



## CITY OF FOLEY PROPOSED GOMESA PROJECT

### PROJECT NAME:

**FOLEY NATURE PARKS EXPANSION & ENHANCEMENTS**

### SUBMITTER CONTACT INFORMATION:

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### PROJECT LOCATION:

Graham Creek Nature Preserve: Wolf Bay Drive, Foley, AL 36535  
Wolf Creek Park: Hance Lane, Elberta, AL 36530

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Foley is a fast growing city which attracts people nationwide for proximity to the beach, shopping, retail, dining and entertainment. The addition of the sports tourism complex and Owa has significantly increased the visitor traffic in the city throughout the year. Many people are still discovering Foley's nature parks that sit on the streams of Wolf Bay. Wolf Bay's pristine conditions allows for safe recreational opportunities. Furthermore, Foley has implemented progressive low impact development regulations to protect the natural resources while still allowing growth in our area. Although the city actively seeks grants for improvements, it continues to invest large amounts of capital dollars into environmental projects and the nature parks. City staff are actively involved with the local watershed groups and the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, including serving on multiple committees.

The City of Foley acquired Graham Creek Nature Preserve to preserve the pristine aquifers for future public water wells. In 2008, Graham Creek Nature Preserve formally opened as a nature park with small educational programs, passive recreational opportunities and conservation of the 484 acres. Since that time, the park has grown with multiple recreational opportunities including many multi-use trails, canoe/kayak launch, archery park, two playgrounds, three pavilions and three full disc golf courses. There is also an Interpretive Center to offer visitors information and provide meeting space. This park receives close to 50,000 visitors annually. Wolf Creek Park is 25 acres located off of Wilson Road. It

includes a fishing pier and pavilion on Wolf Creek. There is a canoe launch on a cove of Wolf Creek where shore birds nest. A boardwalk crosses the cypress wetlands to access the creek from the cove. This property was purchased by Baldwin County with GOMESA funds, but the city of Foley funded the majority of the improvements.

Foley has taken much pride in the development of our Nature Parks as there has been much regional recognition. Expansion of the nature parks is key to continue the conservation efforts underway. From invasive plant removal to prescribed burning operations, Foley continues to manage the habitat for the rare plant and animal species found in this area. Natural trails allow visitors to experience the habitats while not impacting them. Educational programs have expanded to reach over 4000 students annually including programs, field trips, educational presentations, summer camps and adult workshops.

This project would include acquiring land to the east of Graham Creek Preserve. This would allow expansion of the preserve. It would be included in habitat management operations which include invasive plant removal, native plantings and prescribed burning operations. Long term there would be natural trails as well as coastal access for fishing. Gopher tortoises are currently located on the site so conservation of those burrows would be included in the habitat management plan. Another land acquisition would be 4 acres south of the Wolf Creek Park off of Hance Lane. This parcel is noted as a bird rookery and preventing development would be key to preserving their habitat.

Another part of this project is connectivity and park enhancements. A multi-use path ends at County Road 12 along the Foley Beach Express. The plan is to extend that path southward to the Roscoe Road intersection. This would allow walkers and bicyclists to enter Graham Creek along Philomene Holmes Boulevard. The dirt road portion of Roscoe Road would be paved to enhance water quality as the road currently drains turbid clay filled runoff into a tributary of Graham Creek. Also the southern entrance to the preserve, where disc golfers enter the park, is a dirt road that would be graveled to prevent runoff and be more accessible following rain events. Wolf Creek Park would receive a restroom facility with a small park ranger office. This would not only assist visitors with a restroom, but provide regular staff on site for security. Graham Creek Preserve would add a learning pavilion with a restroom and office area. This would be for the addition of a containerized hydroponics operation and small greenhouse. Students would learn basics of hydroponics and the conservation of natural resources in the operation. The hydroponics area would also teach culture and heritage of farming and how farms are being replaced by urban development. The greenhouse would grow pollinator species and native plantings for onsite gardens and for educational workshops. These enhancements will provide opportunities for more students, visitors, and residents to enjoy coastal Alabama.

## JUSTIFICATION:

This project meets GOMESA authorized uses A (conservation), B (mitigation of damage to natural resources) and C (implementation of a federally approved CCMP). Specifically, the project will protect coastal areas through conservation of wetlands and uplands including tidal marsh, bottomland hardwoods, pine savannas and forested uplands. These areas also include habitats for rare and Alabama endangered plants and animals. The project will also be implementing the federally approved Mobile Bay National Estuary Program Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan for Alabama's Estuaries and Coast 2019-2023. Objective ERP-3 applies to improving ecosystem resilience through protection, restoration and conservation of beaches, bays and backwaters. This project will not only provide for conservation of the backwaters, but it will also provide for restoration through habitat

management practices. Objective ERP-5 applies to the promotion/expansion of human connections. The project will open up more areas for public access to our coastal waters. It will also allow for educational enhancement with the hydroponics farm and learning pavilion. Connectivity with improved road and multi-use paths will also meet this objective. Objective EPI-3 applies to improving community understanding of how estuaries and coasts support what people value most about living in coastal Alabama. This project would educate students about resource conservation. The program with hydroponics would also work with economically and mentally challenged communities to understand resource protection and watersheds.

#### ESTIMATED COST & DETAILED BUDGET:

Pre-Acquisition Site Assessment 2 Parcels	\$100,000
Contractual Services – Wetland Delineation, Appraisal, Due Diligence, Survey, Etc.	
Access Improvement & Connectivity	\$350,000
Materials & Supplies - Road Building Materials; Bike Path Materials	
Contractual Services – Conversion of Dirt Access to Asphalt	
Park Enhancements	\$400,000
Contractual Services –Restrooms @ Wolf Creek Park; Learning Pavilion with Office & Restroom @ Graham Creek Preserve	
Direct Costs – Hydroponics Container; Interpretive Signage	
Land Acquisition 2 Parcels	\$2,150,000
<b>TOTAL PROJECT COST:</b>	<b>\$3,000,000</b>

#### GOALS & OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT:

The goal of this project is to expand and enhance the nature park system in the city of Foley along Wolf Bay streams. The acquisition of additional parcels would increase sensitive lands in conservation with public access. Another goal is to manage the lands with appropriate habitat management techniques to restore native landscapes. The park enhancements would provide additional access capabilities to remote areas and provide for additional conservation educational programming.

## PROJECT SCHEDULE THAT INCLUDES KEY MILESTONES:

The project is estimated to be completed in 15 months with a tentative schedule as follows:

### Project Task

Pre-Acquisition Site Assessment 2 Parcels	6 months
Access Improvement & Connectivity	6 months
Park Enhancements (Design & Construction)	15 months
Land Acquisition (following site assessment)	6 months

## COST SHARING:

The city of Foley has developed two outstanding nature parks over the past ten years. Graham Creek Nature Preserve has a master plan which has driven the habitat management operations as well as park enhancements. Operating costs of the parks which include habitat management has been completely city funded. The city will leverage staff time for management of this project as well as operation costs for lands acquired and enhancements. City staff will also be used to construct the multiuse path and improve the southern access road. Foley is committed to funding the development and growth of its nature parks.

## RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PROGRAMS:

This project meets the goals and objectives of many programs. The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program's Coastal Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) has several goals consistent with this project including conservation of lands, expansion of human connections and conservation education. The city has been very active on their multiple committees. Along with the implementation of the CCMP, the Wolf Bay Watershed Management Plan is under development. One major concern that will be included is public access in the watershed. This project is a priority in the implementation of the plan as it will provide additional conservation land for the public to use. The city has also partnered with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to provide grants for enhancements within the nature parks. The Alabama Forestry Commission has been a partner since the park opened to assist with habitat management operations. This project would add lands that would be managed through prescribed burning operations with the Forestry Commission. Graham Creek Nature Preserve has been recognized as an Alabama TREASURE Forest and was recently recognized as the Alabama Success Story by the National Cohesive Wildfire Strategy. This project would only complement our existing programs with the Alabama Forestry Commission. Wolf Bay Watershed Watch is another example of partnerships with the nature parks. As a local grassroots nonprofit, the watershed has supported efforts to develop the nature parks over the years and will continue to work with park expansion plans. The city has been very active in programs that encourage natural resource conservation.





# MOBILE BAY NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

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January 21, 2020

Ms. Leslie Gahagan, Environmental Manager  
City of Foley  
23030 Wolf Bay Drive  
Foley, AL 36535

**Re: City of Foley Gulf of Mexico Security Act Grant Proposal: Foley Nature Park Expansion and Enhancement**

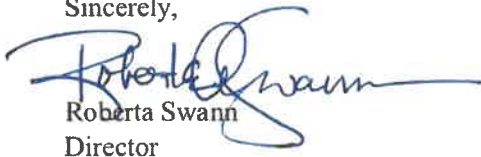
Dear Ms. Gahagan,

I am writing on behalf of the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program to express enthusiastic support for the City of Foley's 2020 GOMESA Grant Proposal entitled Foley Nature Park Expansion and Enhancement. The MBNEP is guided by a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) created collaboratively by our Management Conference partners based on local input and supporting local priorities to ensure the ecological integrity of Alabama's watersheds and the estuarine waters to which they drain. The proposed project to acquire two additional tracts of 125 and four acres to expand Foley's Graham Creek Nature Preserve and enhance the Preserve by managing habitats, controlling invasive species, using prescribed burning, and adding biking and walking paths, restroom facilities, a ranger station, and additional staffing addresses Goals and Objectives of the CCMP.

A comprehensive watershed management plan is currently under development for the Wolf Bay Complex of watersheds, and it will certainly recommend management and preservation of this exceptional public access site, ensuring that this project supports Ecosystem Restoration and Protection Goals ERP-2: *Implement comprehensive watershed management plans with a focus on priority habitats*; ERP-4: *Improve management of invasive species through coastal Alabama watersheds*; and ERP-5: *Restore and expand human connections to nature as a mechanism for improving environmental protection*. The proposed project supports Technical Assistance and Capacity Building Goal TAC-3: *Build capacity of local governments to manage and enhance coastal environmental resources*. It also supports Education and Public Involvement Goal EPI-3: *Improve community understanding of how estuaries and coasts support what people value about living in coastal Alabama*; and particularly Objectives EPI-3.1: *Create and support recreational and educational programs and events that connect more people to local waterways, fish, and wildlife*; and EPI-3.2: *Educate youth about watersheds, water quality, and educational issues relevant to the CCMP's six values*.

The enhanced Graham Creek Preserve will provide even more opportunities for residents and visitors to learn about coastal habitats, waterway health, and land conservation and its appropriate management. Outdoor exploration and environmental education are key to connecting citizens to the resources contributing to our coastal quality of life and helping us to accomplish our mission to promote the wise stewardship of the water quality and living resources of Alabama's estuaries and coast. Again, we enthusiastically support this proposed project and encourage its favorable consideration.

Sincerely,

  
Roberta Swann  
Director