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For immediate release:

Students' Environmental Education Program Ended Due to Theft of Canoes from Siletz Bay Refuge

Four canoes, along with six paddles and twelve personal flotation devices, were stolen from buildings located on the Siletz Bay National Wildlife Refuge sometime between December 28th and 30th, 2005. These canoes were the primary means of transport for local and Salem-area middle school students using the Siletz Bay and Nestucca Bay Refuges as outdoor classrooms to conduct field-based research projects for the past four years. Using the refuge canoes, student-designed projects have explored the placement and role of large woody debris as fish habitat in the recently restored Millport Slough, inventoried frog populations in Neskowin Marsh, and investigated water quality in tidal marsh habitats.

“For these students, having the opportunity to apply their skills and knowledge in real life research situations is invaluable,” said Mike Weddle, primary instructor at the Jane Goodall Environmental Middle School in Salem. “The on-going research projects that the students have been conducting on the refuges are the most exciting part of the school year and they would really like to continue them. The projects are great fun, they’re good science, and they are making an important contribution to the Fish and Wildlife Service and to the environment,” said Weddle. The theft of the canoes and associated equipment means that students will now be denied the unique and perhaps life-changing opportunity for a hands-on learning experience in these difficult to access marsh habitats.

The canoes also served a critical role in furthering the mission of the biological program at the Oregon Coast NWR Complex, where they were used by biologists and volunteers to conduct important fisheries research and monitor the progress of marsh restoration projects at three estuaries along the Oregon coast. In addition, the canoes were used for many Refuge-led seasonal public tours of the Siletz Bay Refuge. These popular tours, always full to capacity, allowed visitors to enjoy a free guided interpretive canoe tour of refuge areas which are usually closed to the public to prevent wildlife disturbance. All future tours for the spring and summer are now cancelled due to the theft.

The stolen Old Town brand canoes were two 17 ft. 4 in. ‘Discovery’ model, one 14 ft. 7 in. ‘Guide’ model, and one 12 ft. ‘Pack’ model. Anyone with information regarding the theft of these canoes, paddles and PFD’s is urged to contact Lincoln County Sheriff Deputy Bruce McGuire at 541 265-4231. For more information on the Environmental Education programs on Siletz Bay and Nestucca Bay Refuges please visit <http://www.fws.gov/oregoncoast/education.htm>.