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Mangrove Replanting Initiates Massive Bahia Grande Restoration

OT & USFWS lead inauguration of nursery for public-private restoration partnership

Brownsville, TX – May 14, 2003 – The largest estuary restoration in the United States will get a little help from Episcopal Day School (9:00 a.m.) on Thursday morning, May 15 when students plant black mangroves (*Avicennia nitida*) in the 11,000 acre barren basin off Highway 48 know as Bahia Grande. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge and Ocean Trust, a national non-profit conservation and research foundation are leading the restoration project.

“This is the beginning of a major public-private partnership to restore Bahia Grande into a functional estuary again,” said Thor Lassen, president of Ocean Trust. “We’re building a strong partnership to give everyone an opportunity to participate and to ensure the restoration of Bahia Grande is a success.”

The purchase of Bahia Grande by the USFWS and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and its incorporation into the Laguna Atascosa Wildlife Refuge was the starting point for the restoration of Bahia Grande, which was cut off from tidal water in the 1930s with the construction of the Brownsville Ship Channel. The restoration project has the support of the Brownsville – Port Isabel community and national organizations.

Project partners include the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Coastal Program, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Community-based Restoration Program, Environmental Protection Agency as federal funding partners, Ocean Trust, Gulf of Mexico Foundation and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation as private foundation partners, National Fisheries Institute (NFI), Brownsville-Port Isabel Shrimp Association, and Texas Coastal Conservation Association as commercial and sports industry partners as well as Cameron County Offices, the Brownsville Navigation District, Texas A&M University, and the schools within Brownsville, Port Isabel and Los Fresnos that surround Bahia Grande.

The mangrove nursery that will be used in the restoration was constructed by employees of Marco Sales, a shrimp importing and distribution company from Brownsville with support from a habitat restoration partnership between Ocean Trust, NOAA and NFI.

Episcopal Day School students will be the first of several area schools to replant mangroves they have been growing over the winter. Once the plants mature, they will re-propagate and spread throughout the estuary providing both an important habitat for fish and wildlife and stabilization for the soil.

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Ocean Trust is a national conservation foundation dedicated to the sustainable use of the oceans.