U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Fisheries and Habitat Conservation

The National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program

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Since 1990, when Congress passed the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act, 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, $152 million have been awarded to 25 coastal States and 1 U.S. Territory, and almost 189,000 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 for wildlife habitat. Coastal environments are important economically, generating billions of dollars annually through such industries as tourism and commercial fisheries.

WHY ARE COASTAL WETLANDS IN TROUBLE?

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

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL COASTAL WETLANDS CONSERVATION GRANT PROGRAM?

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

Between $12 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.

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WHO CAN APPLY FOR GRANTS?

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

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Louisiana's Coastal Wetland Program

Louisiana's unique wetland resources have been seriously depleted and degraded. Recognizing this, the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act of 1990 has special provisions for the State of Louisiana. It calls for the development of both Restoration and Conservation Plans specifically for Louisiana's wetlands. Since Louisiana's Conservation Plan was approved in 1997 by the Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the State's cost share for wetland projects dropped from 25 percent to 15 percent.

HOW DOES COST-SHARING WORK?

States provide 50 percent of the total costs of the project. However, 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. With the exception of Puerto Rico, Territories and Commonwealths are not required to share the costs of projects. Federal grants awarded under the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program cannot exceed $1 million for an individual project.

HOW ARE PROJECTS SELECTED?

The Service's role has been to review, rank, and select projects based on their national importance and to assist State resource agencies in the planning and application process. Due to limited funding and considerable demand, projects need to be selected competitively. The Act itself 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 benefit other ongoing projects.

WHAT IS BEING ACCOMPLISHED?

The National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant 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 results in maximum benefits.

Three examples of funded projects illustrate the program's 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. Wildlife and resource-based industries, like tourism and commercial fisheries will directly benefit.

EXAMPLES OF FUNDED PROJECTS

Clayhole Swamp, Georgia
Georgia's Department of Natural Resources will use its 2005 grant to acquire 5,491 acres of Clayhole Swamp in the Altamaha River watershed. The Altamaha River supports Georgia's best stocks of anadromous fish including American shad, shortnose sturgeon and Atlantic sturgeon. After acquisition the site will be used for hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreational use. The Nature Conservancy is a major partner in this effort.

Washington and Detriot Island, Wisconsin
Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources, in cooperation with the Door County Land Trust and the Washington Island Art and Nature Center, will acquire or purchase conservation easements on about 250 acres with its 2005 grant. This will include protection of 11, 250 feet of Lake Michigan shoreline. These islands are the tip of the Door Peninsula and are important spring and fall migratory stopover habitat for songbirds and birds of prey.

West Bay Conservation Corridor, Texas
Texas Parks and Wildlife will use its 2005 grant to acquire 1,500 acres of marsh and coastal prairie habitats adjacent to West Bay. In addition, 42 acres of shallow open water will be restored to marsh habitat. The habitats protected and restored will benefit migratory birds and commercially and recreationally important fish species. Project partners include Harborwalk-Watkins Properties, the Trust for Public Lands, and Scenic Galveston, Inc.

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For more information about the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program, contact U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Fisheries and Habitat Conservation at 202/208-6394 or visit us on the Internet at http://fisheries.fws.gov/.

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