POSITION PAPER: GOMURC 2014

GULF OF MEXICO UNIVERSITY RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE

GOMURC ROLE IN GULF RESTORATION

WHO WE ARE

The Gulf of Mexico University Research Collaborative (GOMURC) is a regional alliance of university consortia (currently 78 institutions) intended to promote research initiatives that span the scale and scope of state boundaries. Through a variety of means, GOMURC informs research activities and science-based policy development to understand, restore, protect and sustain affected natural resources.

POSITION

The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill (DWHOS) response and restoration is an unprecedented regional and national effort in terms of size and complexity. To assure success in terms of scope, effectiveness and efficiency, GOMURC members can assist, including:

Ensure Relevant, Meritorious Science and Technology Development: Competitive awards based on independent, expert peer review and clear program requirements ensure all restoration efforts are based, as required by the RESTORE Act (PL112-141, subtitle f), on the "best available science."

Support Research, Observing, Monitoring and Assessment Capabilities: Ecosystem monitoring includes all aspects of an ecosystem—people, species, and habitats. Restoration projects require effectiveness/performance monitoring. In addition, an Gulf ecosystem-wide monitoring program should be supported by all restoration programs, building on existing observing and monitoring programs. The Gulf-wide system is needed, for example, to establish baselines needed to assess damages and prepare for future events, to account for large scale forcing factors that impact local restoration efforts, and to evaluate effectiveness of restoration at the ecosystem scale. Contributions must come from all restoration programs, funded by penalties or otherwise, and contribute to an endowment to ensure long-term operations.

Coordinate Restoration Science Programs: The RESTORE Act mandates some coordination efforts among the section 1603, 1604 and 1605 programs. We also recommend a macro-coordination effort via inter-program agreements among all restoration science programs (e.g., National Academy of Sciences, National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, North American Wetlands Conservation Act Transocean settlement funds, and all RESTORE Act programs). GOMURC was established for this purpose and initiated an ad hoc team of leaders from these programs in 2013 to facilitate communication and coordination.

Support Syntheses and Assimilation: In biology and chemistry, synthesis creates something new from base elements, and assimilation integrates synthesized products into a larger system. All restoration programs need to engage scientists to synthesize their program findings and jointly assimilate these into a Gulf-wide picture of ecosystem status and needs. Like the monitoring program, an over-arching assimilation capacity that crosses the matrix of restoration programs and projects should also be cost-shared by all restoration programs.

Support Work Force Development: We have an unprecedented opportunity to educate the scientific and technically trained work force required to support a healthy Gulf for generations. Opportunities should be encouraged through required involvement of students in program projects, and through directed internships or fellowships to support program science and technology activities.