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LAVACA BAY RESTORATION AND CLEAN UP CELEBRATING SUCCESSFUL GOVERNMENT-INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP

Federal, state, local community, and industry leaders met today to celebrate the successful cooperative effort to clean up and restore the Point Comfort/Lavaca Bay Superfund site, located midway between Houston and Corpus Christi, Texas.

Mercury contamination released from Alcoa Inc.'s Point Comfort manufacturing facility in the late 1960's contaminated areas of Lavaca Bay near the facility and caused ecological injuries and a fishing closure in a portion of the bay. Today, federal and state leaders will present Alcoa with an award for its active and cooperative role in resolving the site's contamination problems and in restoring Lavaca Bay.

"This is a great example of government and a responsible company working together to investigate and plan for clean up and restoration of the environment simultaneously," said William Corso, deputy assistant administrator for NOAA's National Ocean Service. "We consider this to be a national model for achieving full and efficient restoration of our nation's coastal resources."

Over the last decade, developing and implementing sound environmental solutions for Lavaca Bay has been the focus for many in Calhoun County," said Ron Weddell, Alcoa remediation manager. "Through cooperative relationships, Alcoa employees, local citizens, state and federal agencies and scientists have worked together to determine the best cleanup solutions and recreational uses for the bay."

Alcoa has spent approximately \$110 million to undertake a suite of projects in and around the bay to affect clean-up and compensate for natural resource losses resulting from the site contamination. The implementation of these projects represent the culmination of 15 years of cooperative work, under the auspices of several agreements, focused on cleaning up the site as well as restoring resources and enhancing recreational fishing opportunities to offset the impacts of the contamination in the Bay.

Alcoa's agreement to implement the restoration projects is embodied in a settlement of its natural resource damages liability for the site approved in 2005. Alcoa also paid costs incurred by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Texas General Land Office (GLO), Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) in evaluating the site and in determining appropriate restoration actions.

"It's important to seize every opportunity to restore and enhance fish and wildlife habitat whenever and wherever we get the chance, since so much of it has been lost or damaged in Texas, and parties on all sides have worked hard to see that the settlement did the best possible job on that score," said Larry McKinney, Ph.D., TPWD coastal fisheries director. "In this case, we were able to provide new recreational facilities and opportunities for anglers and

boaters in Lavaca Bay, as well as restored marshes and oyster reefs that are important for fish, shellfish, birds and other wildlife."

To restore ecological losses, Alcoa transferred 729 acres of land to be preserved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as part of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, created 70 acres of inter-tidal salt marsh within the Refuge, and created 11 acres of new oyster reef habitat in Lavaca Bay. To offset recreational fishing losses, Alcoa constructed new fishing piers at Six Mile Park, Point Comfort Park and the bay front peninsula in Point Comfort. It also replaced an existing auxiliary boat ramp, built docks and modified an existing jetty to improve access to and enhance recreational fishing opportunities in the bay. Although the bulk of restoration activities are completed, there are still continuing efforts to restore the bay.

"The benefits of collaborating parties are most apparent and have resulted in the creation and restoration of saltwater marsh habitats that are important to all of the resident species at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. Everyone involved worked diligently towards a common goal insuring a successful resolution of the ecological impacts. As a result, Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, its wild inhabitants and the public have all benefited. I commend everyone involved for their efforts to derive a solution that will benefit wildlife and people," said Benjamin N. Tuggle, Ph.D., USFWS southwest regional director.

For several years spanning the late 1960s to early 1970s Alcoa operated a chlorine-alkali processing unit at its Point Comfort plant that resulted in discharges of mercury into Lavaca Bay via pathways such as wastewater streams, groundwater, and runoff. Other areas around the facility were contaminated with polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons as a result of the processing of coal tar at the facility.

"Texans expect us to work together and get things done, and that's just what we did here in Lavaca Bay," said Jerry Patterson, commissioner of the Texas GLO. "The results of this effort speak for themselves."

The restoration projects undertaken by Alcoa were identified through a natural resource damage assessment (NRDA) process for the site that was undertaken cooperatively with Alcoa. That cooperative assessment process permitted comprehensive coverage of all NRDA issues associated with the site and led to good working relationships between federal/state partners, Alcoa, and the local community.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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On the Web:

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