

2006 NIT Partnership/Spirit/Special Recognition Award Winners

Partnership Awards

1. **Project Name:** Branford River Fishway Team, CT

Summary: The Branford Fishway Restoration Project was identified through a comprehensive watershed evaluation. It is creative because this is a process that used a federal/state inventory of ecological restoration priorities that were identified and then implementation was led locally. and received funding from the CT Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership.

The final project includes:

- a. Permanent steep pass fishway, with an electronic fish counter installed and operated by Yale University.
- b. Habitat restored for anadromous fish to include 75-86 acres of lakes, 9 acres of riparian marshland and 4-5 miles of free-flowing streams. The restored habitat will include the Supply Ponds, Cedar Lake, Linsley Lake and Pisgah Brook.
- c. Interpretative signage will be installed for public education. Pedestrian access and viewing areas to be constructed on East and West banks of Queach Brook at the fishway.

Lead Federal Agency: FWS/NOAA/NRCS

Partner List: Town of Branford, Branford Land Trust, CT DEP, CT CWRP, the Branford Rotary Club, Save the Sound, the Town of Branford, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection's Office of Long Island Sound Programs, Long Island Sound Fund and the CTDEP Inland Fisheries Division.

Region: NERIT

2. **Project Name:** Aquatic Invasive Species Outreach Toolkit, NC

Summary: Sea Grant recognized in AZA a new venue for sharing information. North Carolina and Georgia Sea Grant, AZA, and the North Carolina Aquariums are sharing their expertise to develop an Aquatic Invasive Species outreach toolkit. The National Sea Grant College Program, recognizing the potential for a strong partnership, awarded \$300,000 for this innovative project.

Through this project a comprehensive Aquatic Invasive Species tool kit will be delivered to all 214 AZA accredited institutions containing materials to present an engaging, fun and interactive AIS program. This is the first national effort to bring programming based on Sea Grant's extensive AIS research and outreach to all AZA institutions. Materials included in the toolkit also provide audiences with effective tools to address regional issues. Many of the CELCs will benefit from this project because they are also AZA institutions: North Carolina Aquariums, New York Aquarium, John G. Shedd Aquarium, South Carolina Aquarium, National Aquarium in Baltimore, Florida Aquarium, Mystic Aquarium, Seattle Aquarium, Monterey Bay Aquarium and Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific.

Lead Federal Agency: NC Aquarium (CELC)

Partner List: US FWS, USGS, NC Sea Grant, GA Sea Grant, FL Aquarium (CELC), GA Cooperative Extension

Region: SERIT (and nationwide)

3. Project Name: Community-based Restoration of Oyster Reefs, FL

Summary: In just a few short years, hundreds of volunteers have contributed thousands of volunteer hours to this restore southwest FL oyster reefs. Just in 2005 alone, more than 250 volunteers contributed time to this project. To date, 23 reefs have been re-established in the estuaries of southwest Florida. Restoration of these oyster reefs has increased the biomass of oysters and has increased the biological filtering capability of the ecosystem. Each of the reefs has helped to increase water clarity and light penetration within the estuaries. In addition, these oyster reefs provide a three-dimensional complex structure that creates additional habitat for important fisheries species, as well as for the organisms that many fisheries depend upon for food. This community-based oyster restoration effort has done much more than just restore a small piece of the watershed. This restoration effort has been established as a community wide commitment to ecosystem restoration. In watching this project in action, the community educational message is just as an important as the restoration itself, which is evident as you talk with volunteers that are so committed to helping this project.

Lead Federal Agency: NOAA

Partner List: Florida Gulf Coast University, FL Marine Sea Grant, South Florida Water Management District

Region: GMRIT

4. Project Name: Bahia Grande Restoration Team, TX

Summary: The Bahia Grande is a 10,000 acre complex of three estuarine basins between Brownsville and Port Isabel in Cameron County, Texas. Once a highly productive shallow water system, for 70 years these basins have been massive, salty sand flats. Since 2000, a coalition of over 50 partners, sponsors, and supporters has come together to restore the Bahia Grande complex to its highly productive and valuable former state. The size of this restoration project makes it one of the largest community-based estuary restoration projects in the country, and its importance is reflected in the diversity of the partners invested in its success. . The Texas Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership (CWRP) has committed \$100,000.00 in cash as well as over \$20,000.00 of in-kind services to the implementation of the Bahia Grande restoration project. This level of support marks the largest single donation of CWRP funds to an individual project.

Lead Federal Agency: NOAA, USFWS

Partner List: over 50 partners

Region: GMRIT

Spirit Award

Organization: Long Island Marine Team

Summary: The Long Island Chapter Marine Team has demonstrated creativity, and innovation which has led to positive, measurable results “in the water” through a well-established shellfish restoration program in the Peconic Estuary and Great South Bay, supported by NOAA Community-based Restoration Program. Hard clam restoration is a critical component of our broader objective to restore and maintain ecosystem functioning of Long Island estuaries. Ownership of 13,000 acres of underwater land in

the Great South Bay provides a unique and unprecedented opportunity for alternative management and restoration efforts on a scale that has never before been possible in New York waters.

With this resourceful “rescue” of nearly 20 percent Great South Bay, this program has pioneered how the private ownership of submerged lands – the first type of transaction of this kind – is used as a way to mitigate threats, in this case the over harvest of shellfish and pollution. The Nature Conservancy’s underwater holding sits in the middle of the Great South Bay and its restoration is intrinsic to the recovery of the entire Bay.

In addition to conservation through ownership of this marine parcel, the Marine Team actively engages in the restoration of several species of shellfish – the key ecosystem engineers of the bays and estuaries of Long Island – in order to restore water quality and ecosystem function through the transplant of shellfish and establishment of spawner sanctuaries.

This project is one of the first of its kind in the United States to attempt to restore shellfish populations and subsequent ecosystem function at scale.

Lead Federal Agency: US EPA

Partner List: NOAA, TNC, Southold Town Baymen’s Association, Town of Southold, others

Region: MARIT

Special Recognition Award

Organization: Gulf of Mexico Foundation

Summary: The Gulf of Mexico Foundation, a nonprofit corporation, was founded in 1990 by citizens concerned with the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico. Since 2001, the Foundation has managed the Gulf of Mexico Community-based Restoration Partnership (GCRP), an award-winning innovative approach to habitat restoration which has effectively organized federal and state agencies, community organizations, and NGO’s to implement (to date) 37 coastal habitat restoration projects in the five Gulf States and the Caribbean. The GCRP is a regional partnership between the US EPA Gulf of Mexico Program’s Gulf Ecological Management Sites (GEMS) initiative, the NOAA Restoration Center’s Community-based Restoration Program, the Gulf-States natural resource agencies, and the Gulf of Mexico Foundation. The GCRP funds citizen-driven, on-the-ground projects which restore aquatic marine habitats, benefit living marine resources, and foster community-involvement and environmental stewardship. When GCRP projects initiated to-date are complete, partnership funds will have generated over \$2.28 million in matching contributions, volunteers will have donated over 20,500 hours of their time helping to plant vegetation and monitor project sites, and the GCRP will have assisted in funding projects which restore over 14,000 acres of coastal habitat.

Lead Federal Agency:

Partner List: over 50 partners

Region: GMRIT