

Study Praises RESTORE Act as Good for Businesses (Sunshine State News)

By Kevin Derby

With the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee set to meet on Wednesday to examine the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act of 2011 (RESTORE Act), business and environmental leaders pointed to a new study that found that ecosystem restoration could lead to new jobs in the Sunshine State.

The RESTORE Act would ensure that 80 percent of the fines from the BP oil spill last year would go to restore the Gulf region. The measure has already moved through the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and has the backing of both Sunshine State senators, Democrat Bill Nelson and Republican Marco Rubio.

Introduced by U.S. Rep. Steve Scalise, R-La., in the House, the RESTORE Act is being co-sponsored by nine Republicans from the Florida delegation: Ander Crenshaw, Mario Diaz-Balart, Jeff Miller, Rich Nugent, David Rivera, Tom Rooney, Dennis Ross, Steve Southerland and Allen West.

A study by Duke University released on Monday of 140 businesses across the nation found they would flourish and add jobs under the Restore Act. "Restoring the Gulf Coast: New Markets for Established Firms" was financially backed by a grant from the Walton Family Foundation to the Environmental Defense Fund, a group that often pushes for market-based solutions to environmental problems.

"Long-term ecosystem restoration would be an economic grand slam, because it both protects current jobs in key Florida industries -- like fishing, tourism and shipping -- and creates new jobs," said Jackie Prince Roberts, director of sustainable technologies for the Environmental Defense Fund, in a statement on Monday. "A study of Everglades restoration by Mather Economics -- based on data from the U.S. Army Corps (of Engineers) -- estimates that every \$1 million of public investment in restoring the Everglades would create about 20 jobs. Our study

helps Florida residents understand where those jobs can be created, and the opportunity Florida has to be a leader in this new industry sector that provides ecosystem restoration services to the Gulf, and to meet emerging global demand."

The reports finds that the shipbuilding, maritime support, industrial, engineering, manufacturing and construction industries would benefit under the RESTORE Act.

"Coastal habitat restoration typically creates at least three to four times as many jobs as road infrastructure or oil and gas projects for every \$1 million invested," said Keith Bowers, president of Biohabitats Inc., whose business is active across the Sunshine State. "This study proves ecological restoration can be a real catalyst for job creation, economic vitality and ecosystem resiliency. Passing the RESTORE Act could help restore the fishing and tourism industries in Florida and the other Gulf Coast states."

Taylor Engineering, which has four offices across the Sunshine State, was one of the 140 businesses included in the study. James Marino, the president of Taylor Engineering and a retired Coast Guard officer, praised the RESTORE Act on Monday.

"If our customer base picks up in response to RESTORE funding, there would be a positive and sustainable long-term impact on our hiring," said Marino. "Restoration projects are very important to small and medium-sized firms like ours because they provide a valuable stream of work in a fragile economy. The cost-to-benefit ratio is very high for restoration projects, especially for beach restoration, which brings considerable value for regional economies in a multitude of business sectors. Not only do these projects serve as an immediate and prolonged benefit economically, but more importantly, the net positive effects provided to a sustainable environmental infrastructure are enduring."

"In Florida, the economy is the environment, but funding for environmental restoration projects has been reduced by the state and most local governments," said Michael Davis, the vice president and principal of Keith and Schnars, an environmental consulting firm with three offices in Florida. "The RESTORE Act is a win for Florida's economy and Florida's environment because it will enable environmental consulting firms like mine to hire additional biologists and engineers, and restoration construction contractors to buy more equipment and hire more operators."

The measure also got the backing of Audubon of Florida on Monday.

"The plan is based on science and input from Gulf communities and should be the guide for spending fines collected from BP," said Eric Draper, the group's executive director. "Now Congress must pass the RESTORE Act to make sure that the Clean Water Act penalties paid by BP will be used to fund restoration efforts in the Gulf region.

"BP fines should not be treated as found money available to plug federal deficits and other spending. The penalties for oiled birds, damaged shores and idle fishing boats should come back the states to restore our Gulf environment," continued Draper. "The oil spill showed that people and wildlife of the Gulf live in a delicate balance. The penalty must be investment to secure our future, so send the BP fines back for Gulf restoration."