

RESTORE Council Activity Description

General Information

Sponsor:

Florida Department of Environmental Protection

Title:

Florida Water Quality Improvement Program

Project Abstract:

The RESTORE Council has approved 6.75M for planning as FPL Category 1 Council-Selected Restoration Component funding for the Florida Water Quality Improvement Program (WQIP), sponsored by Florida, through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). In addition, the Council is also identifying a separate \$20.25M implementation component as a FPL Category 2 priority for potential future funding. The program supports the primary RESTORE Comprehensive Plan goal to restore water quality and quantity throughout the Florida Gulf Coast by underwriting a suite of linked, high-priority water quality improvement projects. Projects may include stormwater treatment, wastewater reuse, septic tank abatement, sediment reduction, and land acquisition. Planning and implementation projects in Florida watersheds that drain to the Gulf of Mexico will be considered.

The WQIP activities are intended to result in environmental benefits such as fewer algal blooms, fish kills, beach closures, fish and shellfish consumption restrictions, healthier seagrass as well as other submerged aquatic vegetation and wildlife habitat, and improved recreational opportunities/experiences. The WQIP framework allows for administration of project funding to target projects that deliver cumulative benefits to the Gulf and link environmental benefits between WQIP projects and other restoration projects in a watershed or region. Combining or leveraging projects within a geographic area contributes to large-scale water resource improvements while maximizing each dollar. Program duration is 10 years.

FPL Category: Cat1: Planning/ Cat2: Implementation

Activity Type: Program

Program: Florida Water Quality Improvement Program

Co-sponsoring Agency(ies): N/A

Is this a construction project?: Yes

RESTORE Act Priority Criteria:

(II) Large-scale projects and programs that are projected to substantially contribute to restoring and protecting the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast ecosystem.

(III) Projects contained in existing Gulf Coast State comprehensive plans for the restoration and protection of natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast region.

Priority Criteria Justification:

WQIP meets Priority Criteria II, large-scale projects and programs, and Priority Criteria III, projects contained in existing Gulf Coast State comprehensive plans (Council 2019). The WQIP will fund a suite of intrinsically linked restoration or conservation water resource improvement projects with the primary goal of reducing excess nutrients and other pollutants to the Gulf of Mexico. Project selection criteria will prioritize projects included in other state or federal restoration planning documents, such as BMAPs, SWIM plans, the SEP, and FL TIG restoration plans that identify both the need and benefits of such projects and which are based on strong science.

DWH funds have been invested throughout Florida's Gulf Coast watersheds to improve water quality, hydrology, and habitats. The DWH funds have leveraged state and local investments in BMAPs and SWIM plans. The WQIP will significantly increase these investments. The state environmental agencies, including FDEP, the FFWWC, and the state's WMDs continue to collaborate with DWH funding partners to build on existing investments and ensure that future investments target priority water quality improvement restoration activities. The WQIP is one such collaboration and will enable Florida to increase funding of critical projects that can make significant, measurable improvements to water quality and thus help restore or maintain natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, beaches, and coastal wetlands. While individual projects may be limited in scope, Florida's selection criteria will ensure a collective contribution to large-scale water quality and habitat restoration by reducing excessive nutrients and other pollutants to impaired fresh, estuarine, and marine waters.

Project Duration (in years): 10

Goals

Primary Comprehensive Plan Goal:

Restore Water Quality and Quantity

Primary Comprehensive Plan Objective:

Restore, Improve, and Protect Water Resources

Secondary Comprehensive Plan Objectives:

N/A

Secondary Comprehensive Plan Goals:

N/A

PF Restoration Technique(s):

Protect and conserve coastal, estuarine, and riparian habitats: Land acquisition

Reduce excess nutrients and other pollutants to watersheds: Erosion and sediment control

Reduce excess nutrients and other pollutants to watersheds: Stormwater management

Reduce excess nutrients and other pollutants to watersheds: Wastewater system improvements

Location

Location:

Florida watersheds that drain to the Gulf of Mexico, including Perdido, Pensacola, Choctawhatchee – St. Andrew, Apalachicola – Chipola, Ochlocknee – St. Marks, Suwannee, Springs Coast, Withlacoochee, Tampa Bay, Tampa Bay Tributaries, Sarasota-Peace-Myakka, Charlotte Harbor, Caloosahatchee, Everglades West Coast, Everglades, and Florida Keys.

HUC8 Watershed(s):

South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Choctawhatchee-Escambia) - Florida Panhandle Coastal(Perdido Bay)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Choctawhatchee-Escambia) - Escambia(Lower Conecuh)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Choctawhatchee-Escambia) - Florida Panhandle Coastal(Perdido)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Southern Florida) - Southern Florida(Everglades)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Southern Florida) - Southern Florida(Florida Bay-Florida Keys)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Southern Florida) - Southern Florida(Big Cypress Swamp)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Southern Florida) - Southern Florida(Caloosahatchee)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Peace-Tampa Bay) - Peace(Peace)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Peace-Tampa Bay) - Peace(Myakka)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Peace-Tampa Bay) - Peace(Charlotte Harbor)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Peace-Tampa Bay) - Tampa Bay(Sarasota Bay)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Peace-Tampa Bay) - Tampa Bay(Manatee)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Peace-Tampa Bay) - Tampa Bay(Little Manatee)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Peace-Tampa Bay) - Tampa Bay(Alafia)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Peace-Tampa Bay) - Tampa Bay(Hillsborough)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Peace-Tampa Bay) - Tampa Bay(Tampa Bay)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Peace-Tampa Bay) - Tampa Bay(Crystal-Pithlachascotee)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Peace-Tampa Bay) - Tampa Bay(Withlacoochee)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Suwannee) - Aucilla-Waccasassa(Waccasassa)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Suwannee) - Aucilla-Waccasassa(Econfina-Steinhatchee)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Suwannee) - Suwannee(Lower Suwannee)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Suwannee) - Suwannee(Santa Fe)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Ochlockonee) - Ochlockonee(Lower Ochlockonee)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Apalachicola) - Apalachicola(Apalachicola)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Apalachicola) - Apalachicola(New)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Apalachicola) - Apalachicola(Apalachicola Bay)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Choctawhatchee-Escambia) - Florida Panhandle Coastal(St. Andrew-St. Joseph Bays)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Choctawhatchee-Escambia) - Florida Panhandle Coastal(Choctawhatchee Bay)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Choctawhatchee-Escambia) - Florida Panhandle Coastal(Pensacola Bay)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Apalachicola) - Apalachicola(Chipola)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Choctawhatchee-Escambia) - Florida Panhandle Coastal(Yellow)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Choctawhatchee-Escambia) - Florida Panhandle Coastal(Blackwater)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Choctawhatchee-Escambia) - Choctawhatchee(Pea)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Choctawhatchee-Escambia) - Choctawhatchee(Lower Choctawhatchee)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Choctawhatchee-Escambia) - Escambia(Escambia)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Suwannee) - Aucilla-Waccasassa(Aucilla)
South Atlantic-Gulf Region(Ochlockonee) - Ochlockonee(Apalachee Bay-St. Marks)

State(s):

Florida

County/Parish(es):

FL - Escambia

FL - Pasco

FL - Calhoun

FL - Pinellas

FL - Charlotte

FL - Citrus

FL - Collier

FL - Columbia

FL - Dixie

FL - Franklin

FL - Gadsden

FL - Gilchrist

FL - Polk

FL - Sarasota

FL - Sumter

FL - Suwannee

FL - Taylor

FL - Union

FL - Wakulla

FL - Alachua

FL - Bay

FL - Bradford

FL - Gulf

FL - Hamilton

FL - Santa Rosa

FL - Walton

FL - Washington

FL - DeSoto

FL - Hardee

FL - Hernando

FL - Hillsborough

FL - Holmes

FL - Jackson

FL - Jefferson

FL - Lafayette

FL - Lee

FL - Leon

FL - Levy

FL - Liberty

FL - Madison

FL - Manatee

FL - Marion

FL - Monroe

FL - Okaloosa

FL - Hendry

Congressional District(s):

FL - 14

FL - 15

FL - 26

FL - 11

FL - 13

FL - 16

FL - 5

FL - 12

FL - 1

FL - 19

FL - 25

FL - 2

FL - 17

Narratives

Introduction and Overview:

The Florida Water Quality Improvement Program (WQIP, see Table of Acronyms attached) will restore and protect water resources throughout the Florida Gulf Coast (Figure 1) by underwriting intrinsically linked high-priority water quality improvement projects that reduce excess nutrients and other pollutants to watersheds (Council 2019). Nutrients and other pollutants that reach Florida's coastal waters have contributed to or exacerbated persistent harmful algal blooms that increase the severity and duration of red tides, depleting oxygen levels and causing fish kills, and destroying SAV. Bacteria and pathogen problems can lead to beach and swimming closures and restrictions on fish and shellfish harvesting. As identified in RESTORE's 2019 Planning Framework document (Council 2019) and demonstrated by the Governor's EO 19-12 and the state's investment in BMAPs, SWIM plans, and other restoration programs, water resource protection and restoration are among the most critical environmental issues facing Florida, demanding immediate action by FDEP and other environmental agencies.

FDEP will rely on the existing TMDL/BMAP process, SWIM plans, and the NPS program, which serve as foundations for restoring impaired waters in Florida. These programs focus on reducing nutrients and other pollutants to meet TMDLs or other priority water body goals (Figure 2). Section 303(d) of the CWA requires states and US Territories to designate impaired water bodies. This has resulted in a concerted effort in the State of Florida to identify solutions to address those impaired water bodies. In addition, the Florida Legislature created the SWIM Act in 1987 to protect, restore, and maintain Florida's highly threatened surface water bodies and directed the state's five water management districts identify a list of priority water bodies within their authority, and implement plans to improve them. Each water management district prepares (and updates) what are called SWIM Plans. SWIM Plans are based on water quality and other data collected within water management districts that is analyzed and used to make decisions based on best available science. SWIM Plans are the result of rigorous peer reviewed scientific analyses that include an extensive public involvement process.

The TMDL/BMAP development process provides an understanding of existing nutrient loads and other pollutants in watersheds where proposed projects will occur. The process begins with identifying priority impaired water bodies for TMDL development that is conducted using a prescribed USEPA approved process to produce a scientifically defensible analysis. This comprehensive process engages stakeholders to collect data from various sources to characterize the watershed, water quality, pollutant loads and responses, and develops TMDL targets and pollutant source assessments. Load/concentration reductions are then developed for the watershed through watershed models to meet the TMDL target (Figure 3). The reductions are allocated to either point sources or non-point sources, with a margin of safety incorporated into estimates to account for uncertainties in the analysis.

Florida will use a watershed/estuary-based approach to guide the selection of projects best suited to address the stressors within a watershed and provide regional benefits.

WQIP selection criteria will prioritize projects identified in other state or federal restoration planning documents (e.g., BMAPs, SWIM plans, the SEP, and FL-TIG restoration plans) that identify both the need and benefits of such projects. Because initial project planning, technical review, stakeholder engagement, and identification of risks are typically part of the development of these restoration plans, use of this approach to identify projects for funding under the WQIP will promote use of BAS and improve the likelihood of project success. Collaboration with NRDA, NFWF-GEBF, or other state and federal funding programs will allow the WQIP to fund more or larger projects more efficiently, maximizing investments to achieve large-scale restoration.

The public will be involved during the development of selection criteria and project selection. FDEP will hold a webinar to review the draft project selection criteria and solicit public input. After proposals are evaluated using the selection criteria, a draft list of projects proposed for funding will be published on the Florida DWH website for public review and comment and will finalize project lists after public comments are analyzed. The final projects list(s) and workplans will be submitted to Council staff for BAS external review and approval.

Partners: Florida is committed to coordination and collaboration for the WQIP and will rely on existing relationships with local governments, WMDs, NEPs, NGOs, Florida's RESTORE Act COEs, the Gulf Consortium, FL TIG, NFWF, and other Council members to advance restoration around the state. Extensive stakeholder outreach is integral to BMAP and SWIM plan development; the WQIP can use these efforts to reach a larger audience and ensure public participation. The BMAP process targets funding of restoration activities to implement TMDLs developed based on BAS. For example, among available validated water quality models the TMDL program deploys, a tool developed by the FSU Department of Scientific Computing uses a simplified GIS-based model to estimate/predict nitrogen loading from septic tanks to receiving surface water bodies (FDEP 2015). The model is used during TMDL development to predict the pollutant load allocation for septic tanks and used during the BMAP planning phase to help stakeholders and FDEP better estimate nitrogen reductions associated with sewer line extensions, among other things. As with BMAPs, a defining characteristic of the SWIM program is that it is conducted primarily through cooperative projects that are prioritized with regional stakeholders and implemented, owned, operated, and maintained by local governments and other watershed partners to help ensure continuing success.

Goals/Objectives: Upland, estuarine, and marine habitats are intrinsically connected. The WQIP will identify and select projects that link benefits between selected projects as well as with other restoration projects in a watershed or region to build upon one another and maximize benefits using Planning Framework (Council 2019) priority techniques to address legacy pollution from existing sources. Infrastructure projects intended to support new development or growth will not be eligible for funding under WQIP. The Council seeks to “optimize ecosystem restoration benefits by advancing large-scale solutions that take into account the environmental conditions of a given region of the Gulf” (Council 2016a). The WQIP will focus on addressing the stressors identified in TMDLs/BMAPs, SWIM, and other approved restoration plans to achieve the Council’s goal of restoring water quality/quantity and Florida’s desired outcome of restoration, improvement, and protection of water quality/quantity.

Commitments: Florida has among the most comprehensive nutrient water quality standards in the nation (FDEP 2011). Of 29 coastal states, Florida is one of 17 to have a fully approved nonpoint pollution control program that satisfies all conditions in accordance with the CZMA (FDEP 2015). The protection and restoration of water resources and other natural resources is guided by comprehensive planning efforts, including SWIM plans; an NPS management program; the Florida Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund Restoration Strategy, which is an overarching framework for restoring/conserving the natural resources of Florida’s Gulf Coast (FFWCC and FDEP 2018) and the BMAP process. To date, 31 BMAPs have been adopted and FDEP is working on developing or updating numerous BMAPs statewide (although not cited in this activity description, links to BMAPs and SWIM Plans are provided in the Bibliography as non-cited literature). The majority of the BMAPs address nutrient impairments, some also target fecal indicator bacteria contamination. This process quantifies the nutrient and other pollutant loads within the watersheds and provides measured desirable outcomes in several Florida watersheds. For example, the Alafia River Basin Management Action Plan, adopted in 2014, identified nutrient and fecal coliform sources in the watershed including stormwater, septic, agriculture, and wastewater. Water quality improvement projects were identified in the Alafia River BMAP and

strategically implemented to address sources, with project review taking place each reporting period. The implementation of a variety of stormwater improvement projects has contributed to a reduction in total nitrogen and increase in DO in several portions of the watershed (FDEP, 2017). The Governor's EO 19-12 also provides a clear indication of the state's commitment to improving water quality.

Use of BMAPs to improve water quality is indicated in Florida's Blue-Green Algae Task Force (FDEP 2019) recommendations, which state that "spatially focused suites of projects in areas likely to yield maximum pollutant reduction [should] be identified and prioritized in all BMAP areas. Integrated monitoring and modeling of implemented BMAP projects should be conducted to ensure that projects are working as expected. Such efforts are, in fact, key to the assessment process and allow for adjustments to be made if necessary."

Environmental Stressors: FDEP planning efforts discussed above have identified stressors and threats such as nutrient pollution from a variety of sources such as the millions of often densely clustered septic systems, urban and agricultural fertilizers, stormwater runoff, and aging and inadequate wastewater and stormwater infrastructure (Badruzzman et al. 2012; Carey et al. 2010; Nagy et al. 2012). Florida's SWIM Act recognizes that reducing NPS loadings requires a comprehensive, long-term approach that relies on cooperative watershed management among all levels of government. SWIM plans, many of which have been recently updated with DWH funds, evaluate and address water quality and quantity stressors at a watershed level. For example, the 2017 Apalachicola River and Bay SWIM plan update (GEBF grant funded) recommended projects that address NPS pollution and septic system impacts (NFWFMD 2017a), and the Choctawhatchee River and Bay SWIM plan update recommended projects to address nutrients, dissolved oxygen, and bacteria from erosion, wastewater, urban stormwater runoff, and septic tanks (NFWFMD 2017b).

Environmental Benefits: The WQIP is intended to reduce algal blooms, fish kills, beach closures, and fish and shellfish consumption restrictions while improving seagrass and other SAV health, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities. WQIP funding will target projects that provide cumulative benefits to the Florida Gulf Coast and link environmental benefits between selected projects and other restoration projects in a watershed or region. Integrating projects in this way promotes large-scale water quality improvements.

FPL 3 Planning Framework: In selecting projects, the WQIP will emphasize the use of priority techniques, including stormwater management, erosion and sediment control, land acquisition, wastewater system improvements and reuse, stormwater treatment, septic tank abatement, and sediment reduction to achieve the goal of restoring water quality/quantity and the objective of restoring, improving, and protecting water resources overall. Selection criteria that support the overarching goal of restoring water quality by prioritizing projects identified in approved state and federal restoration plans and those that leverage other funds are imperative to the success of the WQIP. Draft selection criteria are described in the Methods section and will focus on projects that are contained within an existing peer reviewed plan; can leverage other funding; use BAS and BMPs; are technically feasible and cost effective; have some aspects of planning and E&D/permitting underway to show project readiness; and provide synergistic benefits, among others. Reliable, sound selection criteria will lead to high-quality projects that maximize the extent and success of restoration under the WQIP.

Costs: \$27,000,000. Projects that leverage other funding sources will be prioritized under WQIP selection criteria to maximize cost-benefits and support large-scale restoration.

Timeline: The duration of program planning and implementation is expected to be 10 years.

Methods:

FDEP will use a screening process based on approved selection criteria to fund projects under the WQIP. The WQIP will focus on stormwater treatment, wastewater reuse, septic tank abatement, sediment reduction, and land acquisition practices targeted at impaired water bodies (CWA 303(d) list of approved TMDLs). Infrastructure projects to be funded under the WQIP are intended to address legacy pollution from existing causes which are typically the result of inadequate wastewater treatment (overreliance on septic systems), ineffective or lack of stormwater treatment and other nonpoint source runoff. WQIP is not intended to support new growth or development. Good selection criteria will lead to high-quality projects, which will enable the WQIP to significantly reduce pollutants to priority waters. Success translates into fewer algal blooms, fish kills, beach closures, and fish and shellfish consumption restrictions and improved seagrass and other SAV, habitat and wildlife, and recreational opportunities and experiences.

Project locations with pollutant reduction efforts can be evaluated using the same water quality modeling used in TMDL development; ensuring improved water quality at these locations will also impact the overall system (FDEP 2018a). Water quality modeling will provide the data necessary to address project resilience to increased rainfall and sea level rise. Water quality improvement estimates for stormwater and wastewater project techniques (e.g., wastewater system improvements) will be derived from site-specific information and performance standards, where available, and peer-reviewed sources summarized in the Statewide Best Management Practice (BMP) Efficiencies for Nonpoint Source Management of Surface Waters (FDEP 2018b). By establishing estimates of water quality improvements through quantitative means (e.g., nutrient reduction in lbs.), individual projects can be evaluated together for combined effects and comprehensive restoration.

Project selection based on similar considerations has been used in existing Florida financial assistance programs, in state planning documents (e.g., the GEBF Restoration Strategy, the SEP, etc.), and for funds distributed under other DWH restoration programs since 2013 (GEBF and NRDA) (FFWCC and FDEP 2018). Florida has already established various financial assistance programs and funding collaborations targeted at improving water quality (Section 319 Grant Program, State Revolving Fund and Small Community Wastewater Facility Grants, State Water-Quality Assistance Grants, and WMD cooperative funding agreements), which utilize BAS selection criteria developed by technical experts within Florida and the U.S. EPA.

FDEP will host a public webinar to review the draft project selection criteria to allow for public input. The initial draft selection criteria presented below will be refined prior to this webinar. Refinements could include adding specific criteria for each restoration technique (e.g., for stormwater projects, does the applicant entity have a stormwater utility fee?). Similar to NRDA restoration planning, FDEP will initiate a call for WQIP projects with the final project selection criteria. A technical review panel of agency experts will assess the project proposals submitted against the selection criteria and develop a draft list of projects proposed for funding. The draft project list will be published on the Florida DWH website for public review and comment. Florida will finalize the list after review of the public comments and will submit the final project list(s) and workplans to Council staff for BAS external review and Council staff approval.

FDEP selection criteria will ensure that selected projects collectively contribute to large-scale water quality and habitat restoration by reducing excessive nutrients and other pollutants to fresh, estuarine, and marine waters. The extent to which a proposed project meets individual selection criteria and

overall program goals and objectives and contributes to large-scale restoration efforts across Florida's Gulf Coast region will dictate how projects are prioritized for selection.

Selection Criteria 1: Eligibility Screening

- **Geographic Relevance:** Projects must be geographically located within the 8-digit HUCs identified in this activity description.
- **Relevant Goals and Objectives:** Projects, at a minimum, must meet the primary Comprehensive Plan goal of restoring water quality and quantity and the primary objective of restoring, improving, and protecting water resources.
- **Management Capabilities:** Project sponsors receiving funding will need to demonstrate strong operation and management capabilities and financial resources to assure long-term success. This screening criteria is not intended to prevent small disadvantaged communities from participating in the program.

Projects not meeting all the above criteria will be removed from the screening process and receive no further consideration in that call for proposals.

Selection Criteria 2: Technical Basis and Justification

- **Alignment with Planning Framework:** Projects should demonstrate alignment with the Council's Planning Framework, including restoration priorities, approaches, and techniques (i.e., stormwater management, septic tank removal, erosion and sediment control, etc.).
- **Proposed in Existing Plans:** Projects already proposed in existing plans (e.g., BMAPs, SWIM plans, GEBF Restoration Strategy, SEP, etc.) will be given greater consideration as these projects have typically been previously vetted for BAS, feasibility, cost effectiveness, multiple benefits, etc.
- **Benefits:** Projects should have clear benefits to impaired or other priority water bodies, including those already identified in BMAPs or SWIM plans to maximize benefits within a watershed. Priority will be given to projects that link environmental benefits between selected WQIP projects and other restoration projects in a watershed or region. In addition, projects should clearly outline how their implementation will result in the environmental benefits outlined in the proposal (e.g., nutrient or other pollutant reduction, etc.)
- **Best Available Science:** Projects should clearly explain reliance on BAS.

Selection Criteria 3: Feasibility

- **Technical Efficacy and Constructability:** Projects should demonstrate feasibility. Such demonstration can be achieved through modeling, completion of feasibility studies, examples of successful analogous projects, etc.
- **Resiliency:** Projects should be designed to be resilient, taking into account sea-level rise, hurricanes, other major storm events, etc. Projects with resiliency considerations built into the designs/plans will be given greater consideration.
- **Cost-effectiveness:** Projects should outline their proposed funding needs and justification for cost effectiveness. Projects that show cost savings or that have significant benefit-to-cost ratios will be prioritized.
- **Schedule:** Projects must indicate their proposed schedule through completion, with significant or critical project milestones clearly identified.
- **Risk:** Projects must clearly identify any potential risk to project success. Projects should discuss strategies to mitigate the identified risks.

Selection Criteria 4: Project Status and Leveragability

- **Project Status:** Projects will indicate the state of readiness to proceed. Projects showing a readiness to proceed will receive higher priority.
- **Matching or Leveraged Funds:** Projects will include a discussion on matching or leveraged funds (including in-kind contributions). Projects that include matching or leveraged funds from other sources will be given greater consideration.
- **Environmental Compliance:** Projects should identify all required environmental compliance approvals or permits needed for the project. Projects that have achieved greater levels of environmental compliance will be given greater consideration.

Environmental Benefits:

Water bodies along the Gulf provide a gradient of saltwater, estuarine, and freshwater environments. Within these systems, unique organisms rely on good water quality for survival. The CWA and Florida laws recognize the influence of human activities on ecosystem health and aim to develop policies and regulations to protect and improve water quality. In Florida, freshwater, estuarine, and coastal water quality impairments are associated primarily with nutrients, low DO, and fecal indicator bacteria (FDEP 2018a). High concentrations of TN and TP can result in excessive algae growth, leading to low DO, inhibition of seagrass growth, negative aquatic food web impacts, and health threats to wildlife and humans (Badruzzman et al. 2012; Beck et al. 2019; Greening et al. 2014; Tomasko et al. 1996). Fecal bacteria in waters results in beach closures, human health risks, and restrictions on fish and shellfish harvesting.

The WQIP will improve water quality and biological integrity by selecting projects that upgrade or eliminate septic systems, upgrade wastewater treatment systems, improve stormwater treatments and reduce effluent discharges to Florida Gulf Coast waterways. Selected water quality improvement projects will eliminate significant sources of nutrients, bacteria, sediment, and other pollutants from entering waterways, which will have a positive impact on seagrass, fish and shellfish populations, and recreational uses. The WQIP goals align with many goals identified in TMDLs/BMAPs, SWIM, and other approved restoration plans that have led to implementation of projects that have successfully improved water quality in multiple waterways along Florida's Gulf Coast. This provides assurances that the WQIP's purported benefits (e.g., reduced pollutant loads, improved surface water quality, improved habitat for seagrass and other aquatic species, etc.) will result in improved water quality.

The WQIP will achieve the Comprehensive Plan goal of restoring water quality and water quantity and its associated objective of restoring, improving, and protecting water resources through implementation of priority water quality improvement projects. A key difference between existing programs and the WQIP is that the latter allows for the administration of funding that targets projects providing cumulative benefits to the Gulf and that links environmental benefits between selected projects and other restoration projects in a watershed or region. Linking projects in this way maximizes environmental benefits and contributes to large-scale water quality improvements.

Florida collects water quality data under several programs, including FDEP's Strategic Monitoring Program used to assess impairment, targeted sampling to refine TMDL development or evaluate BMAP progress, and probabilistic Status Monitoring and Trend Monitoring networks for statewide water quality. The data collected by Florida's WMDs, counties, and cities feed into these programs, which all use scientifically sound methodologies, techniques, and protocols for data collection. This water body-specific data will be used, where appropriate, to document the benefits of projects implemented under the WQIP. The WQIP will integrate quantification of environmental benefits into the selection of

restoration projects using WQIP metrics (e.g., acres of lands acquired or lbs. of sediment removed) so that projects are selected based in part on desired ecological quality with options to attain the desired ecosystem based on a broad spatial foundation to achieve overall water quality, health, and resiliency of the larger ecosystem.

Success means a reduction in the number of impaired waters or levels of impairment; reduced algal blooms, fish kills, beach closures, and fish and shellfish consumption restrictions; and improved SAV health, wildlife habitat, and recreational experiences. Tying together projects with existing plans (e.g., BMAPs, SWIM, the NFWF GEBF Strategy) ensures sound planning for successful restoration as projects continually build upon and contribute to one another during the restoration strategy development process (FFWCC and FDEP 2018). These synergistic, watershed-level improvements have worked in other regions. In Tampa Bay, NEP CCMP projects have resulted in water quality (chl-a, TN, and DO) and seagrass coverage in the watershed approaching conditions observed in the 1950s (Greening et al. 2014). The success in Tampa Bay was achieved through the use of sound science, management plan development with identified projects, broad stakeholder engagement and support, and multiple funding partners, both government and business/industry. The WQIP has been designed to build on the lessons learned in Tampa Bay.

Metrics:

Metric Title: RES002: Watershed management - # upgrades to stormwater and/or wastewater systems

Target: TBD

Narrative: Florida will use this as a program-wide metric to evaluate the success of the WQIP and its benefits to watershed management and water quality by upgrading septic systems (or connecting to sewer systems); stormwater runoff treatment improvements, and upgrades to aging/inadequate wastewater and stormwater infrastructure, among others as applicable. Because specific projects or activities have not been identified as of yet under the program, a target value or range of values cannot be provided, as it would be purely speculative. As projects or activities are selected for funding a range of values for this program metric can be proposed at that time. However, each project or activity funded under this program may not be captured by this metric. Additional metrics will be determined to capture the benefits of each technique utilized under this program; specifically, each project or activity selected under the WQIP will have specific metrics aimed at evaluating the success of the individual activity.

Metric Title: HM001: Nutrient reduction - Lbs. N avoided or removed

Target: TBD

Narrative: Florida will use this as a project or activity metric. The purpose of this metric will be to verify that a reduction or avoidance of N loading had been completed, and the performance measure will be the project or activity's ability to avoid or reduce lbs. of N. Once a project or activity is selected a target value will be established. Project or activity success will be evaluated and determined as the lbs. of N successfully removed or avoided using program funding. The outcome will be a decrease in or avoidance in lbs. of N entering water bodies.

Metric Title: HM003: Nutrient reduction - Lbs. P avoided or removed

Target: TBD

Narrative: Florida will use this as a project or activity metric. The purpose of this metric will be to verify that a reduction or avoidance of P loading had been completed, and the performance

measure will be the project or activity's ability to avoid or reduce lbs. of P. Once a project or activity is selected a target value will be established. Project or activity success will be evaluated and determined as the lbs. of P successfully removed or avoided using program funding. The outcome will be a decrease in or avoidance in lbs. of P entering water bodies

Metric Title: HM004: Sediment reduction - Lbs. sediment avoided or removed

Target: TBD

Narrative: Florida will use this as a project or activity metric. The purpose of this metric will be to verify that a reduction or avoidance of sediment loading had been completed, and the performance measure will be the project or activity's ability to avoid or reduce lbs. of sediment loading. Once a project or activity is selected a target value will be established. Project or activity success will be evaluated and determined as the lbs. of sediment successfully removed or avoided using program funding. The outcome will be a decrease in or avoidance in lbs. of sediment entering water bodies.

Metric Title: HC003: Land acquisition - Acres acquired in fee

Target: TBD

Narrative: Florida will use this as a project or activity metric. The project or activity metrics may be adjusted as needed once projects or activities are funded. Metrics may be added, removed, or replaced as appropriate at the project work plan application stage. Once a project or activity is selected a target value will be established. Project or activity success will be determined as the total number of acres acquired in fee. The purpose of this metric will be to verify that acquisition has been completed, and the performance measure will be an executed and recorded deed. Upon transfer of the parcel to Government ownership, this metric will be complete. The outcome will be an increase in protected acres.

Risk and Uncertainties:

Projects come with potential risks and uncertainties, including cost overruns and public controversy. Risks will be minimized through direct public engagement and ongoing transparency, careful cost estimates and reasonable contingencies, effective planning and design, third-party construction oversight, and nimble adaptive management. Bad weather can also delay project completion, but good planning and construction management will minimize the impact. Operating entities receiving funding will have to document strong operation and management capabilities and financial resources to assure long-term project success.

As part of project selection, the WQIP will encourage resiliency and adaptation planning in the E&D for selected projects. FDEP is aware that climate change effects are dynamic, and reliable responses and new technologies to address the effects are being and will continue to be developed. The WQIP is committed to considering project resiliency and climate change adaptation throughout the 10-year lifespan of the program.

On a project-specific basis, FDEP will require project sponsors to submit a monitoring and adaptive management plan that will address responses to unavoidable risk. Adaptive management strategies will be implemented as needed to improve project performance, leading to ultimate project and program success. Adaptive management is meant to be an iterative process that links project monitoring to management decisions; adjustments are made to management approaches based on observed outcomes (NRC 2004). These plans will outline the goals and objectives of the project, the uncertainties

and risks associated with the project, the monitoring parameters and methods, and adaptive management strategies if the outcome of monitoring does not meet the project's success metrics.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management:

Monitoring will be conducted on two levels: programmatic and project specific. Programmatic monitoring will focus on the programmatic metric specified below. At the project level, monitoring will be targeted toward the project metrics specified below and will be specific to resource outcomes and validate restoration techniques and BMPs. Programmatic and project-level monitoring will be conducted hand-in-hand to understand, document, and analyze how well projects perform compared to the expected outcomes and to provide lessons learned to help guide future project selection and adapt the WQIP to ensure its goals and objectives are achieved. Water quality can be monitored on a project basis using a variety of techniques, including baseflow, storm flow, inflow vs. outflow, time series, and paired watersheds, depending on specific project objectives and site characteristics. With the general exception of inflow vs. outflow monitoring, most of these monitoring approaches generally require a sustained period to account for climatic and precipitation variability. To the extent feasible, both program and project monitoring will seek to use FDEP's Strategic Monitoring and probabilistic Status Monitoring and Trend Monitoring networks discussed above. Under the WQIP, projects will be required to submit a monitoring and adaptive management plan. These plans should be based on existing, peer-reviewed guidance documents, such as the NRDA MAM Manual and the Council Observational Data Plan Guidance (DWH NRDA Trustees 2017; Council 2018). The monitoring outlined in these plans will be for both long- and short-term outcomes, such as the following:

Long-term outcomes:

- o Evaluation of long-term water quality trends. This requires multiple years of data collection following specific project implementation, including an evaluation of historical and baseline data for affected areas, as available.
- o Evaluation of long-term trends affecting key habitats and communities, including seagrass, tidal marshes, and shellfish.
- o Monitoring and evaluation of site stability and resilience. Coastal restoration sites will be monitored to evaluate effects of public use, seasonal conditions, erosion or accretion, and major storm events.

Short-term outcomes:

- o Specific facility performance (e.g., inflow vs. outflow pollutant concentration or load reduction monitoring).

Data Management:

FDEP will provide a central location to access data and other information related to the projects funded under the WQIP and make it available to the Council, regional partners, stakeholders, and any person or entity upon request. An Observational Data Plan and Data Management Plan for the WQIP will be submitted to the Council.

Data will be collected pursuant to approved QA plans. All data collected, analyzed, and reported will comply with chapter 62-160, Florida Administrative Code, and will be documented using standardized project-specific datasheets, as appropriate. Handwritten hardcopy data will be scanned to PDF files and transcribed into a standard digital format. QA plans will specify minimum field and laboratory QA, methodology, reporting, auditing, and data usability requirements. Data will be input into WIN, the Watershed Information Network (<https://floridadep.gov/dear/watershed->

[servicesprogram/content/winstoret](#)). WIN provides a platform for data providers to submit their data and perform data quality checking interactively prior to allowing the data to be migrated into the published WIN environment. WIN is used to store and manage data and to report data to interested users and the EPA). Data can be accessed through a web-based search program at <http://prodenv.dep.state.fl.us/DearWin/public/welcomeGeneralPublic?calledBy=GENERALPUBLIC>. FDEP will utilize the RESTORE METadata Records Library and Information Network for metadata records creation.

Collaboration:

Through the CPS process, meetings were held with local governments, WMDs, NEPs, NGOs, Florida's RESTORE Act COE, the Gulf Consortium, and other Council members. Additionally, BMAPs and SWIM plans have extensive stakeholder outreach during plan development and throughout implementation, including numerous public meetings and public education materials. Project selection will consider each project's ability to leverage other funds to expand the impact of awards. These monies could consist of other DWH funds or federal, state, or local government matching funds, including Florida's State Revolving Fund loans and grants, annual springs funding, TMDL project funding, NPS grants, Florida legislative member project funding, the Gulf Consortium State Expenditure Plan, the Gulf Coast counties' MYIPs, Florida Gulf Coast NEP CCMPs, Panhandle Estuary Program future CCMPs, and potentially those projects and programs identified in the Governor's EO.

Public Engagement, Outreach, and Education:

Under Florida's BMAP and SWIM programs, public engagement and education activities are routinely identified as the part of projects that contribute to the overall goal of improving water quality. These efforts have focused on many of the stressors targeted by the WQIP, allowing the program to make connections with the public more readily thanks to these previous engagement and education efforts. In the Chassahowitzka River watershed, citizens participated in the Lakes, Rivers & Coastal Cleanup event aimed at improving water quality and educational tools were developed to depict septic system water quality issues (SWFWMD 2017a). Similarly, schools and other organizations in the Weeki Wachee watershed participate in a program to learn about storm drains through hands-on stenciling and classroom presentations (SWFWMD 2017b). These activities help gain stakeholder buy-in and future participation through providing experiences and information showing the direct impacts of community choices at a personal level. Public engagement and education are often collaboratively funded through DEP-administered 319(h) grants for NPS pollution education.

Existing programs like SWIM and BMAP have built a strong foundation for public engagement and education that will encourage continued participation in the WQIP and ensure that the value of projects reaches a large audience. Furthermore, previous involvement of communities in SWIM and BMAPs increases the likelihood of meaningful public engagement and comments during WQIP project selection criteria development.

In addition, ongoing public outreach as part of DWH NRDA restoration efforts began in 2012, with over 60 projects in Florida to date. This includes the recently issued FL TIG Restoration Plan #1, which directed NRDA funds to water quality, nutrient reduction, and recreational enhancements (FTIG 2019). The NRDA process incorporates a rigorous public engagement element that affords stakeholders and the public opportunities to submit projects via a Florida-maintained web portal, comment on projects at the draft Restoration Plan stage, and comment on proposed projects. Florida also embarked on a large public outreach campaign as part of its GEBF Gulf Restoration Strategy development (FFWCC and FDEP

2018). The WQIP will be able to utilize the existing successful DWH public engagement structure without expending much of the WQIP administrative budget on these efforts.

Leveraging:

Funds: TBD

Type: Bldg on Others

Status: Proposed

Source Type: Other

Description: The WQIP will potentially leverage other federal funds and state funds including SEP, State Revolving Fund wastewater, NPS 319, WQ grants SW, NRDA. The selection criteria put greater emphasis on projects that leverage other funding sources. Therefore, although the program itself is not leveraging other funds, individual projects will be expected to do so. See Methods section for a description of selection criteria.

Environmental Compliance:

Some aspects of the WQIP comply with NEPA using the Council's NEPA CE for planning, research, or design activities (Section 4(d)(3) of the Council's NEPA procedures). Selected implementation projects will be required to comply with all applicable federal laws in the Council's Environmental Checklist as well as state and local laws. Because Council NEPA regulations allow the use of member NEPA CEs where appropriate (Section 4(d)(4) of the Council's NEPA Procedures), selected project NEPA compliance will occur using the appropriate documentation (EAs, EISs, or CEs). Some projects may be able to rely on existing member NEPA documents, including CEs (e.g., EPA §6.204 (a) (ii) ii). Actions relating to existing infrastructure systems (such as sewer systems, drinking water supply systems, and stormwater systems) could be used for a project extending services to current septic users.

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Budget

Project Budget Narrative:

The budget for this program consists of \$27,000,000, of which the majority (approximately 90%) will be spent on planning or implementation of projects or activities aimed at improving water quality in coastal watersheds of the Gulf Coast. The total amount of funding in Category 1 is \$6,750,000 and the total amount of funding in Category 2 is \$20,250,000. The Category 1 funds will be spent on State of Florida program administration and project or activity specific planning, E&D, and permitting. Program monitoring and adaptive management activities, and data management activities will also fall under Category 1. Category 2 funds will be used to implement projects or activities such as construction of stormwater and wastewater facilities, septic to sewer projects, or land acquisition, and will include project or activity specific monitoring and adaptive management activities, and data management activities. More detailed budgets will be developed at the project or activity level when projects or activities are selected for funding under this program, including an appropriate contingency. The percentages listed below apply to the entire \$27,000,000.

Total FPL 3 Project/Program Budget:

\$ 27,000,000.00

Estimated Percent Monitoring and Adaptive Management: 2 %

Estimated Percent Planning: 15 %

Estimated Percent Implementation: 75 %

Estimated Percent Project Management: 7 %

Estimated Percent Data Management: 1 %

Estimated Percent Contingency: 0 %

Environmental Compliance

Environmental Requirement	Has the Requirement Been Addressed?	Compliance Notes (e.g., title and date of document, permit number, weblink etc.)
National Environmental Policy Act	Yes	Section 4(d)(3) of the Council's NEPA procedures applies to Category 1 funds for planning.
Endangered Species Act	N/A	
National Historic Preservation Act	N/A	
Magnuson-Stevens Act	N/A	
Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act	N/A	
Coastal Zone Management Act	N/A	
Coastal Barrier Resources Act	N/A	
Farmland Protection Policy Act	N/A	
Clean Water Act (Section 404)	N/A	
River and Harbors Act (Section 10)	N/A	
Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act	N/A	
Marine Mammal Protection Act	N/A	
National Marine Sanctuaries Act	N/A	
Migratory Bird Treaty Act	N/A	
Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act	N/A	
Clean Air Act	N/A	
Other Applicable Environmental Compliance Laws or Regulations	N/A	

Maps, Charts, Figures

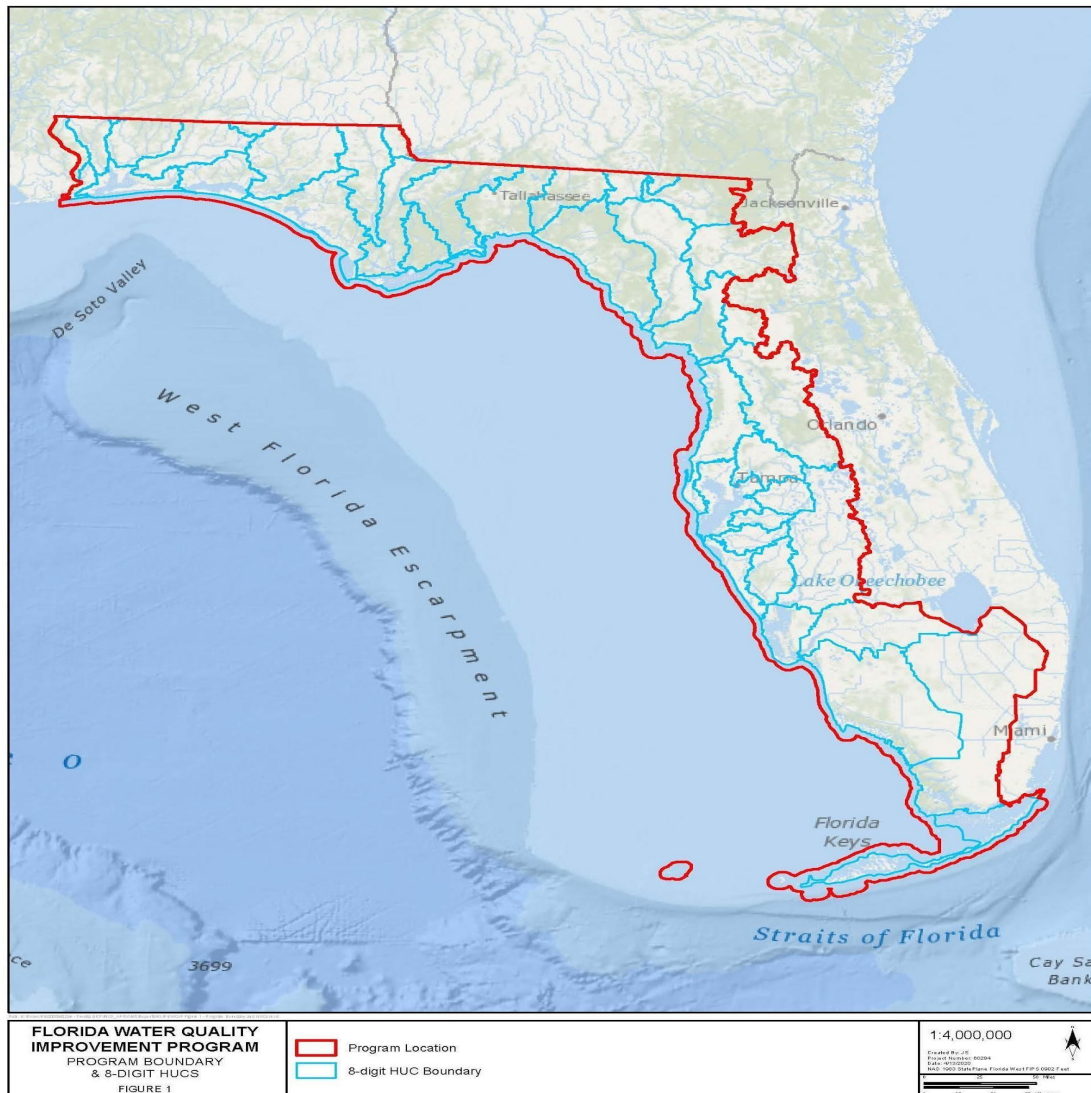


Figure 1: The WQIP boundary which includes all 5-digit HUC8 watersheds that flow to the Gulf of Mexico.

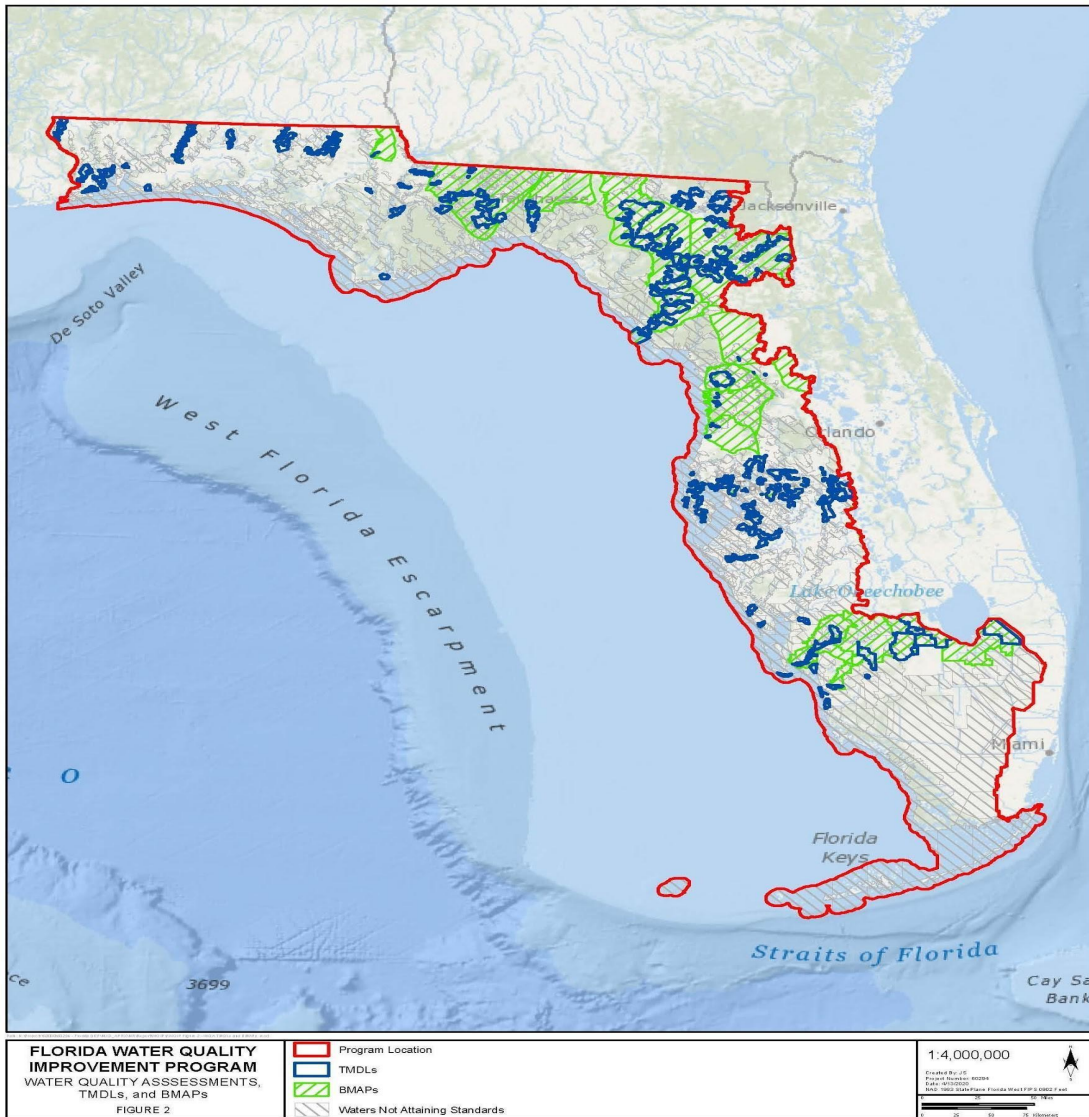


Figure 2: The WQIP boundary with all 5-digit HUC8 watersheds that flow to the Gulf of Mexico as well as waterways within the boundaries that have designated TMDLs, completed BMAPs and those that have not attained current water quality standards.



WATER QUALITY RESTORATION FRAMEWORK



Figure 3 depicts Florida’s water quality restoration framework using TMDLs and BMAPs.

Figure 3: Florida’s water quality restoration framework using TMDLs and BMAPs.

Table of Abbreviations and Acronyms for WQIP	
BAS	best available science
BMAP	Basin Management Action Plans
BMP	best management practices
CCMP	comprehensive conservation management plan
CE	Categorical Exclusion
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
chl-a	chlorophyll a
COE	Center of Excellence
Council	Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
CPS	Comprehensive Plan Commitment and Planning Support
CWA	Clean Water Act
CZMA	Coastal Zone Management Act
DO	dissolved oxygen
DMP	data management plan
DWH	Deepwater Horizon
EA	environmental assessment
E&D	Engineering and Design
EIS	environmental impact statement
EO	Executive Order
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FAC	Florida Administrative Code
FDEP	Florida Department of Environmental Protection
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FFWCC	Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission
FTIG	Florida Trustee Implementation Group

Table of Abbreviations and Acronyms for WQIP	
FSU	Florida State University
FTIG	Florida Trustee Implementation Group
GEBF	Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund
GIS	geographic information system
HUC	hydrologic unit code
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
lbs.	pounds
MAM	Monitoring and Adaptive Management
MYIP	Multi-Year Implementation Plan
N	nitrogen
NEP	National Estuary Programs
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NFWF	National Fish and Wildlife Federation
NGO	nongovernmental organizations
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NPS	nonpoint source
NRDA	Natural Resource Damage Assessment
NFWWMD	Northwest Florida Water Management District
ODP	observational data plan
QA	quality assurance
RESTORE Act	Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act
SAV	submerged aquatic vegetation
SEP	State Expenditure Plan
SWFWMD	Southwest Florida Water Management District
SWIM	Surface Water Improvement and Management

Table of Abbreviations and Acronyms for WQIP	
TMDL	total maximum daily loads
TN	total nitrogen
TP	total phosphorus
U.S.	United States
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
vs.	versus
WIN	Watershed Information Network
WMDs	water management districts
WQIP	Water Quality Improvement Program