The Honorable Mark Begich  
Chairman, Senate Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard  
425 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Marco Rubio  
Ranking Member, Senate Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard  
425 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bill Nelson  
Senate Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard  
425 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

August 11, 2014

Dear Senators Begich, Rubio, and Nelson:

Thank you for holding the recent hearing, *Revisiting the RESTORE Act: Progress and Challenges in Gulf Restoration Post-Deepwater Horizon*. We greatly appreciate your unrelenting attention to the Gulf in the wake of this tragedy and hope that science will be employed widely and wisely to help guide restoration efforts and ensure that we are better prepared for future injuries to our coastal communities and resources.

As you well know, in response to the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon Oil spill, various programs were authorized to address response, restoration and science in the Gulf, with funding and oversight for these programs originating from a variety of places, both federal and private. The Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative (GoMRI), Natural Resource Damage Assessment, criminal plea agreements, Clean Water Act, class action lawsuits, and the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act (RESTORE Act) represent the broad authorities, funding sources, and diverse goals of the nation responding to this tragedy. Given that each program addresses a specific need, each also brings its own governing body, timeline, and oversight structure. While the RESTORE Act included some provisions for coordination among efforts, there is no requirement or mandate for coordination among the various broader suite of restoration science programs. With no overarching framework to identify gaps or duplicative efforts that may exist in time or space or opportunities to maintain continuity and availability of data and information moving forward, we are left with no mechanism to ensure that, at the end of these programs’ tenure, we have a whole that is greater than the sum of their individual parts.

Coordination among programs for creating efficiencies in programs and reducing duplicative work is critical to the success of all the programs. For instance, there will be monitoring efforts in many of these programs, either to help actively manage a restoration project or to improve basic knowledge of and forecasting for the coastal environment. A coordinated ocean observing system that provides real-time data from buoys, gliders, radar and other remote devices would be a valuable asset for all programs and
would advance the field of knowledge to better prepare the nation for the next oil spill regardless of its location. Another example of needed coordination exists with regards to research vessels. A dedicated regional research vessel for the Gulf would certainly be fully utilized given the many field experiments and monitoring activities that will be ongoing for the next decade.

On the data side of monitoring, there are also multiple entities with plans to compile all the historic data and establish a permanent repository. Cyberinfrastructure of this sort is very complex, costly, and needs to be thoughtfully designed and implemented to ensure quality control of data going in and quality products coming out. Coordination of efforts in data quality control and management is essential for ensuring the nation’s researchers, industry and resource managers have open access to data and information products that will aid sustainable management of our resources.

Furthermore, a lateral strategy and coordination can maximize the programs’ varied timelines through staging of research, as well as moving research findings into usable products. While some programs have strengths in research and science, others focus on restoration, communication, forecasting, mitigation, and myriad other topics. Programs building on each other’s strengths (as well as on data and information from historical programs) and bolstering others to complementarily fill mission gaps will create a cohesive, comprehensive national approach to Gulf oil spill response and recovery.

Finally, we share your concerns with the sluggish way that the Treasury Department has responded to the RESTORE Act regulations. As you know, these regulations are overdue, and no money can flow until they are finalized. It appears that Treasury and OIG activities are not synchronized, further exacerbating a confusing situation along the Gulf. In one case, the federal entities (led by NOAA) are well on the way to planning for RESTORE science activities, but the lack of rules from Treasury seem to preclude the academic Centers of Excellence from being at the planning table, even though it is prescribed in the statute.

We share your commitment to a successful restoration of Gulf ecosystems and hope that with your leadership we can achieve vigorous coordination between the various Gulf spill science programs. It is critical that this occurs as soon as possible to ensure that we take the best advantage of the ongoing and future opportunities stemming from the Gulf oil spill tragedy. We understand the complexity and magnitude of coordinating across the breadth of Gulf restoration resources and activities, and we offer the experiences of Consortium for Ocean Leadership and the Gulf of Mexico University Research Collaborative to assist with developing a strategy. We are happy to discuss these issues with you in more detail at your earliest convenience.

Regards,

Robert B. Gagosian
President and CEO
Consortium for Ocean Leadership

William Monty Graham
Board Chairperson
Gulf of Mexico University Research Collaborative