



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE AWARDS FIRST-EVER COASTAL WETLANDS GRANTS

A total of thirteen vital wetlands projects will receive \$5.7 million in funding through the first Federal Aid grants made under the new Coastal Wetland Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act signed by President Bush. The program is administered by the Department of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In announcing the program, agency director John Turner said, "This country is blessed with coastlines and adjacent wetlands of astounding beauty. This new program will provide much needed support for efforts by coastal states to conserve and enhance these coastal areas and their wildlife."

Coastal wetlands and associated estuaries support a tremendous diversity of wildlife, and are the focus of a new Bush Administration initiative, termed "Coastal America", in which the Department works cooperatively with other Federal agencies and state and local organizations to protect, enhance, and restore coastal areas.

Millions of fish, shellfish, birds, mammals, and other types of species are dependant upon coastal habitats. But these areas are also under intense development pressure due to the rapidly growing population centers scattered along the nation's coastlines. Recent Census Bureau statistics show that while the coastal zone comprises only about 16 percent of this country's land area, it encompasses 62 percent of the U.S. human population.

The funding is made available to the states under the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act of 1990. The money is from a portion of funds deposited in the Sport Fish Restoration Account of the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund. Funds deposited in the account are derived from a 10 percent excise tax on sport fishing equipment, a 3 percent excise tax on trolling motors and sonar fishfinders, import duties on sport fishing equipment and pleasure boats, as well as taxes on gasoline attributed to use in small engines (lawn mowers, chain saws, etc.) and a portion of the taxes on gasoline used in motorboats.

Under this legislation, grants are available to all coastal states through a competitive process. The states must demonstrate that the project provides for the long-term conservation of the lands and waters involved, as well as associated fish and wildlife resources. In addition, priority consideration is given to conservation projects in maritime forests on coastal barrier islands.

Highlights of each of the initial projects to be funded through this program include the following:

**Escondido Creek, California:** This key 43-acre tract of riparian habitat and brackish and freshwater marsh is located upstream from the San Elijo Lagoon on one of the few free-flowing streams remaining in southern California. It is a pocket of high biodiversity and four endangered species are found here. Federal Cost: \$750,000. State Match: \$750,000.

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**Salmon Cove, Connecticut:** This project involves acquisition of 100 acres at the confluence of the Connecticut and Salmon Rivers. The area offers a wide diversity of habitat types on the only major river in the Northeast without a major port. Private waterfowl organizations have already pledged \$40,000 toward acquisition. Federal Cost: \$100,000. State Match: \$100,000.

**Guana River, Florida:** This project involves using dredged spoil to fill in mosquito drainage ditches, thus returning sheet flow of water to 382 acres. Federal Cost: \$30,719. State Match: \$35,076.

**Rookery Bay, Florida:** This project involves acquisition of coastal barrier islands with a very high degree of biodiversity and unique maritime habitat types. An adjacent Estuarine Reserve area includes a research and education center. Federal Cost: \$557,635. State Match: \$557,635.

**Tomoka Marsh, Florida:** This restoration project will remove a barrier berm and restore tidal flushing to a 22-acre marsh. It will return the marsh to the surrounding estuary system. Federal Cost: \$33,601. State Match: \$40,299.

**Hamakua Wetlands, Hawaii:** This project will restore 20 acres of wetlands donated to the State by Ducks Unlimited. It is a key area within a \$7 million marsh enhancement and acquisition effort on the island of Oahu, where wetlands have all but disappeared. Federal Cost: \$100,000. State Match: \$100,000.

**St. Clair Flats, Michigan:** This is a segment of a state program to acquire and restore wetlands on the largest freshwater delta in the world. Initial effort involves acquisition of 18 acres and removing debris from two islands. Federal Cost: \$62,250. State Match: \$20,750.

**Grand Bay, Mississippi:** This acquisition effort will add 500 acres, including critical tracts of wetlands within a 20,000-acre wet savanna, to a salt marsh system currently under acquisition by the state, private partners, and the Fish and Wildlife Service. Federal Cost: \$100,000. State Match: \$100,000.

**Bald Head, North Carolina:** This is the most significant tract of maritime forest in the state and currently threatened with development. The Bald Head Development Corporation is going to donate \$1 million worth of land as part of the effort. The 198 acres of forest will complement 9,000 acres of wetlands already owned by the state. Federal Cost: \$2,000,000. State Match: \$325,000.

**Salt Bayou, Texas:** This project will fund a water control structure to return 55,000 acres of marsh from salt to fresh and brackish waters. The area exhibits a high degree of biodiversity and is the top priority project in the Gulf Coast Joint Venture under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Federal Cost: \$750,000. State Match: \$750,000.

**Chehalis and Elk River, Washington:** Both of these projects are within the Gray's Harbor ecosystem, one of the most critical wetland areas on the West Coast. These proposals will acquire up to 3,250 acres. Chehalis is a unique coastal surge plain and Elk River is the largest quality estuarine system remaining in either Washington or Oregon. Both are threatened by logging and development. Federal Cost: Chehalis \$500,000; Elk River \$500,000. State Match: Chehalis \$1,500,000; Elk River \$3,000,000.

**Kennedy Creek, Washington:** This project will acquire a key 60-acre tract of coastal wetlands hosting one of the largest populations of shorebirds within Puget Sound. Federal Cost: \$175,000. State Match: \$250,000.