

Estuary Habitat Restoration Council

ACTION PLAN

2012

The purpose of this Action Plan is to support the 2012 Estuary Habitat Restoration (EHR) Strategy by identifying specific actions and milestones that the EHR Council (Council) will achieve over three years. The activities outlined in this Action Plan are intended to be carried out by the ERA Council agencies consisting of representatives from the Department of the Army -U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Department of Commerce - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department of the Interior - United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Several federal agencies fund and implement coastal and estuarine habitat restoration projects. Restoration efforts must be coordinated, evaluated, and tracked to ensure that restoration is effective and efficient. Continued federal funding and technical assistance to coastal and estuary habitats allows for collaboration across government agencies that can result in implementation of quality restoration projects. Project monitoring provides an opportunity to improve the science of restoration and document the benefits to the ecosystem and society, such as increases in fishing opportunities, fish populations, and biological diversity.

While this Action Plan does not cover all three of the major sections in the Strategy, it confirms the Council's dedication to the implementation of strategic concrete actions that support the overall Strategy. The Council has identified the areas of greatest opportunity to actively enhance the science of restoration and focused on actions directly related to implementation of habitat restoration, monitoring, and project tracking that align with the Implementation and Project Effectiveness sections of the Strategy. The ability of the Council agencies to meet the milestones listed below is dependent upon funding and staff availability.

I. Implementation of Habitat Restoration

A. *Description:* Despite its modest allocation, the ERA continues to fund landscape-scale projects that focus on quality projects and innovative technologies to improve the science of restoration. The Council collaborates with other Federal agencies and conservation stakeholders to continue to improve the efficiency of project implementation.

B. *Timeframe:* Annually

C. Outcomes: Financial and technical assistance offered by the Council and work group provide invaluable resources for applicants and recipients that allow partners across the nation to continue to implement and improve habitat restoration projects for the benefit of future generations.

D. Milestones:

1. Announce Federal Funding Opportunity annually (typically in the spring).
2. Each year, the Council will award funding to projects based on proposals submitted and available funds (typically in the summer).
3. Work with recipients to finalize their projects and required monitoring plan prior to the start of construction, typically within 6 – 12 months of the Council selection.

E. Lead Agencies: NOAA and ACOE

F. Resource Requirements and Coordination: ERA work group staff time and expertise.

II. Monitoring

A. Description: Although most coastal and estuarine restoration projects appear to be successful, without monitoring restoration, practitioners do not have the data to document the success or instances of failure. Additionally, opportunities to learn lessons and catalogue the impacts of projects on the ecosystem, such as increases in fish populations and biological diversity, are not available unless project monitoring and overall analysis of project data are conducted and stored in a location accessible to the public.

B. Timeframe: 1-4 years

C. Outcomes: Improved and consistent monitoring and data collection to document the ecological and socio-economic outcomes of habitat restoration projects will improve the effectiveness of habitat restoration.

D. Milestones:

1. Complete interagency review of existing minimum monitoring data standards by fall 2012.
2. Begin review of potential socio-economic parameters by fall 2012.
3. Convene workshop to discuss minimum monitoring data standards with other federal and non-federal entities by spring/summer 2013.
4. Revise existing minimum monitoring data standards for both ERA funded and non-ERA funded projects by fall 2013.
5. All five Council agencies approve new minimum monitoring data standards for both ERA funded and non-ERA funded projects by summer 2014.
6. ERA Council agencies will implement the revised minimum monitoring standards for restoration projects where project implementation and biological monitoring is required by spring 2015.

E. Lead Agency: NOAA

F. Resource Requirements and Coordination: Multiple agency staff will need to participate in the interagency process to review, revise, approve, and implement the minimum

monitoring standards. Funds to hold a monitoring workshop, as well as for actual monitoring, will be needed.

III. Project tracking

A. Description: Data collection is the first step to assessing the data, but it is database management and reporting that will allow restoration practitioners to identify ecological and socio-economic trends, evaluate project success criteria, and compile lessons learned about project implementation and monitoring at a national level that can be disseminated at a broader scale. These tools also allow the Council to define strategic targets for future project selection.

B. Timeframe: 1-4 years

C. Outcomes: Database management is critical to facilitating the development of Congressional and other reports that will improve the ERA Council's understanding of the impact of ERA funded projects to date and define strategic targets and future project selection. Data in the database may also be used by other restoration practitioners to develop reports for widespread dissemination that describe the status of both ERA funded projects, as well as other projects that organizations have entered into the publicly accessible database.

D. Milestones:

1. Obtain ERA Council agency commitments to make estuary restoration project information publicly available in a coordinated manner by spring 2012.
2. Coordinate efforts and implement a mechanism to make estuary restoration project information from agency databases available to the public by spring 2013.
3. Report to Congress every other year. Next reports will be submitted in fiscal year 2013 and 2015.

E. Lead Agency: NOAA

F. Resource Requirements and Coordination: Agency staff will coordinate with NOAA on development and maintenance associated with making restoration project information publicly available.