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**NOAA ANNOUNCES \$180,000 TO HELP RESTORE ISLES OF CAPRI FISHERY**

The U.S. Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) awarded \$180,000 to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve for a community-based project to restore fishery habitat in the Isles of Capri in southwest, Fla.

The project is funded by the Community-based Restoration Program within the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries). Funds will be used to help reconnect over 600 acres of bay system – blocked since the 1960s – between Tarpon Bay and Johnson Bay.

During the development of the Isles of Capri in the 1950s and 1960s, a road constructed between the islands obstructed all natural water passes and halted tidal flushing between the islands. Since then, fisheries habitat in the surrounding bays has deteriorated. Two critical bay systems, Johnson Bay and Tarpon Bay, gradually filled with silt, declined in water quality, and lost important nursery and estuarine habitat.

To restore historic flushing between Tarpon Bay and Johnson Bay, project partners will reconnect the bay system by installing two box culverts and a bridge. "The restoration of this area will be beneficial for recreationally and commercially important finfish, shellfish, and even manatees. Water quality is also expected to improve, which will in turn benefit seagrasses in the area," said Judy Haner, resource management coordinator for the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

"NOAA and the Bush administration are proud to partner on a restoration project that will benefit fisheries habitat in southwest Florida," said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "Estuary restoration is a national priority and we join with our federal, state and local partners to make this project a reality."

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The NOAA Community-based Restoration Program has been working with community organizations to support locally-driven habitat-restoration projects in marine, estuarine and riparian areas since 1996. NOAA-funded projects provide strong on-the-ground habitat restoration components that offer educational and social benefits for people and their communities in addition to long-term ecological benefits for fishery resources. To date, over 700 projects in 26 states have been implemented using NOAA funding and leveraged funding from national and regional habitat restoration partners.

For more information about the Community-based Restoration Program, please see; <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration> or contact your local NOAA representative.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. To learn more about NOAA, please visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.