



## **NEWS FROM NOAA**

**NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

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Contact: Jeff Donald  
(202) 360-8407

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### **BUSH ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES OPEN RIVERS INITIATIVE**

Retired Navy Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher Jr., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator, today announced the Open Rivers Initiative (ORI), designed to spur economic and environmental renewal and improve public safety in small towns and communities. The initiative will provide grants to communities committed to removing obsolete and derelict stream barriers.

“Many small communities and private owners understand the benefits of removing these obstructions, but simply lack the funds to do so,” said Lautenbacher. “This initiative is intended to help provide assistance where funding is an issue. We envision this initiative as an investment in our society, our economy and our ecological future.”

There are an estimated 2½ million dams across the country, many less than six feet tall and some up to 200 years old. The ORI will target only those small dams where community consensus and the dam owners support removal, the dam no longer serves a useful purpose, and removal will have the greatest benefit to anadromous fish like salmon, striped bass and shad.

Many derelict dams pose a safety hazard, particularly to downstream communities; cause economic hardship for towns forced to pay for upkeep and liability; and disturb delicate ecosystems by preventing the free flow of water and species through the river. Removing dams and other blockages opens habitat for migratory fish and can help boost local economies by increasing property values and increasing recreational opportunities such as fishing and kayaking.

The ORI will be a grant program administered through the NOAA Office of Habitat Conservation. More information can be found at <http://conservationconference.noaa.gov>.

Under Secretary Lautenbacher made this announcement today at the White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation in St. Louis, Mo. The conference, convened by the White House Council on Environmental Quality, brought together a diverse group of leaders to discuss innovative and effective approaches to promoting cooperative conservation.

In August 2004, President Bush signed an Executive Order titled Facilitation of Cooperative Conservation which directs federal agencies that oversee environmental and natural resource policies and programs to promote cooperative conservation in full partnership with states, local governments, tribes, and individuals.

This conference reflects the President's continuing commitment to ensure that the federal government listens to the concerns, ideas and insights of local citizens and works closely with them in restoring and conserving our natural heritage.

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