

PUBLIC NOTICE – REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF ALABAMA’S SEA TURTLE AND ESTUARINE BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN POPULATIONS; AND FISHERY SCIENCE STUDIES TO CHARACTERIZE THE EXTENT OF SEA TURTLE AND BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN INTERACTIONS WITH ALABAMA’S COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL HOOK-AND-LINE FISHING VESSELS

PROPOSAL DUE DATE/ TIME: May 13th at 12:00 PM (NOON) CST

via electronic-mail message containing a .pdf electronic submission, no greater than 25MB sent to:

Sarah.Gumbleton@dcnr.alabama.gov
CC: Nicole.Shaffer@dcnr.alabama.gov

Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

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SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF ALABAMA'S SEA TURTLE AND ESTUARINE BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN POPULATIONS; AND FISHERY SCIENCE STUDIES TO CHARACTERIZE THE EXTENT OF SEA TURTLE AND BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN INTERACTIONS WITH ALABAMA'S COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL HOOK-AND-LINE FISHING VESSELS

I. Introduction and Description of Projects:

Through the Alabama Trustee Implementation Group's (AL TIG) Natural Resource Damage Assessment Restoration Plan II (<https://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/DWH-ARZ001374.pdf>), the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' (ADCNR) Marine Resources Division (AMRD) implements Protection, Education, and Enhancement projects for both the Coastal Alabama Sea Turtle (CAST) and the Alabama Estuarine Bottlenose Dolphin (AEBD).

Below is a summary of each project, which share the overall goal of developing and implementing response activities that provide resiliency and sustainability, taking into account the ecological needs of each respective habitat. In executing the scope of work, the selected entity(ies) agrees to comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, as well as all programmatic requirements and AL TIG's developed criteria.

A. Sea Turtle Project

Alabama's Gulf Coast supports many sea turtle species throughout various life stages. Three sea turtle species nest along Gulf of Mexico beaches, while several more species nest offshore. The DWH oil spill disrupted sea turtle nesting habitat and injuries occurred to turtles from both oiling and response activities along the beach. Additionally, sea turtles were negatively impacted by oil and response activities in open ocean, nearshore, and shoreline environments, with the resulting mortality spanning many life stages (AL TIG, 2018).

The Coastal Alabama Sea Turtle (CAST) project aims to reduce human activities and behaviors that harm sea turtles in state waters and beaches by taking steps to reduce both hook-and-line fisheries bycatch and impact on nesting turtles. This is accomplished by conducting social science and fishery surveys to characterize attitudes and perceptions of vessel-based ecotourism, and documenting public knowledge of sea turtles and the Endangered Species Act (ESA) (AL TIG, 2018).

B. Bottlenose Dolphin Project

In Alabama state waters, common bottlenose dolphins can be found throughout the bays, sounds, and estuaries, ("inshore" dolphins) as well as in nearshore waters ("Gulf" dolphins). Typically, "inshore" dolphins are primarily found within bays, sounds, and estuaries with limited movements through passes to the Gulf of Mexico, while "Gulf" dolphins inhabit coastal waters. Individuals from different stocks may overlap; however, mixing or interbreeding does not typically occur (NOAA, 2019).

As a result of the Deepwater Horizon (DWH) oil spill, prime marine mammal habitat in both nearshore and offshore waters was contaminated. Bottlenose dolphins faced numerous adverse health effects, and the largest and longest marine mammal unusual mortality event (UME) on record in the northern Gulf of Mexico transpired (AL TIG, 2018).

The AEBD project will attempt to reduce human-induced injury and mortality in Alabama's bottlenose dolphins by conducting social science and fishery studies to: characterize interactions with commercial and recreational hook-and-line fishing vessels and pier and shore anglers, understand the nature and extent of illegal feeding and negative human/dolphin interactions, and document the attitudes and perceptions of different groups of people towards dolphins and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). AMRD will implement a public outreach and education program based on study results (AL TIG, 2018). Specific activities related to this project are discussed in Section II, below.

II. Scope of Work:

ADCNR is looking for qualified candidates to provide project planning, social science study design and implementation, fishery study creation and implementation, statistical analyses, report writing, and other related services for the AEBD and the CAST Protection: Education and Enhancement projects. ADCNR anticipates entering into a contract with the selected entity(ies) for an 18-month period.

The selected candidate(s) will develop social science studies and fisheries studies (e.g., focus groups, interviews, etc.) in order to: help characterize the nature and extent of dolphin and sea turtle interactions with anglers (commercial and recreational) using hook-and-line gear; gauge resident, tourist, and business (e.g. ecotours) owners' knowledge of the ESA and MMPA viewing guidelines; and characterize the nature and extent of the illegal feeding and vessel-based harassment of dolphins in Alabama. The social science study and the fisheries study are two separate projects with the same end goal - to provide guidance for a comprehensive and targeted outreach plan. As such, question development and study design will reflect this distinction. In the event target audiences (e.g., commercial hook and line operators) overlap, the contracted company will implement the surveys in a format where participants will be questioned in one session to reduce the burden on participants. The selected entity(ies) will, among other tasks:

A. Develop social science study design, methodology, and sample size.

The social science study results will be used to gain insight on the extent of resident, tourist, and business owners' knowledge for a suite of issues and topics related to sea turtles and dolphins in Alabama. Topics of interest may include, but are not limited to: knowledge of viewing regulations; knowledge of federal protections—MMPA and ESA; what to do and who to contact if an injured animal is observed; willingness to report an injured animal; frequency of dolphin and turtle observations, the mode of interaction, and the animal's behavior to the interaction; knowledge of the types of threats sea turtles and dolphins face; willingness to modify behaviors and practices to reduce those threats; basic sea turtle and dolphin biology; knowledge of illegality of feeding of dolphins and willingness to abide by law; level of interest in interacting with sea turtles and dolphins; general attitude towards sea turtles and dolphins; preferred forms of receiving informational and educational materials; level of concern over protecting sea turtles and dolphins; demographic characteristics of interviewee; etc. Targeted groups may include, but are not limited to, tourists; residents; and businesses such as hotels, condominiums, ecotourism organizations, vessel rental, and restaurants. The AEBD project aims to characterize the types of encounters ecotours have with bottlenose dolphins; the contracted company will ensure dolphin cruise owners, operators, and patrons are represented

in the sample population. With input from ADCNR staff, the contracted company will design questions, establish the survey format and delivery method, and identify user groups, sample size(s), and project timeline. Surveys will be conducted during a period of heavy tourist traffic, such as spring break and/or summer. These data will be used in developing and implementing education and outreach programs for the Alabama Gulf Coast.

B. Develop fishery study design, methodology, and sample size.

Fishery surveys will be used to characterize the nature and extent of sea turtle and dolphin interactions with commercial and recreational fishing vessels, as well as pier and shore anglers. Topics of interest may include, but are not limited to: knowledge of federal protections—MMPA and ESA; knowledge of viewing regulations; basic sea turtle and dolphin biology; types of threats sea turtles and dolphins face; willingness to modify behaviors and practices to reduce those threats; knowledge of illegality of feeding of dolphins and willingness to abide by law; what to do and who to contact if an injured animal is observed; willingness to report an injured animal; frequency of dolphin and turtle observations while actively fishing with hook-and-line gear; frequency of depredation or scavenging interactions with dolphins and sea turtles while fishing with hook-and-line gear and the fishing location at the time of depredation or scavenging occurrence; typical fishing location(s) and water depth(s); gear type(s); frequency of dolphin and sea turtle entanglement and/or hooking in fishing gear; what respondents do if a dolphin or turtle is nearby (interacting with their gear vs not interacting with their gear); general attitude towards sea turtles and dolphins; level of concern over protecting sea turtles and dolphins; reason for fishing (livelihood, to feed family, for fun, etc.); experience level and demographics of the angler; among others. Targeted groups may include, but are not limited to, commercial and recreational, shore/beach, and pier hook-and-line anglers. With input from ADCNR staff, the contracted company will design questions, establish the survey format and delivery method, and identify user groups, sample size(s), and project timeline. These data will be used in developing and implementing education and outreach programs for the Alabama coast.

C. Conduct social science studies and fishery science surveys.

The selected contractor(s) will provide personnel to conduct both social science studies and fishery science surveys. The contracted company(ies) will ensure their staff is trained appropriately, and data collection methods will be accurate and consistent across all personnel. The contractor will decide on appropriate interview methodology; this may include in-person intercepts, focus groups, telephone interviews, or mail surveys. Information will be conducted in a manner that collects data representative of the identified targeted stakeholder groups in Alabama.

D. Conduct analyses on social science study and fishery science survey results.

Selected contractor will determine which statistical analyses are appropriate for this project. The contractor will conduct all statistical analyses, synthesize, and summarize data. Analysis of the results will consist of descriptive statistics, as well as inferential statistics.

E. Reporting.

The contractor will provide a final report to ADCNR. The final report will describe the project, social science study and fishery science survey implementation methods, target audiences, analytical methods used to interpret results, and a detailed description of the results and related interpretations. Where applicable, the report will also include recommendations on which forms of public education would be most effective based on survey data (i.e., print, television, radio, etc.).

III. Minimum Experience and Qualifications:

As part of its submission, an Applicant must meet all the following minimum qualifications and must describe these qualifications in a *Statement of Qualifications* submitted to ADCNR as part of its proposal:

- 1) At least 5 years' experience in developing and conducting social science studies related to natural resources and outdoor recreation.
- 2) At least 5 years' experience in developing and conducting fishery science surveys.
- 3) Documented experience in hiring, training, monitoring, and QA/QC of survey staff.
- 4) At least 5 years' experience in statistics and scientific/technical report preparation.
- 5) Documented experience in converting survey data into a useable format to inform creation of education and outreach materials.
- 6) Preferred: knowledge of natural resource and conservation issues.

IV. Submission Requirements:

- 1) **All submissions will be made via an electronic-mail message containing a .pdf attachment no greater than 25 MB to Sarah.Gumbleton@dcnr.alabama.gov, with a Carbon Copy to Nicole.Shaffer@dcnr.alabama.gov.**
- 2) Each proposal submission shall consist of:
 - i. Cover Letter;
 - ii. Proposed Activities and Implementation Timeline: a detailed description of proposed methodologies, processes, and metrics to accomplish the work and a timeline of implementation of proposed activities;
 - iii. Statement of Qualifications: a narrative that addresses the firm and/or team background and organization, examples of relevant previous project experience within the past five years, past performance references, résumés of key personnel (limited to 2 pages each), and/or other supporting documentation. Key personnel should include personnel with educational backgrounds and/or relevant experience in social science surveys, marine sciences, data management, education and outreach, and project management.
 - iv. Budget: a budget and budget narrative/justification (note that no equipment purchase is allowed) clearly identifying each staff member and anticipated hours to be worked on the project. In addition to personnel costs, include the cost of supplies, and a total funding request.
- 3) The *Cover Letter* shall be no more than 2 standard letter-size pages, text size no smaller than size 12 font, and shall clearly indicate the name, title, email address, and telephone number of the submitting entity's primary contact.
- 4) If more than one entity is responding to this RFP under a single proposal, *the Statement of Qualifications* shall list all entities that are part of the proposal and/or will perform services pursuant to Scope of Work.
- 5) Submissions shall consist of a .pdf electronic submission, no greater than 25 MB. In terms of number of pages, proposals should be limited to no more than 30 pages total. The page limit does not supersede the

file size limitation. Submissions that meet the 30-page limitation but are greater than 25 MB will not be received.

V. Submittal and Deadline:

It is the sole responsibility of the Applicant to ensure actual electronic delivery (via e-mail) of its submission by the deadline. Applicants should request a read receipt when sending the submission email. **All submissions will be electronic. Neither in-person, mailed, nor facsimile submissions will be accepted.**

Responses to this RFP must be received electronically **via e-mail no later than May 13th** at 12:00 PM (NOON) CST to Ms. Sarah Gumbleton, Biologist II, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Sarah.Gumbleton@dcnr.alabama.gov with a carbon copy to Nicole.Shaffer@dcnr.alabama.gov. The subject line of the e-mail and the title of the proposal should contain “Response to Alabama Social and Fishery Science Survey RFP”.

VI. Evaluation Criteria:

It is expected that ADCNR will evaluate proposals using the following criteria:

Experience, Expertise, Knowledge, Stability of Vendor, and Demonstrated Ability to Carry Out the Described Work	35%
Proposed methodologies, activities, and timeline	35%
Budget Expenses	20%
Understanding and Responsiveness to RFP	10%

ADCNR reserves the right to award the contract to a vendor other than the lowest-price vendor, if a higher-priced proposal provides the best value as determined by ADCNR.

VII. Reservations and Miscellaneous:

1) Authority:

This process is only for the benefit of ADCNR and is to provide ADCNR with competitive information to assist it in the process of selecting a vendor. All decisions on compliance, evaluation, terms, and conditions related to the RFP will be made solely at the discretion of ADCNR.

2) Disclaimers:

DCNR reserves the right to award to multiple Vendors; to award by item, groups of items; to divide the award; to reject any and all proposals in whole or in part, and to waive any informality or technical defects if, in its judgment, the best interests of DCNR and the State of Alabama will be served. DCNR may seek clarification of the proposal from Vendor at any time, and failure of the Vendor to timely respond may be cause for rejection. Clarification is not an opportunity to change the proposal. The submission of a proposal confers on Vendor no right of selection or to a subsequent contract. This process is for the benefit of DCNR only and is to provide DCNR with competitive information to assist in the selection process. All

decisions on compliance, evaluation, terms, and conditions will be made solely at the discretion of DCNR and made to favor the State of Alabama.

3) Questions/Requests for Clarifications:

Written questions or comments regarding this RFP must be submitted via electronic mail message to Sarah.Gumbleton@dcnr.alabama.gov, with a Carbon Copy to Nicole.Shaffer@dcnr.alabama.gov. Applicant(s) understands and agrees that he/she has an affirmative duty to inquire and seek clarification regarding anything in this RFP that appears to be unclear. ADCNR intends to make responses to the submitted questions available to all Applicants on its website at <https://www.alabamacoastalrestoration.org/>.

4) Alterations:

ADCNR reserves the right to alter any deadlines or revise any part of this RFP by issuing an addendum to the RFP at any time. Addenda, if any, will be posted at <https://www.alabamacoastalrestoration.org/>. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to check the website for addenda to the RFP, if any.

5) Waiver of Administrative Informalities:

ADCNR reserves the sole and exclusive right to reject or accept any and all proposals and to waive any informality in any proposal. The best interests of ADCNR shall be considered as the number one determining factor in selecting or not selecting an Applicant.

6) Proposal Rejection/RFP Cancellation:

Issuance of this RFP in no way constitutes a commitment by ADCNR to award a contract. ADCNR reserves the right to accept or reject, in whole or part, all proposals submitted and/or cancel this RFP if it is determined to be in ADCNR's best interest. ADCNR also reserves the right to withdraw this RFP at any time or terminate the contract resulting from this RFP upon thirty (30) day notice without penalty.

7) Changes and/or Withdrawal of Proposal:

An Applicant may withdraw a proposal that has been submitted at any time up to the date and time the proposal is due. To accomplish this, a written request signed by the authorized representative of the Applicant must be e-mailed to the addresses referenced herein. No additions or changes to an original proposal will be allowed unless specifically requested in writing and e-mailed to the addresses referenced herein by the authorized representative of the Applicant.

8) Errors and Omissions in Proposal:

ADCNR reserves the right to make corrections or amendments due to errors identified in proposals by ADCNR or by the Applicant. ADCNR, at its discretion, has the right to request clarification or additional information from the Applicant.

9) Compliance with Laws:

Applicants acknowledge and agree to comply with all applicable State regulations and laws, Federal regulations and laws, and ADCNR policies, guidelines, and standards.

VIII. Required State Clauses:

1) Open Trade:

By submitting a proposal, the Applicant represents that he/she and the business entity he/she represents is not currently engaged in the boycott of a person or an entity based in or doing business within a jurisdiction with whom the State of Alabama can enjoy open trade, as defined in Act 2016-312.

2) Non-Discrimination:

By submitting a proposal, the Applicant represents that he/she and the business entity he/she represents is compliant with all state and federal laws which prohibit discrimination, including on the basis of race, color, religion, age, sex, pregnancy, national origin, genetic information, veteran status, or disability.

3) Immigration:

By submitting a proposal, the applicant represents that he/she and the business entity he/she represents is not in violation of federal immigration law and has not knowingly employed, hired for employment, or continues to employ an unauthorized alien within the State of Alabama.

4) Non-Commitment of Funds:

Any contract(s) that may be entered into related to this proposed project is/are subject to the availability of funds and/or the needs of the ADCNR. Therefore ADCNR, at its sole discretion, may or may not issue a final contract or contracts as a result of this RFP. Further, even in the event an initial selection is made by ADCNR, no selection is final until full execution of a written agreement detailing an agreed-upon scope of work. If ADCNR deems, at its sole discretion, that a satisfactory agreement cannot be reached in accordance with an initial selection, ADCNR reserves the right to proceed with efforts to make another selection based upon proposals submitted pursuant to this RFP.

5) Submittals as a Public Record:

All proposals submitted to the ADCNR pursuant to this RFP will be retained and are subject to disclosure under Alabama's Open Records laws.

6) Not a Debt of the State:

It is agreed that the terms and commitments contained herein shall not be constituted as a debt of the State of Alabama in violation of Article 11, Section 213 of the Constitution of Alabama, 1901, as amended by Amendment Number 26. It is further agreed that if any provision of this contract shall contravene any statute or constitutional provision or amendment, either now in effect or which may, during the course of this contract, be enacted, then that conflicting provision in the contract shall be deemed null and void.

7) Alternative Dispute Resolution:

In the event of any dispute between the Applicant and a party, senior officials of both parties shall meet and engage in a good faith attempt to resolve the dispute. Should that effort fail, and the dispute involves the payment of money, a party's sole remedy is the filing of a claim with the Board of Adjustment of the State of Alabama. For any and all other disputes arising under the terms of this RFP, and any ensuing contract, which are not resolved by negotiation, the parties agree to utilize appropriate forms of non-binding alternative dispute resolution including, but not limited to, mediation. Such dispute resolution shall occur in Montgomery, Alabama, utilizing where appropriate, mediators selected from the roster of mediators maintained by the Center for Dispute Resolution of the Alabama State Bar.

8) Agency Language:

Applicant acknowledges and agrees that it is not an agent of the State, but rather is an independent entity from the State and nothing in this contract creates an agency relationship between the parties.

9) Not Entitled to Merit System:

Applicant understands and agrees that it is not hereby entitled to any benefits of the Alabama State Merit System.

10) Indemnification and Limitation of Liability:

Successful Applicant shall indemnify, defend, and hold harmless ADCNR, its officers, agents, and employees from any and all claims, damages, and actions of any kind or nature arising from or caused by the use of any materials, goods, equipment, or services furnished by the Proposer, provided that such liability does not attribute to the sole negligence of ADCNR.

11) Choice of Law; Jurisdiction and Venue:

This RFP and related documents shall be governed by and construed in accordance the laws of the State of Alabama. Venue for any actions arising under this RFP shall vest exclusively in courts located in the United States District Court for the Middle District of Alabama or in sitting in Montgomery County. The Applicant hereby submits to the exclusive personal jurisdiction and venue of the aforementioned courts and agrees that it will not assert lack of personal jurisdiction or improper venue as a defense to any such action.

IX. Additional Information:

This work will be for the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Deepwater Horizon Section. If you have questions, please contact:

*Ms. Sarah Gumbleton
Biologist II
AL Department of Conservation and Natural Resources – Marine Resources Division
Email: Sarah.Gumbleton@dcnr.alabama.gov
With a carbon copy to Nicole.Shaffer@dcnr.alabama.gov*

Questions should be submitted in writing via e-mail and responses to those questions will be posted on the Alabama Coastal Restoration website at <https://www.alabamacoastalrestoration.org/> for all applicants to review.

X. Literature Cited:

Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Alabama Trustee Implementation Group (AL TIG)
2018 Final Restoration Plan II and Environmental Assessment: Restoration of Wetlands, Coastal, and Nearshore Habitats; Habitat Projects on Federally Managed Lands; Nutrient Reduction (Nonpoint Source); Sea Turtles; Marine Mammals; Birds; and Oysters. September. Available at: <https://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov>

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association
2016 Common Bottlenose Dolphin (*Turisops truncates truncates*): Gulf of Mexico Northern Coastal Stock. May. Available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-mammal-protection/marine-mammal-stock-assessment-reports-species-stock>

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association
2019 Common Bottlenose Dolphin (*Turisops truncates truncates*): Gulf of Mexico Bay, Sound, and Estuary Stocks. February. Available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-mammal-protection/marine-mammal-stock-assessment-reports-species-stock>