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News Release



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U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Awards Washington State more than \$8.5M to Protect and Restore Coastal Wetlands

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will award more than \$8.5 million in grants to 10 projects in Washington that protect and restore coastal wetlands. The grants are part of the \$19.2 million awarded to 11 states through the 2010 National Coastal Wetland Conservation Grant Program. Nationwide, the grant program will fund 25 conservation projects encompassing nearly 6,100 acres of coastal habitat. Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar announced the grants on December 28.

The \$8.5 million being awarded in Washington will be used to acquire, restore or enhance coastal wetlands and associated nearshore and upland habitat. All of the ten sites are priority conservation areas and will provide important habitat for federal and state listed species of concern.

Cost share from state, tribal and private partners for the Washington grants totals more than \$5.4M. Partners include the Washington Departments of Ecology, Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources and State Parks; the Cascade Land Conservancy, Lummi Indian Nation, Columbia Land Trust, Trust for Public Land, Jefferson Land Trust, Capitol Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, and the Pacific Coast Joint Venture.

Five of the projects are in the Puget Sound Basin and are part of the USFWS' contribution to two of the key objectives of the Puget Sound Partnership: habitat protection and habitat restoration. Five projects are located on the Washington Coast in Grays Harbor, Willapa Bay and the Lower Columbia River Estuary. The projects will protect or restore a total of 2,378 acres of coastal wetlands and associated habitat, and will benefit marine bird populations, ESA-listed salmon and trout, and support improved forage and groundfish production. In Washington, wetlands provide feeding and breeding habitat for over 175 species, and provide ecosystem services that deliver ecological, economic and social benefits. Wetlands are nurseries for many fish and shellfish of commercial and recreational importance and they provide floodwater retention and storage, recharge groundwater, improve water quality and reduce pollution, buffer habitat and human development for any future impacts from climate change and sea level rise, and provide recreation and wildlife viewing opportunities.

Puget Sound

In the *Nooksack River Estuary*, the Washington Department of Ecology, the Lummi Indian Nation and other federal, state and local partners are working with willing sellers to acquire and restore over 2,421 acres of coastal estuary (a mixture of salt and freshwater wetlands at the mouth of rivers) habitat. The USFWS funding will contribute to protection of 160 acres in the project area. At *Kiket Island*, 22 acres of shoreline and wetland habitat will be added to Deception Pass State Park, providing excellent habitat for endangered juvenile salmon and other fish and bird species. The Washington State Parks Commission is partnering with the Trust for Public Land to complete purchase of the entire island. In the *Dungeness River Estuary*, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Clallam County will acquire 39 acres of coastal wetland habitat. This acquisition is part of a larger effort to restore floodplain and estuarine function to the lower Dungeness River. In upper *Quilcene Bay at the Donovan Creek Estuary*, the Washington Department of Ecology, Jefferson Land Trust and the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group will protect and restore 76 acres of coastal wetland habitat, and improve 1 mile of estuarine stream habitat. In south Puget Sound at *Totten Inlet*, the Washington Department of Ecology and Capitol Land Trust are working with willing sellers to protect 20 acres of forested and coastal habitat, including an intact pocket estuary, 1,400 feet of undeveloped coastal shoreline and feeder bluffs. Totten Inlet has been identified as a high priority for conservation due to the ecological diversity present.

Grays Harbor

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources will acquire and protect 300 acres of pristine coastal wetland habitat and will add the acquisition to the 5,000 acre *Elk River Natural Resources Conservation Area*. This conservation area contains one of the largest, most diverse, highest quality estuarine systems remaining in the Pacific Northwest. Purchasing these properties from willing sellers will remove threats from land-use practices and will help to sustain diverse habitats and protect water quality and habitat for ESA listed North American Green Sturgeon; a Washington State Species of Concern, the Olympic mudminnow, and multiple coastal migratory bird species. In the *Hoquiam River*, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Cascade Land Conservancy, the Chehalis River Basin Land Trust and Grays Harbor Audubon Society will conserve and protect 644 acres and 6 river miles of high quality coastal surge plain and adjacent spruce forest. This is the second phase of this conservation effort, and will bring 75% of the Hoquiam Surge Plain into conservation ownership, totaling 1,358 acres. Grays Harbor is one of the largest, most important estuarine habitats on the Pacific Coast and conservation of the Chehalis River Basin is the focus of the USFWS Chehalis Fishery Restoration Program.

Willapa Bay, Long Beach Peninsula and Lower Columbia River Estuary

In *Willapa Bay at Stanley Point and Chetco Harbor*, The Washington State Department of Ecology in partnership with the Cascade Land Conservancy will protect more than 700 acres of high quality wetlands, including estuarine emergent salt marsh, eelgrass meadows, mudflats, marsh shrub-scrub, forested wetlands, and nearshore habitat. This project is adjacent to the 15,000 acre Willapa Bay National Wildlife Refuge and will conserve important habitat in one of the most productive estuaries in Washington State.

On the *Long Beach Peninsula at the Island and Loomis Lakes Conservation Area*, the Washington Department of Ecology, and the Columbia Land Trust will protect 125 acres of highly threatened, declining coastal wetlands. The project area contains one of the largest interdunal freshwater wetland complexes in North America and supports over 25 sensitive habitat communities and at-risk species. These properties will be added to the 890 acre Island and Loomis Lakes Conservation Area.

In the *Lower Columbia River Estuary at Grays Bay*, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will acquire 287 acres of tidal emergent marsh at the mouth of Deep and Grays River, supporting habitat for wintering waterfowl, threatened salmon, and other fish and wildlife species. This habitat type and area are a

priority for conservation and salmon recovery in the Lower Columbia River. The area will remain open for public use, including hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing.

A complete list of projects funded by the 2010 grant program can be found online at:
<http://www.fws.gov/coastal/CoastalGrants/index.html>.

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.

The National Coastal Wetland Conservation Grant Program awards coastal wetland conservation grants to states through a competitive process. The program is funded under provision of the 1990 Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act, with money generated from excise taxes on fishing equipment and motorboat and small engine fuels. In addition to Washington, states receiving grants this year include Oregon, California, Florida, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

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.