



## Request for Proposals

# Contractor to Support Ecological and Economic Monitoring for the *Deepwater Horizon* Oceanic Fish Restoration Project

Release Date: 9 February 2021 | Proposal Deadline: 9 March 2021

### OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) seeks a qualified independent Contractor to assist in ecological and economic project monitoring for the *Deepwater Horizon* Oceanic Fish Restoration Project ("the Project"). The Project is supported through a partnership between NFWF and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The selected Contractor will conduct requisite statistical analyses to evaluate key performance indicators related to the implementation of the Project. The successful Offeror will be selected through a competitive process that is based on an assessment of the Offeror's proposed plan for achieving stated work items, technical qualifications, and cost considerations. The contract Period of Performance is estimated to be up to 30 months.

### BACKGROUND

In 2016, the Natural Resource Trustees for the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill finalized a comprehensive restoration plan for the Gulf of Mexico that included a settlement of up to \$8.8 billion to resolve claims for natural resource damages related to the spill<sup>1</sup>. Initial research and injury assessments indicated injury to various pelagic fish species as a result of the spill, and therefore the Trustees proposed the *Deepwater Horizon* Oceanic Fish Restoration Project (formerly named the Pelagic Longline Bycatch Reduction Project) through the Phase IV Early Restoration process to compensate for injuries incurred by these species. The Project was one of ten projects included in the *Deepwater Horizon* Final Phase IV Early Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment<sup>2</sup> released in September 2015.

The Project aims to restore pelagic fish biomass through reductions in incidental bycatch in the Gulf of Mexico pelagic longline fishery. The pelagic longline fishery in the Gulf of Mexico primarily targets yellowfin tuna and swordfish, but incidentally catches and discards non-target species. This Project aims to reduce mortality associated with bycatch and regulatory discards through two integrated actions. First, the Project implements a voluntary annual six-month repose period to coincide with the spawning season for many important pelagic fishes. During the voluntary repose, participating fishers are compensated for refraining from all fishing activity using pelagic longline gear. Second, the Project provides participating fishers with alternative fishing gear (greenstick, buoy gear, and deep drop gear), which can be used to harvest yellowfin tuna and swordfish during the repose period in lieu of pelagic longline gear. The first repose period under the Project was implemented in 2017, and the Project is expected to continue over the next 2-3 years.

This integrated strategy provides for direct benefits to pelagic species through the repose period, while continuing to support local economies using alternative fishing gear. In addition, the Project aims to build on

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<sup>1</sup> *Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill: Final Programmatic Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan and Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement*. Available online: [www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/restoration-planning/gulf-plan/](http://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/restoration-planning/gulf-plan/)

<sup>2</sup> *Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Final Phase IV Early Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment*. Available online: [www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/wp-content/uploads/Final-Phase-IV-ERP-EA.pdf](http://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/wp-content/uploads/Final-Phase-IV-ERP-EA.pdf)



NFWF's investments in the Gulf of Mexico regarding the use of alternative gear types. Alternative gears, such as greenstick, buoy, and deep drop gear, have proven effective at reducing bycatch<sup>3,4</sup>; however, additional testing and refinement is needed to increase the efficiency of these alternative gear types in catching target species. The Project supports continued testing and refinement of these alternative gear methods.

The selected Contractor will support NFWF and NOAA staff in analyzing key performance indicators associated with the implementation of annual repose periods and participation in the alternative gear portion of the Project. The Contractor will conduct analyses in accordance with the Oceanic Fish Restoration Project Monitoring Plan<sup>5</sup> ("the Monitoring Plan") and will build upon previous analyses of the 2017-2019 repose years. Following the Monitoring Plan, previous analyses estimated reductions in discard mortality associated with the implementation of the first three repose periods, in addition to exploring various economic and ecological performance indicators related to the use and operation of alternative fishing gear. The selected Contractor will build upon these previous efforts, conducting statistical analyses to estimate bycatch reduction and alternative gear performance during the remaining repose years of the Project. In addition, the Contractor will support evaluation of the overall performance of the Project following the final repose year<sup>6</sup>.

## SCOPE OF WORK

The selected Contractor will work in close coordination with NFWF and NOAA staff throughout the Period of Performance to conduct regular statistical analyses to evaluate key performance indicators associated with the Project. Specific Contractor tasks will include but may not be limited to the following tasks. These analyses will be conducted each year to evaluate annual project implementation and, following the final repose year, to evaluate the overall performance of the Project.

### **Task 1: Working with the Project Team, establish a work plan detailing an analytical approach for annual project monitoring and overall project evaluation.**

Through initial meetings with NFWF and NOAA staff, the selected Contractor will develop a robust analytical approach to evaluate the research objectives outlined in the Monitoring Plan. The selected Contractor will review previous analyses conducted to-date, including reports evaluating the 2017-2019 repose years. The Contractor will build upon these methods and recommend a cohesive approach to analyze all relevant research objectives, including both ecological and economic components.

The work plan will detail a robust analytical approach to measure the Project's progress in addressing two key objectives to reduce discards and minimize economic effects, as outlined below. In association with each objective, the Monitoring Plan also details the following performance indicators, which will be refined as

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<sup>3</sup> Kerstetter, D., Appelman, M., Secord, J. (2014). Alternative Gears Pilot Program: Evaluation of Greenstick and Swordfish Buoy Gears in the Gulf of Mexico: 2011-2013. Final Report. Nova Southeastern University Oceanographic Center. Pp. 139.

<sup>4</sup> Steen, M. E. (2016). A Characterization of Greenstick Catch in the Northern Gulf of Mexico: Implications for bycatch Reduction and Economic Viability. Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. NOAA Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program. pp. 51.

<sup>5</sup> The Project Monitoring Plan is available as Appendix B.14 of the *Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Final Phase IV Early Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment*. Note, the Oceanic Fish Restoration Project was formerly referred to as the Pelagic Longline Bycatch Reduction Project. Available online: <https://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/wp-content/uploads/Final-Phase-IV-ERP-EA.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> The final repose year is dependent upon the level of participation but is expected to occur within the anticipated period of performance associated with this RFP.



needed through the development of the work plan and/or as warranted based on preliminary analyses. The selected Contractor will coordinate with NOAA directly to gather necessary fisheries data; the selected Contractor will have access to permit, logbook, observer, dealer, and other relevant data, subject to confidentiality requirements.

Note that additional performance indicators are included in the Monitoring Plan; however, only those listed below are the focus of this RFP.

**Objective 1: Reduce discards in the Gulf of Mexico pelagic longline fishery**

- *Quantity (count by size) and disposition of total catch, bycatch, and discards by species caught by project participant vessels with alternative gear and vessels in the pelagic longline (PLL) fishery*
- *Gear configuration parameters (e.g., gear type used, gear condition, specific gear parameters (e.g., number/depth of hooks, floats, light sticks, radio beacons, etc.), for project participant vessels with alternative gear and vessels in the Gulf of Mexico (GOM) PLL fishery*
- *Set parameters (e.g., set location, target species, date, time of day, speed, days at sea, etc.) for vessels with alternative gears and vessels in the GOM PLL fishery*
- *Dead discard rate and ratio by species, caught by project participant vessels with alternative gears and vessels in the GOM PLL fishery*

**Objective 2: Minimize economic effects from potential reductions of catches of target species through the use of alternative gears in the Gulf of Mexico**

- *Quantity (count by weight, size, and product grade), and price of landings of fishery target species landed by project participant vessels with alternative gears and vessels in the GOM PLL fishery*
- *Annual expenses per vessel; (e.g., equipment purchases and/or maintenance, staff and salaries, revenue sharing, fuel and trip costs), for project participant vessels with alternative gears and vessels in the GOM PLL fishery*
- *Gear configuration and set parameters for project participant vessels with alternative gear and vessels in the GOM PLL fishery.*
- *Environmental conditions (e.g., wind speed and direction, weather, wave height, water and/or air temperature) encountered by project participant vessels with alternative gears*
- *Qualitative features of the market influencing the revenue for both project participant vessels with alternative gears and vessels in the PLL fishery*

The work plan should also establish clear research questions and associated methods necessary to evaluate the overall performance of the Project following the final repose year. The selected Contractor will work closely with NFWF and NOAA staff to develop and refine relevant evaluation questions. If relevant, the work plan should clearly outline how the selected Contractor will coordinate with any associated subcontractor(s) and the Project Team.

**Deliverables & Schedule:** Written work plan. Contractor should expect regular meetings with the Project Team and at least two rounds of revision on the work plan. The work plan should be completed within the first four (4) months of the contract start date.



## **Task 2: Conduct statistical analyses to evaluate the ecological and economic impacts of the Oceanic Fish Restoration Project.**

The selected Contractor will implement the work plan developed in Task 1 and conduct annual analyses as data associated with each repose year becomes available; prior to commencing work on this task, the Contractor must receive written approval from NFWF of the Task 1 work plan. The analyses should include advanced statistical methods that appropriately model the distribution of the data and use a mixed modeling approach to account for temporal (e.g., effects of individual fishers) and spatial correlation (if detected). Importantly, the statistical approach should model the data over the entire project period available at the time of analysis. To support consistent reporting of project results over time, it is important that a similar analytical approach is applied to both research objectives wherever possible. Therefore, and only as needed, the selected Contractor may also update or refine previous analyses conducted for the 2017-2019 repose years.

*Deliverables & Schedule:* Each year, prepare final report outlining results according to the following schedule:

- May 2022 – Final report analyzing results from the 2020-2021 repose years (including any updates or changes to the 2017-2019 analyses to support reporting that is comparable across repose years).
- May 2023 – Final report analyzing results from the 2022 repose year<sup>7</sup>.

The final report should also include any relevant supplementary material such as models, code, geodatabases, etc. All reports will include at least two rounds of revisions. In addition, the Contractor will be expected to present results via a meeting with the Project Team annually.

## **Task 3: Following the final repose year, evaluate overall performance of the Oceanic Fish Restoration Project.**

Once the Project has implemented its final repose year (expected 2022), the selected Contractor will evaluate the Project's performance across all repose years in accordance with the work plan developed in Task 1. Prior to commencing work on this task, the Contractor must receive written approval from NFWF of the Task 1 work plan. While specific research questions will be developed in close coordination with NFWF and NOAA staff following contracting, measures of overall performance should consider overarching trends across all repose years, building upon and summarizing the annual analyses to be completed in Task 2. In addition, this task may include additional primary data collection as needed to address other important questions not outlined in the Monitoring Plan. This may include, but is not limited to, surveys or interviews to evaluate participants' experiences and perceptions of the project by other key stakeholders such as other eligible vessel owners or fish dealers; analyses to evaluate domestic and international seafood market trends, including any niche markets established with the use of alternative gear (if relevant); evaluation of the compensation mechanisms used; or development of case studies to explore those circumstances whereby alternative gear was particularly effective.

*Deliverables & Schedule:* By November 2023, prepare final report summarizing key findings from the evaluation of the overall Project's performance. The report will include at least two rounds of revisions. In

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<sup>7</sup> This task will be modified if additional repose years are required to complete the Project.



addition, the Contractor will be expected to present results via a meeting with the Project Team and potentially other key stakeholders.

**Task 4: Provide technical assistance and services associated with the tasks above as needed.**

The selected Contractor will be available to provide additional, follow-up assistance to provide technical guidance and maintenance of any associated models as needed on a time and expense basis.

**REQUIRED EXPERTISE AND PROPOSED STAFF**

Required expertise of the team includes advanced skills in statistics, data analytics, fisheries biology, program evaluation, and natural resource economics. Offerors should have experience working in the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Highly Migratory Species fishery and should have familiarity with the use and operation of pelagic longline gear, greenstick gear, buoy gear, and deep drop gear. Preferred expertise includes spatial data analysis and social science research methods, including survey techniques.

**CRITERIA FOR COMPETITIVE APPLICATIONS**

Proposals will be evaluated and scored on the following criteria. Offerors should organize their Proposal Narrative based on these sections:

- 1. Understanding of the Scope of Work.** The Proposal Narrative should demonstrate an understanding of the goals of the activities, including familiarity with the Oceanic Fish Restoration Project Monitoring Plan. This section should include a description of how the offeror plans to communicate with NFWF, NOAA, and other project stakeholders and report on progress, results, and deliverables. Weight: 10%
- 2. Technical Approach.** The proposed technical approach should clearly describe the proposed methods necessary to evaluate the ecological and economic performance of the Project. This section must demonstrate that those methods are robust and appropriate to address the items described in the Scope of Work above and within the Monitoring Plan. The technical approach should address any areas of complexity or uncertainty associated with project monitoring and evaluation. Weight: 30%
- 3. Qualifications of Proposed Personnel.** This section should clearly describe which tasks each member of the team will conduct and how their training and experience provide the requisite experience to do so successfully. Weight: 20%
- 4. Contractor's Past Performance.** The proposal should include information on the primary investigator(s)'s past performance conducting efforts like those proposed. Describe how the past performance is applicable to this effort. If sub-contractors are to be used, information should be provided that demonstrates their past performance as well and how the firms/entities have worked together successfully in the past. Weight: 15%
- 5. Budget.** The proposed budget should itemize work in sufficient detail to enable reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of the entire funding request. Offerors must use the Contractor Budget Template provided (<https://www.nfwf.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/OFRP-Project-Monitoring->



[Evaluation\\_Contractor%20Budget%20Template\\_Feb2021.xlsx](#)). You may add columns to the template for additional tasks if needed but should not make any other changes. Weight: 25%

## **ELIGIBLE OFFERORS & CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

Eligible applicants include institutions of higher education, other nonprofits, commercial organizations, international organizations, and local, state and Indian tribal governments.

By submitting a proposal in response to this solicitation, the offeror warrants and represents that it does not currently have any apparent or actual conflict of interest, as described herein. In the event an offeror currently has, will have during the life of the contemplated contract, or becomes aware of an apparent or actual conflict of interest, in the event an award is made, the offeror must notify NFWF in writing in the Statement of Quotations, or in subsequent correspondence (if the issue becomes known after the submission of the Statement of Quotations) of such apparent or actual conflicts of interest, including organizational conflicts of interest. Conflicts of interest include any relationship or matter which might place the contractor, the contractor's employees, or the contractor's subcontractors in a position of conflict, real or apparent, between their responsibilities under the award and any other outside interests, or otherwise.

Conflicts of interest may also include, but are not limited to, direct or indirect financial interests, close personal relationships, positions of trust in outside organizations, consideration of future employment arrangements with a different organization, or decision-making affecting the award that would cause a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts to question the impartiality of the offeror, the offeror's employees, or the offeror's future subcontractors in the matter. Upon receipt of such a notice, the NFWF Contracting Officer will determine if a conflict of interest exists and, if so, if there are any possible actions to be taken by the offeror to reduce or resolve the conflict. Failure to resolve conflicts of interest in a manner that satisfies NFWF may result in the proposal not being selected for award.

By submitting a proposal in response to this solicitation, the Offeror warrants and represents that it is eligible for award of a Contract resulting from this solicitation and that it is not subject to any of the below circumstances:

- Has any unpaid Federal tax liability that has been assessed, for which all judicial and administrative remedies have been exhausted or have lapsed, and that is not being paid in a timely manner pursuant to an Contract with the authority responsible for collecting the tax liability, where the awarding agency is aware of the unpaid tax liability, unless the agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government; or
- Was convicted (or had an officer or agent of such corporation acting on behalf of the corporation convicted) of a felony criminal violation under any Federal or State law within the preceding 24 months, where the awarding agency is aware of the conviction, unless the agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government; or
- Is listed on the General Services Administration's, government-wide System for Award Management Exclusions (SAM Exclusions), in accordance with the OMB guidelines at 2 C.F.R Part 180 that implement E.O.s 12549 (3 C.F.R., 1986 Comp., p. 189) and 12689 (3 C.F.R., 1989 Comp., p. 235), "Debarment and Suspension," or intends to enter into any subaward, contract or other Contract using



funds provided by NFWF with any party listed on the SAM Exclusions in accordance with Executive Orders 12549 and 12689. The SAM Exclusions instructions can be found here:

[https://www.fws.gov/northeast/refuges/agreements/Documents/SAM\\_Exclusions\\_how\\_do\\_i\\_search\\_exclusions.pdf](https://www.fws.gov/northeast/refuges/agreements/Documents/SAM_Exclusions_how_do_i_search_exclusions.pdf)

## **SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

Proposals must be submitted under the same email at the same time, in three distinctly labeled and separate documents: 1) Technical Proposal, 2) Budget, and 3) Evidence of Financial Stability. Interested parties should submit proposals electronically to NFWF (Gray Redding at [gray.redding@nfwf.org](mailto:gray.redding@nfwf.org)) using the requirements below.

### **1. Technical Proposal**

- ***Format:*** Proposals must be provided in Word format or searchable PDF with a font size no smaller than 11 pt. (Embedded tables can use a different font size from 11pt; however, please ensure the size is sufficiently large for readability.) Note, only the narrative section has a page limit.
- ***Contact information:*** Primary contact person, company name, address, phone, email, website, DUNS number, and EIN/Taxpayer ID#. No page limits.
- ***Narrative on Proposed Work Plan:*** Concise description of the proposed work plan. The narrative portion of the proposal should not exceed six (6) pages in length.
- ***Past Experience:*** Summarize applicant's expertise and experience. List recent (last 2-5 years) accomplishments and previous services related to the technical expertise offered. No page limits.
- ***Biographies:*** Resumes and/or Vitae of key staff and their role in the proposed work area. No page limits.
- ***References:*** List at least two clients who have received services from the applicant that is similar in nature to the proposed work; include names, phone numbers, and email address. No page limits.

### **2. Budget:** The budget proposal must be submitted using the Contractor Budget Template

([https://www.nfwf.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/OFRP-Project-Monitoring-Evaluation\\_Contractor%20Budget%20Template\\_Feb2021.xlsx](https://www.nfwf.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/OFRP-Project-Monitoring-Evaluation_Contractor%20Budget%20Template_Feb2021.xlsx)).

### **3. Evidence of Financial Stability:** The applicant shall provide with the RFP response proof of financial stability in the form of financial statements, credit ratings, a line of credit, or other financial arrangements sufficient to demonstrate the applicant's capability to meet the requirements of this RFP.

## **SELECTION PROCEDURE**

A panel of NFWF and NOAA staff will review the full proposals. Offerors may be asked to modify objectives,



work plans, or budgets prior to final approval of the award. Only one award will be made for this project. If multiple institutions are involved, they should be handled through sub-awards and sub-contracts.

## **SUBMISSION DEADLINES**

**February 17**

### **Deadline for questions about the solicitation to NFWF**

Offerors should submit questions regarding this solicitation via email to Gray Redding ([gray.redding@nfwf.org](mailto:gray.redding@nfwf.org)). NFWF will post all the questions and responses to all questions so that all offerors have access to them at the same time. To provide equitable responses, all questions must be received by NFWF **no later than 5:00 PM EST on Wednesday, February 17, 2021.**

**February 22**

### **NFWF response to questions about the solicitation**

Find answers to the questions submitted regarding the solicitation and responses on the NFWF website here:

[https://www.nfwf.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Response to Questions OFRP%20Monitoring%20and%20Eval Feb%202021\\_web.pdf](https://www.nfwf.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Response%20to%20Questions%20OFRP%20Monitoring%20and%20Eval%20Feb%202021_web.pdf)

**March 9**

### **Deadline for receipt by NFWF of proposals**

Proposals must be received electronically as an email attachment to Gray Redding ([gray.redding@nfwf.org](mailto:gray.redding@nfwf.org)) by **11:59 PM EST on Tuesday, March 9, 2021.** Proposals must be provided in Word format or searchable PDF.

**March/April**

### **Interviews with selected finalists**

**May**

### **Contract award to selected Offeror**