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Interior Secretary Ken Salazar Announces More Than \$19 Million in Grants to Protect Coastal Wetlands Across the Nation

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced today the award of more than \$19 million to support 24 conservation projects benefiting fish and wildlife on more than 5,900 acres of coastal habitats in twelve states in the U.S. through the 2011 National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program. These federal grants will be matched by over \$21 million in partner contributions from state and local governments, private landowners and conservation groups.

The grants will be used to acquire, restore or enhance coastal wetlands and adjacent uplands to provide long-term conservation benefits to fish, wildlife and their habitat. States receiving funds include: Oregon, Washington, Wisconsin, Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Alaska, and California.

“Our Nation’s coastal wetlands encompass large areas of vital habitat for countless species of wildlife while providing important economic resources and recreational opportunities for the American people,” Secretary Ken Salazar said. “These grants will offer additional protection, restoration, and enhancement of these precious habitats.”

The National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and funded under provisions of the 1990 Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act. Funding is provided by Sport Fish Restoration Act revenue – money generated from an excise tax on fishing equipment, motorboat and small engine fuels.

Including the 2011 grants, the Service has awarded nearly \$260 million to coastal states and territories since the program began in 1992. When the 2011 projects are complete more than 265,000 acres of habitat will have been protected, restored or enhanced.

Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, the Service’s Coastal Program provides strategic conservation planning and assistance in coastal areas. It represents one of the Service’s most popular and effective programs for voluntary, locally-based habitat restoration and protection efforts. With climate change threatening to reduce coastal habitats, the public and private partnerships garnered by the Coastal Program are essential.

A complete list of projects funded by the 2011 grant program can be found online at: <http://www.fws.gov/coastal/CoastalGrants/index.html>.

Several examples of projects include:

- **Sisters of Notre Dame Conservation Easement** – The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, partnering with the Essex County Greenbelt Association, the Great Marsh Land Protection Team, and the Town of Ipswich were awarded a \$1 million grant to permanently protect approximately 78.05 acres of coastal salt marsh, freshwater marsh and ponds, and associated upland buffer. The Great Marsh is the largest salt marsh in New England covering over 25,000 acres. The project area is located at the mouth of Eagle Hill River, which drains into Plum Island Sound and Ipswich Bay. It is part of a 7,000-acre conservation corridor that includes Parker River National Wildlife Refuge four miles to the north. The barrier beaches of the Great Marsh support large breeding populations of water birds, including federally-threatened Piping plovers. The property also lies within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Atlantic Coast Joint Venture North Shore Waterfowl Focus Area and the Massachusetts Bays Program National Estuary Program.
- **Brown's Island Project** – The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, along with the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust were awarded a \$387,400 grant to acquire a 45-acre parcel on Brown's Island located near Cape Lookout National Seashore in Cataret County, North Carolina. Brown's Island is a 600-acre undeveloped island. The parcel contains a diversity of wildlife habitats including 31.5 acres of salt and brackish marsh, pocosin, and 13.5 acres of maritime live oak and longleaf pine forest. The project would protect habitat for eight federally listed species, 10 state listed species, 18 coastal dependent and/or migratory bird species, and conserve four priority habitat types: forested wetlands, estuarine emergent wetlands, longleaf pine habitat, and maritime forest. Although the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program considers the island to be a state significant natural heritage area, the island has been under threat of development in recent years.
- **Riverside Ranch Restoration Project** - The California Coastal Conservancy was awarded a \$1 million grant to restore the natural ecosystem functions of the Salt River Delta in the Eel River estuary. Located just south of Humboldt Bay, the Eel River estuary is the second largest estuary in California. The 446-acre Riverside Ranch sits at the confluence of the Salt and Eel Rivers was acquired with a 2007 National Coastal Wetland Conservation Grant. The Salt River watershed has been degraded by a century of diking and gating. This project will restore and enhance a total of 334 acres of estuarine tidal marsh, riparian forest, and other estuarine habitats, and 112 acres of associated uplands for numerous federal and state listed and other wetland-dependent fish and wildlife species. It will restore a functional tidal ecosystem that provides habitat for special status species, and reduce flooding by restoring tidal prism, sediment transport, and floodplain connectivity. The project area will be managed by the California Department of Fish and Game as part of the Eel River Wildlife Area.

Coastal areas comprise less than 10 percent of the nation's land area yet support the majority of wildlife species, including 75 percent of migratory birds, nearly 80 percent of fish and shellfish and about half of all threatened and endangered species. The Coastal Program is a vital tool in

helping to recover listed species and maintaining populations of candidate species that depend on coastal habitats.

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.

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