



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southwest Region

NEWS RELEASE

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Announces 129 Projects in Southwest Region Under President's Economic Recovery Plan

Albuquerque, N.M. – From the deserts of Arizona to the Gulf Coast of Texas, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will undertake more than 129 construction, energy efficiency, habitat restoration and other improvement projects at national wildlife refuges, fish hatcheries and other public and private lands to create jobs and ensure our nation's fish and wildlife resources, treasured landscapes, and rich heritage are conserved for future generations, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced today.

These projects total approximately \$29.9 million for improvements within the Southwest.

Funding for these projects and hundreds more across the nation comes from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Of the \$3 billion appropriated to the Department of the Interior, the Act provides \$280 million for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – which includes \$115 million for construction, repair and energy efficiency retrofit projects at Service facilities, and \$165 million for habitat restoration, deferred maintenance and capital improvement projects. The Service will benefit from an additional \$10 million, which is administered by the Department of Transportation and is not included in the Service's \$280 million appropriation that will be used to rebuild and improve roads on several national wildlife refuges. Projects will immediately create local jobs in the communities where they are located, while stimulating long-term employment and economic opportunities for the American public.

“These projects are an investment in America's future that will help get our country moving again,” Salazar said. “They will enable us to preserve our rich history and natural heritage by conserving and restoring awe-inspiring landscapes, important historic sites and crucial wildlife habitat.”

The \$29.9 million amount announced today for the Southwest Region will go to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service projects including:

- Capital Improvements: \$290,000
- Deferred Maintenance of facilities and infrastructure: \$10.6 million
- Habitat Restoration: \$7.9 million

- Construction of new visitor centers and other facilities: \$7.5 million
- Reconstruction and Repair of Service buildings and other structures: \$1.2 million
- Energy Efficiency Retrofits of Service facilities- \$2 million

The 129 projects are spread out through Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Arizona. They will benefit both National Wildlife Refuges – such as The Texas Chenier Plain Refuge Complex in Anahuac, Chambers County, TX, where more than \$6.4 million will be spent to replace the Refuge Headquarters and Visitor facility that were destroyed by Hurricane Ike – and National Fish Hatcheries throughout Arizona, where \$2.3 million will be spent to rehabilitate aging hatcheries, and make improvements to energy efficiency of hatchery operations.

Other projects throughout the region include:

- **Bahia Grande Restoration (TX)** – \$1.7 million for continued restoration of the Bahia Grande wetland unit at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. The project includes the construction of two bridges and a low water crossing to allow for better movement of water benefitting wading and water birds as well as the aquatic and marine resources of the Bahia Grande. The project will also restore other water features and tidal inflows into the system.
- **Student Employment Opportunities (Region Wide)** – \$615,000 for student employment opportunities throughout the 4-state region. Opportunities for college and high school students to participate in hands on conservation efforts will be provided on National Wildlife Refuges in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma.
- **Havasu Wildlife Refuge Improvements (AZ)** – \$1.95 million for substantive improvements in the physical water delivery and distribution facilities at Havasu National Wildlife Refuge. The project will fund improvements in the existing and highly inefficient gravity fed canals. This project will significantly improve the water delivery efficiency of the canals, and in turn, improve habitat on over 4,000 acres of refuge land.
- **Salt Cedar Removal on Bitter Lake Wildlife Refuge (NM)** – \$800,000 for further restoration and improvement of wetland-riparian, river, and upland habitat at Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Roswell. By removing salt cedar, the release of native grasses, forbs, and scattered stands of native shrubs will be promoted. Biodiversity in general will be promoted by eliminating stands of salt cedar.

All the projects announced today represent long-standing priority needs identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through its capital planning process. The Service worked through a rigorous merit-based process to identify and prioritize investments meeting the criteria put forth in the Recovery Act: namely, that a project addresses the Department's highest priority mission needs; generates the largest number of jobs in the shortest period of time; and creates lasting value for the American public.

Under the Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Department of the Interior is making an investment in conserving America's timeless natural and historical treasures, while also focusing on renewable energy projects, employing youth and promoting community service.

For a full list of funded projects nationwide, go to the Department's Recovery Web Site at <http://recovery.doi.gov/>. Secretary Salazar has pledged unprecedented levels of transparency and accountability in the implementation of the Department of the Interior's economic recovery projects. The public will be able to follow the progress of each project on the recovery web site, which will include an interactive map that enables the public to track where and how the Department's recovery dollars are being spent. In addition, the public can submit questions, comments or concerns at recoveryact@fws.gov.

Secretary Salazar also has appointed a Senior Advisor for Economic Recovery, Chris Henderson, and an Interior Economic Recovery Task Force. Henderson and the Task Force will work closely with the Department of the Interior's Inspector General to ensure the Recovery Program is meeting the high standards for accountability, responsibility, and transparency that President Obama has set.

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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