



Request for Proposals

Reducing Impacts to Marine Mammals from Anthropogenic Sound in the Gulf of Mexico

Requesting Organization:

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
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Contact Information:

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Application Deadline: July 29, 2021 5:00 PM Eastern Time

PURPOSE

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) seeks a qualified independent Contractor(s) to support the development and implementation of on-going activities to benefit marine mammals in the Gulf of Mexico. This solicitation is supported through a partnership between NFWF and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to provide for direct benefits to marine mammals while increasing knowledge and establishing recommendations for future management alternatives.

GENERAL INFORMATION

In 2016, the Natural Resource Trustees for the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill finalized a comprehensive restoration plan for the Gulf of Mexico that includes a settlement of up to \$8.8 billion in order to resolve claims for natural resource damages related to the spill¹. Injury assessments indicated injury to various marine mammal species as a result of the spill. The Trustees proposed funding for various marine mammal restoration efforts in the Gulf of Mexico to compensate for injuries incurred by these species. Specifically, the Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group approved and funded a marine mammal project titled “Reduce Impacts of Anthropogenic Noise on Cetaceans” and the project factsheet is available here:

https://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2019-05%20OOTIG_DraftRP2EA_Marine_Mammals_Fact_Sheets.pdf

This solicitation supports work under the initial phase of the anthropogenic underwater noise reduction project to identify and prioritize locations and sources of underwater noise within the Gulf of Mexico based on their impact to cetaceans; and to prioritize noise reduction opportunities that show the greatest potential for testing in future phases. This solicitation is part of a larger project that includes both short and long-term acoustic monitoring that will be used to evaluate pilot project effectiveness and overall project success.

NFWF will employ a competitive process that assesses the Offerors’ plan for achieving stated work items, technical qualifications, and cost considerations. The award level will be based on the Foundation’s evaluation of the proposal and budget documentation.

¹ *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/

The contract period of performance is estimated to be two years but may be extended. The selected Contractor(s) should have the willingness and ability to start immediately (within 2 weeks of offer) and travel within the Gulf of Mexico region when appropriate and safe to do so.

SCOPE OF WORK

The selected Contractor(s) will support the Project Management Team (PMT) throughout the period of performance to coordinate with key stakeholders, (including scientists, managers, and port and industry representatives among others) and assist in the development of specific products (risk assessment, communications plan, recommendations paper, etc.). Offerors should indicate which task(s) they wish to complete and describe the knowledge and experience that qualifies them to perform the role(s) identified. If applying for a single task below, Offerors should be aware that NFWF will determine which task or tasks will be assigned to selected Contractor(s) based on qualifications and preferences outlined in the Offerors' proposals and will perform the role of supporting coordination and communication among Contractors. If several Offerors apply as a team who would collectively perform all three tasks, the proposal should clearly itemize the distribution of labor expected among the entities, should ensure that the full list of requirements can be accounted for across the team as a whole and that a clear plan is proposed to support coordination among team members, which will be supported by NFWF if the team is selected. The level of effort required will vary by year and within a given year. A 'not to exceed cost' will be negotiated upon award.

Task 1: Risk Assessment and Sound Propagation Modeling

The objective of this task is to identify locations where radiated underwater noise generated by human activities and marine mammals with acoustic sensitivity overlap and rank noise sources in the Gulf of Mexico that have higher to lower total influence on regional marine mammal habitats.

The selected Contractor will liaise with the PMT, members of the NOAA Steering Committee and data providers to develop/use data input layers necessary to conduct an analysis of risk to marine mammals in the Gulf of Mexico due to associated exposure to anthropogenic noise. The models will be based mainly on existing data and may include some new passive acoustic monitoring data continuing to be collected. The contractor will work with the PMT and NOAA Steering Committee to identify and model scenarios for reducing risk relative to existing conditions. Activities under this task thus include:

Oversee all components of the *Risk Assessment*. Contractor will work through NOAA to secure data necessary to evaluate levels of anthropogenic underwater noise and cetacean population distribution and density in the Gulf of Mexico per model requirements. NOAA will provide cetacean population distribution and density maps for key marine mammal taxa in the Gulf of Mexico. The Contractor will apply existing (in literature) risk assessment techniques to integrate these data with frequency, depth and duration specific soundscape maps, producing region-wide geospatial quantifications of risk.

Conduct *Sound Propagation Modeling* to map the distribution of low frequency sound produced by two main human activities that produce lower frequency sounds in offshore marine mammal habitat within the Gulf of Mexico: several main classes of vessels that dominate patterns in offshore waters and geological and geophysical surveying efforts that similarly are occurring in offshore waters. Evaluate per source and cumulative sound predictions based on these source types and relative to

wind-based predictions. Use empirical data provided by NOAA to support these comparisons and ground-truth model output. Model outputs should include monthly soundscape maps at specified spatial resolutions for each sound source at specified frequencies and depths.

Develop and deliver risk assessment output to the PMT including base soundscape maps, risk quantification maps and scenario/options result maps. The Contractor will work with the PMT to identify various recommended risk reduction scenarios or noise mitigation “options” based on input from the NOAA Steering Committee and through Partner/Industry Engagement efforts (Task 2) to reduce the overall sound/impact identified in the Risk Assessment. The Offeror should include a separate budget line for additional model runs to understand and prioritize implementation scenarios as part of developing the Recommended Options Paper listed in Task 3. As deliverables for this task, the Offerer may be expected to provide (1) all data and code that would be needed to replicate the model, and (2) all model results as a spreadsheet or database and all associated spatial data needed to map the results in a GIS.

Anticipated Timeline: Activities under Task 1 are expected to occur sequentially with products being delivered at roughly six and 12 months respectively. Products are likely to take the form of an iterative document, maps, data layers, and/or presentations to stakeholders.

Task 2: Industry collaboration and engagement

The selected contractor will work to bring industry perspectives, knowledge, and participation to inform the Risk Analysis and Scenario Modeling (Task 1) and prepare viable pilot options for project development and execution components in the Recommended Options Paper (Task 3). Activities under this task will include:

- a) Develop an *Industry Engagement Strategy* for Gulf of Mexico industries that produce noise that overlaps frequencies of concern for marine mammals in offshore habitats (e.g., oil and gas seismic exploration, and vessels including commercial/ocean going shipping, oil and gas platform servicing). The strategy should include an assessment of previous efforts that have engaged these industries and associated partners in noise reduction efforts, an analysis of existing noise reduction-focused programs or program components in the Gulf of Mexico or elsewhere that will inform selected options (e.g, ECHO/Port of Vancouver, QuietSound, Green Marine, Joint Industry Partnership’s marine vibroseis project, Maritime Blue electrification for smaller vessel class projects, Transport-Canada funded “smart tech” on-board noise monitoring pilots, etc), and a review of successful incentivization models for advancing and/or testing new technologies or approaches for reducing incidental underwater noise emissions.
- b) Facilitate engagement in the identification of tangible project requirements to gather data, identify or implement designs and/or otherwise validate quieting or location-specific risk reduction techniques for inclusion in the *Recommended Options Paper (Task 3)*. Generate a qualitative or quantitative method for ranking the viability of Options based on a spectrum of costs and benefits. Serve as the industry liaison to the NOAA Steering Committee, providing operability specifications for the Recommended Options Paper. Provide meeting facilitation if necessary to establish critical parameters of pilot designs.

- c) Using the Recommended Options Paper, work closely with the PMT (and other contractors as appropriate) to develop solicitation documents for the first selected pilot projects. Identify venues and communication channels to solicit projects and technical experts to review and refine proposals for optimal performance, and to establish mechanisms within each pilot to evaluate progress and performance from both a risk reduction and industry performance perspective.

Anticipated Timeline: Activities under this task are expected to occur year-round with products being produced somewhat sequentially within two years.

Task 3: Recommended Options Paper

The selected Contractor will liaise with the PMT, the Industry Collaboration and Engagement Contractor (from Task 2 above, if soliciting separately/as members of a team), and the NOAA Steering Committee to generate a list of options towards developing or applying viable and effective methods for reducing underwater radiated noise in the Gulf of Mexico. The Recommended Options Paper is expected to include five to ten pilot project ideas (including estimated budgets) and prioritization for implementation. Options should be prioritized by their linkage to reductions in incidental human-induced noise within frequencies important to, and/or at specific offshore locations with concentrations of marine mammals, and by the viability of options based on dialog and input from project partners.

This task is supported by the two previous tasks and by continuing application of the risk assessment model to quantify the results of various stages of implementation that each Option would advance. For example, an Option might create a new partnership, informed by engagement done in Task 2, with a company to advance a quieting design towards an open water trial. Should such a trial advance towards implementation within a broader industry, the result on location specific and region-wide risk can be predicted using the Risk Assessment model. These activities will require the selected contractor(s) to facilitate strategic partnerships, , including holding targeted meetings and in haring information among internal and external partners (e.g., industry, stakeholders, NGOs, academics, other Government agencies, IMO, etc.) on noise mitigation, research, and other activities related to addressing noise in the Gulf of Mexico.

Anticipated Timeline: Activities under Task 3 are expected to begin in some capacity after the Task 1 risk assessment is complete and the Task 2 options begin to be identified (6-8 months) with Task 3 document products and refinement taking 3-6 months.

QUALIFICATIONS SOUGHT

To assist the successful implementation of the Project, this Request for Proposals (RFP) is seeking qualified entities to serve as an independent contractor(s) to NFWF. Whether via one organization, a team of coordinated organizations, or multiple independent contractors that will be coordinated and supported by NFWF, the following qualifications are desired in whole and by task.

All Tasks

- Significant years of experience in marine science, ecology, environmental studies or related field and Bachelor's Degree in associated discipline.

- Experience working with marine scientists and managers; preference for experience with Gulf of Mexico representatives of these communities.
- Working knowledge of U.S. marine environmental policy frameworks, and especially those relevant to noise related impacts; preference for working knowledge of Gulf of Mexico marine environmental protection issues and key stakeholders.
- Experience building consensus and managing conflict among diverse partners.
- Experience with group facilitation, workplan development and project logistics management.
- Excellent written and oral communication skills.
- Ability to work independently in a rapidly changing environment.
- Excellent organizational skills and attention to detail.
- Computer proficiency, including databases, spreadsheets, and word processing.
- Proficiency in English.

Task 1

- Professional experience or graduate degree in ecological risk assessment, mapping and/or geospatial analysis, environmental impact assessment or related fields of quantitative modeling to address biological conservation questions; experience in underwater radiated sound propagation modeling; experience with larger-scale fully interpolated mapped results of natural sources (e.g., wind), vessels and geological and geophysical survey source types.
- Knowledge of the field of underwater sound and evaluation of its impacts on marine life; knowledge of passive acoustic datasets preferred.

Task 2

- Professional experience working with industries likely to generate underwater radiated noise in the Gulf of Mexico prioritized per above; portfolio including qualitative/quantitative summarizations/weighting schemes for cross-stakeholder dialogs; knowledge specific to work and technology to reduce incidental noise emissions in marine operations preferred.

CRITERIA FOR COMPETITIVE APPLICATIONS

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

- 1. Overall approach to task objectives.** The Offeror should outline their approach to implementing the selected task(s) indicating relevant experience and questions/data/assumptions they would need to be successful to complete the tasks in an efficient manner. Weight: 20 points
- 2. Marine Sound/Industry experience.** The Offeror should detail experience working with communities listed in the tasks above that intersect with the field of marine conservation, particularly where they apply to those in the Gulf of Mexico. Specifically, the Offeror shall indicate which relevant communities in the region they have worked with directly and in what capacity. Weight: 20 points
- 3. Technical, administrative, and logistical support.** As appropriate to the tasks identified, the Offeror should describe experience providing technical and/or administrative support to coordinating similar communities toward the development of similar products, knowledge of marine sound, auditory science, industry, meeting facilitation, and applicable scientific and

management applications. The Offeror should clearly explain in what capacity they have conducted the work in the relevant tasks and provide examples of the types of services provided (e.g., risk assessments, technical papers etc.). Weight: 20 points

4. **Communications experience.** Detail any relevant experience engaging relevant stakeholders, generating written outreach materials, and/or coordinating or supporting events. Weight: 20 points
5. **Budget.** The offer must contain a budget that represents the estimated all-inclusive costs associated with completing the task(s) in this RFP. In the proposal narrative, please include a total cost estimate along with a brief budget narrative to explain anticipated project time and costs. In addition, complete the separate Excel budget template ([Budget Template](#)) as described in the Submission Requirements. Weight: 20 points

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Eligible applicants are nonprofit organizations, for-profit businesses and individual consultants. Qualified, small, minority and women-owned businesses are strongly encouraged to apply.

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 Proposal, or in subsequent correspondence (if the issue becomes known after the submission of the Proposal) 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

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Proposals must be submitted under the same cover 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 Michelle Pico (pico@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.
- Contact information: Primary contact person, company name, address, phone, email, website, DUNS number, and EIN/Taxpayer ID#.
- Narrative: Concise (6-page limit) description of the work plan and a summary of the applicant's expertise and experience. List recent (last 2-5 years) accomplishments and previous services related to the technical expertise offered.
- Biographies: Resumes and/or Vitae of key staff and their role in the proposed work area.
- References: List 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.

2. Budget: The budget proposal must be submitted using the following [NFWF budget template](#).

EVALUATION CRITERIA

SELECTION PROCEDURE

A panel of NFWF and NOAA staff will review proposals submitted in response to the RFP. The panel will assess each proposal according to the project description and evaluation criteria provided in this RFP. Applicants may be asked to modify objectives, work plans, and/or budgets prior to final approval of the award. More than one contractor may be selected to carry out the tasks identified in this SCOPE OF WORK. Specific funding amounts

will be negotiated with NFWF and additional funding will be considered annually based upon the expressed needs of the programs. If multiple institutions are involved, they should be handled through subcontracts.

SUBMISSION DEADLINES

June 24, 2021	Deadline for questions about the solicitation to NFWF. Offerors should submit questions regarding this solicitation via email to Michelle Pico (Pico@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. In order to provide equitable responses, all questions must be received by NFWF no later than 5:00 PM (EST) on June 24, 2021
June 30, 2021	NFWF will post the questions submitted regarding the solicitation and responses on the NFWF website at provide website.
July 29, 2021	Deadline for receipt by NFWF of proposals. Proposals must be received electronically as an email attachment to Michelle Pico (Pico@nfwf.org) by 5:00 PM (EST) July 29, 2021 . Proposals must be provided in Word format or searchable PDF.
Weeks of August 1st and 8th August	Interviews with selected finalists Tentative NFWF Notification to Offerors