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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Announces Grants to Protect Coastal Wetlands Across the Nation and in Texas

H. Dale Hall, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today that twenty-five conservation projects benefiting fish and wildlife on more than 13,543 acres of coastal habitat in twelve States will be funded with \$20.1 million from 2009 National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program.

Texas will receive a federal grant of \$740,425 to be matched with partner funds to complete a \$1 million project.

Texas Parks and Wildlife, with assistance from The Nature Conservancy, will acquire a conservation easement on approximately 3,500 acres of coastal habitats in the Guadalupe River Delta in Refugio County. Blue crabs, a main food source for the endangered whooping crane that winters on the Texas mid-coast, inhabit the wetlands on the property. In addition to the cranes, many other species of fish and migratory birds use the forested and emergent wetlands. The project site, Swan Lake Ranch, is part of the San Antonio Estuary ecosystem and will make a significant contribution to a corridor of protected lands. There are 148,000 acres of land nearby held in conservation by TPW, the Service, Guadalupe Blanco River Trust and private landowners.

Nationally, the grants will acquire, restore or enhance coastal wetlands and adjacent uplands to provide long-term conservation benefits to fish, wildlife and their habitat. Other states receiving

funds include Alaska, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Maine, New Jersey, Oregon, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin. These federal grants will be matched by nearly \$27 million in partner contributions from state and local governments, private landowners and conservation groups.

"Coastal wetlands provide valuable habitat for many fish and wildlife species, help keep our oceans cleaner, and serve as buffers to protect coastal communities from storms and flooding" Hall said. "The Service's National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program is a great example of a voluntary approach to habitat conservation. By providing technical and financial assistance to our partners, we are able to enlist their help in conserving coastal areas threatened by development and predicted sea-level rise resulting from climate change."

The National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and funded under provisions of the 1990 Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act, drawing from Sport Fish Restoration Act revenue – money generated from an excise tax on fishing equipment and motorboat and small engine fuels.

Including the 2009 grants, the Service has awarded more than \$220 million to coastal states and territories since the program began in 1992. When the 2009 projects are complete, nearly 258,000 acres of habitat will have been protected, restored or enhanced.

For a list of all projects funded by the 2009 grant program, go to: www.fws.gov.

For more information, contact the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Arlington, VA 22203, or Division of Federal Assistance, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Arlington, VA 22203, or visit the program's home page.

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.

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