



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Pacific Region

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Michael Mascari 303-236-4336
michael_mascari@fws.gov
Sharon Rose 303-236-4580
sharon_rose@fws.gov

Recovery Act Funds for the National Elk Refuge Help Feed Animals and the Economy

Jackson, Wyo.—The Fish and Wildlife Service has awarded one of its largest American Recovery and Reinvestment Act projects to Yerba Buena Engineering and Construction, a minority-owned small business. Work will begin on the \$5 million project to replace and expand the irrigation system on the 25,000-acre National Elk Refuge near Jackson, Wyoming. The Recovery Act will cover more than \$4.3 million of the cost. It is the largest Recovery Act project in the Service's Mountain-Prairie Region.

“The Recovery Act is putting people to work today to make a long-term positive difference for our communities and our environment,” U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar explained. “We are providing good jobs during these difficult economic times while undertaking important conservation and construction work at the refuge that will make it a better place for both people and wildlife.”

The project should steadily employ 40-50 people at any given time, with most of them subcontractors from the local area, according to Yerba Buena Project Manager Lee Barrus, who added Yerba Buena is one of the fastest growing minority-owned companies in the country. “One of the things the Recovery Act has done is to give us opportunities we don't normally have. We have been successful in finding opportunities, but this is a major boost. It ramps up business and will definitely help us to grow our company,” Barrus said.

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A state-of-the-art irrigation system will replace the frontier-era canals currently used, which are porous and inefficient. The new system will provide a less intrusive aesthetic than previously considered center-pivot designs. It will also aid in vital habitat creation.

The project is environmentally significant. Elk on the refuge rely on a winter supplemental feeding program that concentrates the herd and increases potential for disease transmission. Increased natural food production from this irrigation project will reduce reliance on supplemental feeding and allow the elk to disperse to a larger area, reducing the potential for disease.

The National Elk Refuge is home to over 7,000 elk during winter and 46 other mammals, including bison, and nearly 75 species of birds throughout the year. This herd has helped to reestablish elk populations across the United States. More than one million visitors come to the refuge each year. “It’s phenomenal. This project is only possible because of Recovery Act dollars. The chances of getting those funds by other means were unlikely. It would take a lot of bake sales to raise that kind of money,” Project manager Steve Kallin said.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act passed earlier this year gave \$3 billion to the Department of the Interior. Of that amount, \$280 million in funding goes to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The ARRA funds are part of a stimulus package that is an important component of the President's plan to jumpstart the economy and put a down payment on addressing long-neglected challenges so the country can thrive in the 21st century. Under the ARRA, Interior is making an investment in conserving America's timeless treasures – our stunning natural landscapes, our monuments to liberty, the icons of our culture and heritage – while helping American families and their communities prosper again. Interior is also focusing on renewable energy projects, the needs of American Indians, employing youth and promoting community service.

“With its investments of Recovery Act funds, the Department of the Interior and its bureaus are putting people to work today to make improvements that will benefit the environment and the region for many years to come,” Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar said. Secretary Salazar has pledged unprecedented levels of transparency and accountability in the implementation of the Department’s economic recovery projects. The public will be able to follow the progress of each project on www.recovery.gov and on www.interior.gov/recovery. In addition, the public can submit questions, comments or concerns at recoveryact@fws.gov.

Secretary Salazar has appointed a Senior Advisor for Economic Recovery, [Chris Henderson](#), and an Interior Economic Recovery Task Force to work closely with Interior’s Inspector General and ensure the recovery program is meeting the high standards for accountability, responsibility, and transparency set by President Obama. The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.