



# The National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program



## What Is the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program?

The National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program (Coastal Grants Program) was established by the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act (Act) of 1990. Under this program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provides matching grants for acquisition, restoration, management or enhancement of coastal wetlands.

Typically, between \$13 million and \$17 million in grants are awarded annually through a nationwide competitive process. Funding for the program comes from excise taxes on fishing equipment and motorboat and small engine fuels.

## Who Can Apply for Grants?

Coastal States which border the Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico, Pacific and Great Lakes are eligible. The only exception is the State of Louisiana, which has its own coastal wetlands program under the Act. Also eligible are the Trust Territories and Commonwealths of the United States.

## How Does Cost-Sharing Work?

States provide 50 percent of the total costs of the project. If the State has established and maintains a special fund for acquiring coastal wetlands, other natural areas or open spaces, the Federal share can be increased to 75 percent. Territories and Commonwealths are not required to provide a cost-share except for Puerto Rico. Federal grants awarded under the Coastal Grants Program cannot exceed \$1 million for an individual project.

## How Do States Apply?

Eligible State agencies should submit a complete grant proposal by the deadline specified in the annual announcement. To be eligible, proposals must be substantial and must address the ranking criteria contained in the guidance, Title 50 of the Code of Regulations, Part 84.32. Applicants are encouraged to consult



Photo by USFWS

*Since 1990, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been working with coastal States to acquire, restore, manage or enhance coastal wetlands through a matching grant program. To date, \$183 million have been awarded to 25 coastal States and 1 U.S. Territory, and more than 240,000 acres of coastal wetlands have, or will be acquired, protected or restored.*

## Why Protect Coastal Wetlands?

Coastal wetlands are valuable resources. They protect against flooding, help maintain water quality, and provide vital habitat for wildlife. Coastal environments are important economically, generating billions of dollars annually through such industries as tourism and commercial fisheries.

## Why Are Coastal Wetlands in Trouble?

Hundreds of acres of coastal wetlands have already been lost, and additional acres have been degraded by pollution. The concentration of the U.S. population along the coast is a continuing source of development pressure. Threats to coastal resources include agricultural and urban run-off, residential and commercial development, shoreline modification, invasive species, oil spills, municipal waste disposal, and over-harvesting of fish and shell fish.

with the Regional Program Coordinators in developing their proposals.  
Photo by USFWS

## How Are Projects Selected?

The Service's role has been to review, rank, and select projects based on their national importance and to assist States in the planning and proposal process. Due to limited funding and considerable demand, projects are selected on a competitive basis. The Act calls for projects to be given priority if they are:

- Consistent with the criteria and considerations outlined in the National Wetlands Priority Conservation Plan.
- Located in States with dedicated funding for programs to acquire coastal wetlands, natural areas and open spaces.
- Located in maritime forests on coastal barrier islands.

Additional ranking factors that have been developed by the Service include giving credit to projects that benefit threatened and endangered species, encourage cooperative efforts, and support other ongoing projects.

### What is Being Accomplished?

The Coastal Grants Program is an effective approach that assists States to acquire, restore, manage, and enhance their coastal wetland resources. The program's emphasis on encouraging partnerships, supporting watershed planning and leveraging on-going projects ensures that the use of limited funds produces in maximum benefits. Three examples of funded projects illustrate its accomplishments (see box below). The lasting results of the program will be the protection and restoration of thousands of acres of coastal wetland ecosystems nationwide. Hundreds of species of fish and wildlife and resource-based industries, like tourism and commercial fisheries, will directly benefit.



Photo by USFWS

#### Examples of Funded Projects

**Nushagak Bay Watershed Conservation.** The Alaska Department of Natural Resources received \$1 million to acquire a perpetual conservation easement on 3,205 wetland dominated acres from Aleknagik Natives Limited, a native corporation. This project is part of a larger conservation initiative to protect 20,852 acres, including the four-mile long Agulwak River; associated wetlands and uplands, and approximately 42 miles of shoreline within the Nushagak Bay Watershed. The Agulwak River is a major anadromous fish system, providing passage, spawning and rearing habitat for millions of salmon. Development of this area would have a tremendous impact on the fish and wildlife species that are depend on this habitat.

**Murff Tract Acquisition Phase I.** The Georgia Department of Natural Resources received \$1 million to acquire 7,177 acres, including 5,742 acres of wetlands in the lower Altamaha River floodplain to create a Wildlife Management Area to be managed by the Wildlife Resources Division. The Murff Tract is the largest, most ecologically intact, and most important unprotected tract of land in the Altamaha River watershed, which is one of the most important conservation targets identified in Georgia's State Wildlife Action Plan. The Nature Conservancy has designated the lower Altamaha River watershed as one of the "Last Great Places" because it supports more than 100 rare plants and animals, of which 15 are Federally threatened or endangered.

**Addition to East River Marsh Wildlife Management Area.** The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection in partnership with the Town of Guilford, Guilford Land Conservation Trust, The Nature Conservancy, and others, received \$261,250 to acquire 48 acres for addition to the East River Marsh Wildlife Management Area. The acquisition is comprised of 15 acres of coastal wetland, 33 acres of adjacent upland, including coastal shrub, old field, and mesic forest habitats. The tract lies within the second largest salt/brackish marsh complex and is the largest high marsh complex on Long Island Sound. This section of the Connecticut shoreline is under extreme development pressure.

For more information about the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program, contact the Division of Habitat and Resource Conservation, Branch of Habitat Restoration at (703/358 2236) or the Division of Federal Assistance (703/358 1748), or visit us on the Internet at: [http://www.ecos.fws.gov/coastal/coastal\\_grants/](http://www.ecos.fws.gov/coastal/coastal_grants/)

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