



## Gulf of Mexico Division

Protecting and Preserving  
the Gulf of Mexico



**2022 Strategic Plan**



# Contents

- [Who We Are..... 1](#)
- [Key EPA Goals, Objectives and Strategies ..... 1](#)
- [A Strategic Plan for Investing in a Healthy Gulf of Mexico ..... 2](#)
- [Turning Goals into GMD Actions for the Next Two Years ..... 3](#)
- [Four Measures of GMD’s Performance ..... 4](#)
- [Long-Term Goals..... 8](#)

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# Who We Are

The Gulf of Mexico Division (GMD), founded in 1988, is one of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Great Water Body Programs whose geographic focus is on the major environmental issues of the Gulf of Mexico region and its watershed.



## Our Mission

Champion the health and well-being of the Gulf of Mexico and its community.



## Our Vision

Be the leader of efforts for a healthy and resilient Gulf of Mexico.

# Key EPA Goals, Objectives and Strategies

EPA has outlined a number of primary strategic goals, with several objectives identified for achieving progress toward each goal.

As part of EPA, GMD's priorities focus on three of these goals and key objectives for each, along with one strategy identified by EPA as affecting multiple Agency goals:

### **Goal 1: Tackle the Climate Crisis**

**Objective 1.2:** Accelerate resilience and adaptation to climate change impacts

### **Goal 2: Take Decisive Action to Advance Environmental Justice and Civil Rights**

**Objective 2.1:** Promote Environmental Justice and Civil Rights at the Federal, Tribal, State, and Local Levels

**Objective 2.2:** Embed environmental justice and civil rights into EPA's programs, policies and activities

### **Goal 5: Ensure Clean and Safe Water for All Communities**

**Objective 5.2:** Protect and restore water bodies and watersheds

### **Cross-Agency Strategy 4**

Strengthen Tribal, State and Local Partnerships and Enhance Engagement



# A Strategic Plan for Investing in a Healthy Gulf of Mexico

The purpose of the GMD Strategic Plan is to establish a clear process to engage and communicate with the public, ensure alignment with administration and agency goals, and establish priorities for the next two budget years.

Significant strides have been made over the last 34 years to protect and preserve the Gulf of Mexico and its communities. This progress has occurred by directly engaging constituents on their concerns and employing actionable environmental and resilience measures. GMD's work is committed to consistency with scientific consensus and conducted via a broad range of partnerships. Our partners include private sector businesses, educational institutions from primary schools to colleges and universities, and state and local governments, in addition to the six Mexican states that share Gulf coastline.

Additionally, as emerging issues are identified, GMD develops targeted grant opportunities in response.

In 2022 and 2023, we will be investing over \$25 million to:

1. Address conservation and resilience needs of underserved farmers and communities through novel tools.
2. Improve and sustain vital Gulf community infrastructure.

Through the efforts of our partners and staff, this large investment will improve water quality, strengthen community resilience, restore habitat and increase environmental education.

## Prioritizing Underserved Communities

Although the focus of GMD's strategy is reinforced by two Executive Orders, which provide points of emphasis for the current presidential administration, we traditionally engage in efforts to improve conditions in underserved communities.

Issued on January 20, 2020, the [Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#) indicates the Biden administration's emphasis on providing equal opportunity and service to underserved communities.

## Combating Climate Change

On January 27, 2021, the administration issued a second Order that directs GMD's priorities, the [Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad](#).



## Turning Goals into GMD Actions for the Next Two Years

GMD's principal means for turning goals and priorities into action, on the ground or in the water, are via our public and private sector partners and stakeholders as well as our scientific and administrative staff. GMD creates Requests for Application (RFAs), which invite current and new partner organizations to apply for funding that will support projects to protect, restore and improve the Gulf ecosystem.

This is important context for understanding GMD's strategic planning process and priorities for the two-year budgeting cycle.

GMD will undertake several initiatives over the course of the strategic plan as a way of moving the needle to protect and preserve the Gulf of Mexico. The following tools and programs will be used:

- ▶ Listening Tours
- ▶ Assistance Agreements
- ▶ Trash-Free Waters
- ▶ Farmer to Farmer
- ▶ Environmental Justice
- ▶ STEAM Education
- ▶ Deepwater Horizon Restoration Programs
- ▶ Climate Adaptation
- ▶ Regional-ORD Applied Research
- ▶ Urban Waters
- ▶ Contracts
- ▶ Interagency Agreements

### Setting Funding Priorities

Across 2022 and 2023, GMD expects to invest more than \$25 million in projects and programs critical to restoring the Gulf of Mexico through the promotion of nutrient and water quality management on farmland, demonstration of novel trash reduction efforts, preservation of critical habitat, and application of climate adaptation tools. GMD plans to recommit resources to underserved communities, those predisposed to environmental challenges, and those shouldering the largest share of adverse impact, as directed by Executive Orders and EPA strategic goals.

These funds come from several distinct sources. In addition to the annual GMD budget established through congressional action and EPA, for example, we also anticipate distributing money set aside via the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The exact amounts available to GMD will be determined over the course of the two-year period.

GMD will continue supporting the setting of funding priorities with NRDA Trustees and RESTORE Council members.



# Four Measures of GMD's Performance

Each year, GMD's success in meeting its goals for environmental and community impact is evaluated by four key measures: Water Quality, Environmental Education and Outreach, Habitat Restoration, and Community Resilience.

As we continually work with our partners to increase the effectiveness of GMD programs, we fully anticipate achieving or exceeding the performance targets in each measure in this budget cycle.

## External Factors and Considerations

Climate change has a growing effect on water quality. Heavy rainfall associated with extreme weather events can contribute to changes in nutrients, algae growth, turbidity and dissolved oxygen levels in regional water bodies such as Lake Pontchartrain and Mobile Bay.

GMD will continue to work with regional partners such as local research universities, as well as federal organizations such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, to improve our understanding of climate change and other emerging issues.

Ecological and man-made changes may require a shift in priorities and a re-examination of the strategic course. The following are potential external factors and considerations to success:

- ▶ Climate Change
- ▶ Extreme Events
- ▶ Annual Appropriation
- ▶ Statutory Authority Limitations
- ▶ Appropriations Language

## Water Quality



### Overview

As the name suggests, the Gulf region is dominated by the Gulf of Mexico itself. However, our responsibilities include the entire Gulf of Mexico Watershed.

### Priorities

- ▶ Reduce and prevent nonpoint sources of pollution including but not limited to trash, nutrients and fecal contamination.
- ▶ Support monitoring efforts, promote consistency in data collection and analysis across programs, and improve data accessibility.

### Annual Performance Goal

Improve 6 water bodies or segments.

GMD will continue and expand water quality programs and RFAs over the next two years, prioritizing the work based on analysis of the GMD listening tours, matched with EPA's agency goals and objectives described above.

## Environmental Education and Outreach



### Overview

GMD's goal is to heighten citizens' appreciation of the Gulf, which leads to positive behavior and environmental stewardship. This is accomplished by developing hands-on environmental initiatives and engaging residents in restoration programs and projects.

### Priorities

- ▶ Promote and enhance STEAM education.
- ▶ Expand outreach tools and technologies.

### Annual Performance Goal

Reach 10,000 individuals.

GMD will continue and expand environmental education and outreach programs and RFAs over the next two years, prioritizing the work based on analysis of the GMD listening tours, matched with EPA's agency goals and objectives described above.

## Habitat Restoration



### Overview

EPA data show that Gulf of Mexico coastal wetlands make up 37% of the total coastal wetland bordering the U.S. Our ecosystem is home to thousands of species of plants and wildlife, which in turn provide ecosystem services and support our communities through tourism, hunting and fishing, and farming, as well as recreation. Maintaining the natural balance of this ecosystem requires stewardship of the habitat.

### Priorities

- ▶ Restore, enhance and protect habitats.
- ▶ Address habitat fragmentation and habitat windows.

### Annual Performance Goal

Restore 350 acres.

GMD will continue and expand habitat restoration programs and RFAs over the next two years, prioritizing the work based on analysis of the GMD listening tours, matched with EPA's agency goals and objectives described above.

## Community Resilience



### Overview

Our region includes more than 1,631 miles of U.S. coastline, which has historically been adversely affected by hurricanes, floods and commercial disasters such as oil spills. The Community Resilience measure focuses effort on developing and strengthening programs, projects and/or tools that improve a community's understanding of vulnerabilities, as well as improving resilience in the Gulf of Mexico Watershed.

### Priorities

- ▶ Support the expansion of green infrastructure practices and tools.
- ▶ Advance vulnerability assessments and the development of demonstration projects in order to improve resilience.

### Annual Performance Goal

Reach 40 communities.

GMD will continue and expand community resilience programs and RFAs over the next two years, prioritizing the work based on analysis of the GMD listening tours, matched with EPA's agency goals and objectives described above.



## Engaging Partners in Cross-Measure Strategies

Some strategies and actions affect more than one measure. Such cross-measure strategies are very valuable in protecting the Gulf region's natural resources.

GMD will actively pursue cross-measure strategies, including but not limited to increased engagement with stakeholders and the general public, and participation with partner organizations in efforts related to climate change, environmental justice and conservation.



### Public Engagement

A more engaged public translates to more citizens participating in environmental conservation efforts through both organizational involvement and individual action. For example, less litter and more volunteer cleanup efforts by Gulf region residents can improve soil and water quality, which in turn yields more productive farms and businesses and strengthens the resilience of both communities and habitat. Public engagement is therefore one of GMD's most effective strategies and will be a key area of focus.





### **Stakeholder Engagement and Partnerships**

GMD's region includes the Gulf of Mexico Watershed, comprising a wide range of stakeholders who all hold interest in the health of the entire ecosystem. These stakeholders include but are not limited to state and local governments, NGOs, the public, farmers, fishermen, schools and universities, and businesses of many kinds. Internationally, we also collaborate with Mexico and United Nations Caribbean Environmental Program (includes the Gulf), as coordinated efforts magnify one other's positive impact.

In the next two years, GMD will continue funding successful programs such as Farmer to Farmer, while also issuing new RFAs that encourage and ultimately fund participation from new groups and organizations throughout the region.



### **EPA's Focus on Environmental Justice and Climate Change**

EPA's agency-wide focus on environmental justice and climate change will also continue to create new opportunities to increase GMD's impact across all our areas of performance. New outreach to underserved communities and Federally Recognized Tribes, as directed in EPA's strategic goals, will help GMD programs in protecting coastline, supporting native plant and animal life, and mitigating the impact of climate change.

New funding sources may become available as EPA and connected agencies continue to roll out programs in response to administration and Agency directives.





# Long-Term Goals

The EPA strategic plan for 2022–2026 establishes measurable targets to be achieved by September 30, 2026, demonstrating the Agency’s impact in each of its strategic goals and objectives. GMD’s programs in the current 2022–2024 planning cycle will contribute measurably to EPA’s progress toward those goals in many ways, including:

## **Goal 1: Tackle the Climate Crisis**

Objective 1.2: Accelerate resilience and adaptation to climate change impacts

Implementing priority actions in EPA’s Climate Adaptation Action Plan and assisting federally recognized Tribes as well as states, territories, local governments and communities with environmental justice concerns to anticipate and respond to the impacts of climate change.

GMD’s release of RFAs will support the demonstration of climate adaptation activities and tools. Between 2022–2024, GMD will have awarded approximately five grants supportive of this goal.

## **Goal 2: Take Decisive Action to Advance Environmental Justice and Civil Rights**

Objective 2.1: Promote Environmental Justice and Civil Rights at the Federal, Tribal, State, and Local Levels

Providing capacity-building resources to communities with environmental justice concerns to support their ability to meaningfully engage with GMD and EPA programs, committing to address disproportionate impacts in all written agreements between EPA and states and Tribes (e.g., grant work plans), implementing delegated authorities, and taking significant actions that will result in measurable improvements in Indian country.

GMD plans to release an RFA focused on environmental injustices and Federally Recognized Tribes issues targeting the five Gulf of Mexico states. Between 2022–2024, GMD will have awarded approximately six grants supportive of this goal.

Objective 2.2: Embed environmental justice and civil rights into EPA’s programs, policies and activities

Beginning to implement commitments toward improving environmental and public health conditions on the ground for communities with environmental justice concerns, and demonstrating how these actions address disproportionate impacts, particularly in the areas of access to clean water and reduction in pollutants.

As a result of the listening tours and information sources, GMD plans to integrate activities that seek to identify sources of water quality concerns, to address causes of diminishing habitats, to assess gaps in environmental literacy, and to evaluate community resilience vulnerabilities. Between 2022–2024, GMD will have released two RFAs supportive of this goal with a potential investment of \$28 million.



## **Goal 5: Ensure Clean and Safe Water for All Communities**

Objective 5.2: Protect and restore water bodies and watersheds

Protecting and restoring water bodies and watersheds in the Gulf of Mexico region.

GMD's RFA will continue to focus on improving and protecting water bodies and watersheds in the Gulf of Mexico region. GMD will include activities supportive of this at every funding opportunity.

### **Cross-Agency Strategy 4**

Strengthen Tribal, State and Local Partnerships and Enhance Engagement

Continue to strengthen partnerships through engagement at Tribal, State and Local levels.

GMD will continue outreach and engagement to Tribal, State and Local governments and will incorporate feedback into developing RFAs.

Ultimately, all of GMD's work is focused on building the long-term health and resilience of the Gulf itself and its tributaries, coastal lands and native species. This in turn supports the many diverse communities in the Gulf region and Mississippi River Basin.



Protecting Human Health and  
the Environment



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