide background information of the ecological and socioeconomic topics to consider, and identify the steps to reach the specific goals identified. Since the development of the Gulf FEP was requested in the 2019 no-cost extension, little progress has been made due to staff changes, competing Council priorities, and delays and cancellations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, the Council has formed an Ecosystem Technical Committee to provide guidance on the development of this plan and they met in March 2020 to review the draft outline of the FEP. The Committee recommended a mission statement and outline of the chapters to be included in the FEP. The Council was scheduled to review a draft outline for a Gulf FEP at its March 2020 meeting, followed by an additional meeting to discuss the Council's recommendations with the Ecosystem Technical Committee, and continue working on the content of the FEP document. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has required numerous changes in Council meeting schedules and priorities including cancellation of the March 2020 meeting. Several tasks have been reprioritized so that COVID-19 impacts on the fishery can be addressed and the August meeting was cancelled because of two hurricanes in the Gulf that prevented participation from some Council members and the public. As a result, the progress on this task has been delayed.

Staff is proposing an alternative pathway to accomplish the Gulf FEP work by requesting a change in scope from holding meetings and travel to complete this task to contracting with an outside academic for the development of the Gulf FEP. If this change in scope is approved by grants management division, the funds need to be expended by December 31, 2021, with a mid-year report due July 15, 2021, and a final report due March 11, 2022.

Specifically, the selected contractor would be tasked with working with Council staff to complete the full development of the Gulf FEP. Anticipated expertise needed to complete this proposal include but are not limited to biological/ecological, economic, and social/anthropogenic expertise. The selected contractor would provide a mid-term report and updates to the Ecosystem Technical Committee and Council for feedback:

- The work product should include but not be limited to:
 - An overview of NOAA Fisheries policies addressing ecosystem-based fisheries.

- A summary of FEPs developed by other Fishery Management Councils to define the structure of the documents and key methods that would be applied on an FEP for the Gulf of Mexico region.
- Identification of key ecosystem indicators and the predicted social, economic, and biological responses that would be used to comprise large sections of the FEP.
- Layout a framework to directly incorporate the results into management actions.
- Outcomes from this work will be refined based on Council input and insights from public comments during Council meetings, and results from Council and SEFSC stakeholder workshops.

The estimated cost of contracting for the development of a Gulf FEP is \$250,000-\$300,000.

Logistics and Draft Schedule:

If the Council concurs and this modified scope of work is approved by NOAA grants management division. A call for proposals would be issued in November, reviewed and selected by mid-December, and contract completed by the end of 2020. The proposed review panel would consist of the Council Chair, Chair of Ecosystem Committee, lead Council staff, and Deputy and Executive Directors.

Coral

The development of Coral Amendment 10 was planned in 2019, yet not completed due to numerous staffing changes, competing Council priorities due to COVID-19, and the assessment of the ongoing Florida Keys and Flower Garden Banks Sanctuary Expansion documents in the Gulf of Mexico. The development of a Coral Amendment 10 would require a revisit of the areas that were identified by the Coral Working Group in 2014, but were deemed to be data-limited and not included in Coral Amendment 9.

In October 2019, the Council directed staff to reconvene the Coral Advisory Panel and Coral Statistical and Scientific Committee to reexamine priority areas to be considered as HAPCs through Coral Amendment 10. Staff is proposing an alternative pathway to accomplish research and background legwork necessary to initiate the development of Coral Amendment 10 by requesting a change in scope from holding meetings and travel to complete this task to contracting with an outside academic to characterize relevant data since 2014. This information would include but not be limited to depth, habitat type, density, diversity, and abundance information for previously considered areas in Coral Amendment 9 that the Council selected not to move forward with as well as any new information on regional areas. If this change in scope is approved by grants management division the funds need to be expended by December 31, 2021, with a mid-year report due July 15, 2021, and final report is due March 11, 2022.

Specifically, the selected contractor would be tasked with working with Council staff to compile and document all relevant information with citations and provided in PDF and geospatial map package for spatially-explicit data or in a suitable format following a database template provided by the Council staff for these areas and any additional areas. Anticipated expertise needed to complete this proposal include but are not limited to biological/ecological/habitat/and/or coral.

The selected contractor would provide a mid-term report and updates to the applicable APs and Council for feedback:

- Council staff will provide a list of areas to focus on, based on the areas initially identified by the Coral Working Group in 2014, yet not included in Coral Amendment 9, or the sanctuary expansions.
- Compile information as it relates to: coral presence, coral diversity, coral density, benthic habitat composition, and connectivity of Gulf of Mexico reef habitats.
 - Conduct a comprehensive literature review;
 - Identify a consistent level of details for comparison across and among areas; and
 - Provide citations and source information for each area/regional considered.

The final document will be presented to the Council's advisory bodies for recommendations and then Council for future consideration toward the development of Coral Amendment 10. The estimated cost of contracting for the development of this level of information is \$150,000-\$175,000.

Logistics and Draft Schedule:

If the Council concurs and this modified scope of work is approved by NOAA grants management division. A call for proposals would be issued in November, reviewed and selected by mid-December, and contract completed by the end of 2020. The proposed review panel would consist of the Council Chair, Chair of Habitat Protection and Restoration Committee, lead Council staff, and Deputy and Executive Directors.

Meetings and Travel

Staff is proposing the remaining funds be requested in the no-cost extension to complete meetings such as advisory panel, scientific and statistic committee, technical committees, and public hearings through the end of 2021. Parts of Council meetings are chargeable based on the items requested in 2019 for the original no-cost extension and will be applied as practicable. The remaining anticipated funds after the two contractual above are estimated between \$90,140-\$165,140.