

ALABAMA STATE EXPENDITURE PLAN (SEP)

Project #2: Development of a Regional Strategic Plan for the Coastal Alabama Region

Project Description/Summary

- a) This project will showcase coastal Alabama's ecotourism opportunities in the Mobile Tensaw Delta by developing and implementing a marketing brand and an online resource directory for tourists. The implementation of this marketing campaign will assist in combatting the negative perceptions created due to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, ultimately restoring and enhancing the Gulf Coast economy.

The Alabama Gulf Coast region is comprised of two counties (Baldwin and Mobile), consisting of over 2,300 square miles of land and 24 different municipalities. There are 3 metropolitan planning organizations, 2 economic development entities, 10 chambers of commerce, multiple utility providers, and literally hundreds of plans to foster economic development in the region.

The Coastal Alabama Partnership (CAP) is a non-profit organization comprised of members from the public and private entities listed above that serve as a sounding board and a resource for the Gulf Coast region. The CAP supports a coordinated effort among these various stakeholders to better develop an effective response to challenges facing the citizens and visitors of the Gulf Coast region. The genesis of CAP was in 2010, following the BP Oil Spill, when former Alabama Governor Bob Riley called for Mobile and Baldwin counties to work together as a region to develop the [Coastal Recovery Commission \(CRC\) Report](#). CAP was subsequently created in 2012 to focus on building regional collaboration to support five main initiatives identified in the CRC Report: Infrastructure, Insurance, Seafood, Tourism, and Policy and Planning. Phases I and II of the Coastal Alabama Partnership's Regional Strategic Plan was developed by its stakeholders to respond to those initiatives and related challenges, and to create a blueprint for economic development for the Gulf Coast region.

Activities associated with this project will also include the comprehensive administration of this grant, including, but not limited to, project development and oversight, contracting, and sub-recipient monitoring.

- a. **Need:** A simple google search of "Alabama BP" confirms the oil-stained imagery and perception that our region continues to battle. Although there have been multiple successful media campaigns designed to address the lingering negative perceptions of oil spill damage on the coast and to the local seafood industry, negative perceptions still exist. This project captures those multiple efforts through one overall plan that will help ensure both the full recovery and continued restoration of our region. This project will create a consistent, regional brand, to demonstrate that coastal Alabama has fully recovered and is open for business.

Purpose: Coastal Alabama Partnership's Regional Strategic Plan is divided into three phases: the first and second phases included the participation of

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stakeholders from the two Alabama Gulf Coast counties of Mobile and Baldwin. The first phase utilized research conducted on the Gulf Coast region, with a comparison of the area to two other southeastern US port cities. The research, which included broad input from hundreds of public and private stakeholders, identified opportunities in the region that would strengthen and diversify our local economy. The second phase of the Regional Strategic Plan was carried out with the help of consultants who are knowledgeable in the regional planning process. The public and private stakeholders were engaged, and an action plan was developed to address the identified priorities for the region. The third phase will allow the stakeholders to implement the recommendations of the plan and to further develop priorities, timeframes, target dates, and critical milestones of the plan, while assessing resource implications and assigning responsibilities.

Each step of the Regional Strategic Plan built upon earlier work and involved a significant investment of time, money, and other resources. Through the efforts of the first and second phases of the plan, CAP identified ecotourism as a major resource that would foster further economic growth and diversification in the Gulf Coast region. Mobile and Baldwin Counties have developed tourism industries related to classic ventures such as conventions, major sports tournaments and single events, the beaches, and historic homes and gardens, to name a few. One major relatively undeveloped tourism venue, however, is the Mobile Tensaw Delta and its inclusion in a robust region-wide ecotourism industry.

Wikipedia defines ecotourism as a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed areas, intended as a low-impact and often small-scale alternative to standard commercial (mass) tourism. It involves responsible travel to natural areas while conserving the environment. The Mobile Tensaw Delta qualifies as a destination for ecotourism due to the magnitude of its biodiversity.

The major challenge in developing a regional ecotourism industry that includes the Mobile Tensaw Delta is not the creation of venues and activities that would appeal to Gulf Coast tourists, but rather packaging the venues and activities presently available under one management umbrella. The single management concept is important for the creation of a robust branding and marketing campaign for ecotourism that dovetails with existing tourism campaigns in place for Mobile and Baldwin Counties.

As an example, the current Mobile Convention and Visitors Bureau [website](#) has a section on OUTDOORS. *“With so many options, it may be hard to decide how to spend a day in Mobile’s great outdoors. The area is home to the Mobile Tensaw Delta, the largest river delta and wetland in Alabama and one of the largest in the country. In fact, there are not many places in the world that hold the eco-diversity of the bayous, bays, and beaches of Mobile. From kayaks and canoes to airboats and fishing tours, there are numerous ways to roam this wilderness.”* CAP’s planning efforts have not

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identified a singular entity or service that inventories these numerous ways to enjoy the Mobile-Tensaw Delta or the many other ecotourism opportunities in Alabama's Gulf Coast region and allows a centralized system for its citizens and visitors to identify which venue they wish to enjoy.

Objective: The primary objective of this project is to:

- Develop a Brand and marketing plan showcasing Alabama's Gulf Coast and its potential for ecotourism;
 - Identify and develop an online resource directory with a list of ecotourist destinations in the two-county Gulf Coast region; and
 - Implement the plan through advertising and publicizing the "brand" developed by this effort utilizing signage, online marketing, and paid advertising to increase tourism in the region.
- b. This project is located in Baldwin and Mobile Counties, Alabama.
- c. This project is anticipated to begin on 7/1/2019 and end on 6/30/2022 (3 years).
- d. The proposed project will be implemented by the Coastal Alabama Partnership.
- b) The development and implementation of a branding and marketing plan by the stakeholders of the Gulf Coast region that emphasizes the region's natural resources and cultural diversity will allow a concerted effort by the stakeholders to educate the public about south Alabama's abundant natural resources while simultaneously increasing the public's awareness of the importance of preserving those resources through stewardship activities. In addition, the Mobile-Tensaw Delta region represents a tremendous, untapped opportunity for developing a new ecotourism market that will complement and enhance the region's other ecotourism venues. This project will create a blueprint for the stakeholders to develop, diversify, and enhance the economy of the Gulf Coast region by emphasizing the biodiversity of the Gulf Coast region in Mobile and Baldwin Counties.

Eligibility and Statutory Requirements

This activity is located in the Gulf Coast Region and is eligible for Spill Impact Component funding under Category #10 - Promotion of tourism in the Gulf Coast Region, including recreational fishing (primary). Secondary activities include Category #8 – Planning Assistance.

Comprehensive Plan Goals and Objectives

This project is consistent with the following Comprehensive Plan goals:

- Goal 4: Enhance Community Resilience – Build upon and sustain communities with capacity to adapt to short- and long-term changes, and

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- Goal 5: Restore and Revitalize the Gulf Economy – Enhance the sustainability and resiliency of the Gulf economy.

This project supports the following Comprehensive Plan objectives:

- Objective 6: Promote Natural Resource Stewardship and Environmental Education – Promote and enhance natural resource stewardship efforts that include formal and informal educational opportunities, professional development and training, communication, and actions for all ages.

Major Milestones

- Milestone 1: Conduct initial research
- Milestone 2: Draft campaign plan development
- Milestone 3: Complete brand platform report
- Milestone 4: Complete branding imagery development
- Milestone 5: Finalize marketing and brand development
- Milestone 6: Implement marketing campaign
- Milestone 7: Monitor and track campaign results

Success Criteria/Metrics/Outcomes

The anticipated outcome of the Coastal Alabama Partnership Regional Strategic Plan will be:

- Development and implementation of a unified coastal Alabama branding and marketing campaign to promote ecotourism and stewardship activities

Table 3. Proposed Projects Success Criteria/Metrics/Outcomes

Activity	Anticipated Project Success Criteria/Metrics	Short-term outcome	Long-term outcome
Creation of a regional brand Development and implementation of a marketing campaign	One brand created Online resource directory created One campaign developed	Create an identity for the coastal Alabama region Marketing efforts shared through social and earned media	Increase ecotourism opportunities utilizing abundant natural resources Development of a more diversified economy

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Monitoring and Evaluation

- a) Created branding imagery submitted to ADCNR
- b) Submission of campaign plan to ADCNR for review
- c) Submission of quarterly and final reports

Best Available Science

A Best Available Science (BAS) review is required for programs and activities intended to restore and protect the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, coastal wetlands, and economy of the Gulf Coast. The primary focus of this project is ecotourism promotion; therefore, BAS does not apply.

Budget/Funding

- a) Estimated cost of the project and amount to be requested from Spill Impact Component Funds: \$579,375 (45-55% - Planning, 55-45% - Implementation). While it is noted that funding available under a grant award cannot exceed the amount described in the SEP for this project, the percentages listed in this section are estimated and will be more clearly cultivated in the grant application.
- b) No other funding sources are anticipated at this time.

Partnerships/Collaboration (if applicable)

Not applicable at this time.

Leveraged Resources (if applicable)

CAP intends to contribute \$50,000 over 2 years for program management.
(Committed)

Funds Used As Non-Federal Match (if applicable)

Not applicable at this time.

Other

Not applicable at this time.

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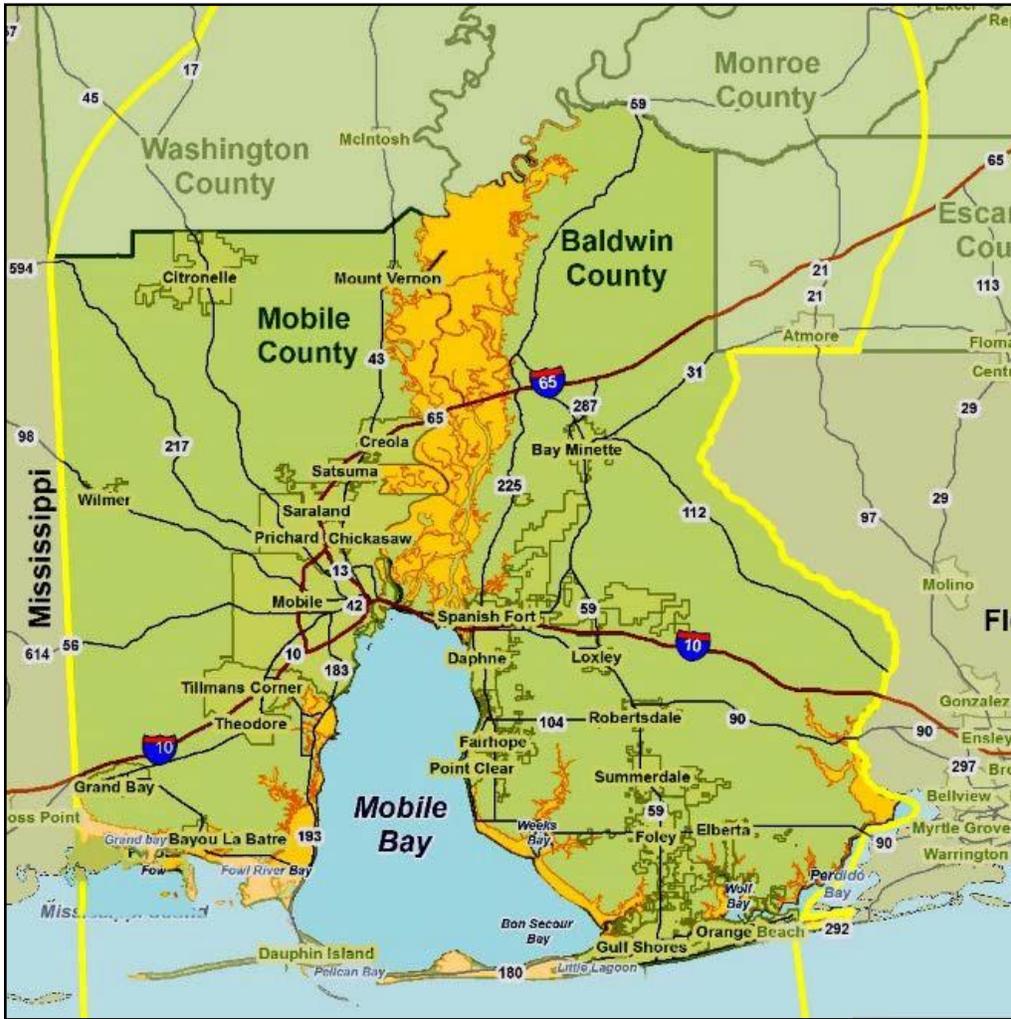


Figure 2. Regional Strategic Plan for the Coastal Alabama Region will encompass Baldwin and Mobile Counties.