



The National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program



Since 1990, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been working with coastal States to acquire, restore, manage or enhance coastal wetlands through a matching grant program. To date, \$183 million have been awarded to 25 coastal States and 1 U.S. Territory, and more than 240,000 acres of coastal wetlands have, or will be acquired, protected or restored.

Why Protect Coastal Wetlands?

Coastal wetlands are valuable resources. They protect against flooding, help maintain water quality, and provide vital habitat for wildlife. Coastal environments are important economically, generating billions of dollars annually through such industries as tourism and commercial fisheries.

Why Are Coastal Wetlands in Trouble?

Hundreds of acres of coastal wetlands have already been lost, and additional acres have been degraded by pollution. The concentration of the U.S. population along the coast is a continuing source of development pressure. Threats to coastal resources include agricultural and urban run-off, residential and commercial development, shoreline modification, invasive species, oil spills, municipal waste disposal, and over-harvesting of fish and shell fish.

What Is the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program?

The National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program (Coastal Grants Program) was established by the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act (Act) of 1990. Under this program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provides matching grants for acquisition, restoration, management or enhancement of coastal wetlands.

Typically, between \$18 million and \$21 million in grants are awarded annually through a nationwide competitive process. Funding for the program comes from excise taxes on fishing equipment and motorboat and small engine fuels.

Who Can Apply for Grants?

Coastal States which border the Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico, Pacific and Great Lakes are eligible. The only exception is the State of Louisiana, which has its own coastal wetlands program under the Act. Also eligible are the Trust Territories and Commonwealths of the United States.

How Does Cost-Sharing Work?

States provide 50 percent of the total costs of the project. If the State has established and maintains a special fund for acquiring coastal wetlands, other natural areas or open spaces, the Federal share can be increased to 75 percent. Territories and Commonwealths are not required to provide a cost-share except for Puerto Rico. Federal grants awarded under the Coastal Grants Program cannot exceed \$1 million for an individual project.

How Do States Apply?

Eligible State agencies should submit a complete grant proposal by the deadline specified in the annual announcement. To be eligible, proposals must be substantial and must address the ranking criteria contained in the guidance, Title 50 of the Code of Regulations, Part 84.32. Applicants are encouraged to consult



Photo by USFWS

with the Regional Program Coordinators in developing their proposals.
Photo by USFWS

How Are Projects Selected?

The Service's role has been to review, rank, and select projects based on their national importance and to assist States in the planning and proposal process. Due to limited funding and considerable demand, projects are selected on a competitive basis. The Act calls for projects to be given priority if they are:

- Consistent with the criteria and considerations outlined in the National Wetlands Priority Conservation Plan.
- Located in States with dedicated funding for programs to acquire coastal wetlands, natural areas and open spaces.
- Located in maritime forests on coastal barrier islands.

Additional ranking factors that have been developed by the Service include giving credit to projects that benefit threatened and endangered species, encourage cooperative efforts, and support other ongoing projects.

What is Being Accomplished?

The Coastal Grants Program is an effective approach that assists States to acquire, restore, manage, and enhance their coastal wetland resources. The program's emphasis on encouraging partnerships, supporting watershed planning and leveraging on-going projects ensures that the use of limited funds produces in maximum benefits. Three examples of funded projects illustrate its accomplishments (see box below). The lasting results of the program will be the protection and restoration of thousands of acres of coastal wetland ecosystems nationwide. Hundreds of species of fish and wildlife and resource-based industries, like tourism and commercial fisheries, will directly benefit.



Salt panne habitat on the Madsen-Ridge Conservation Easement in Essex, Massachusetts
Credit: Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

Examples of Funded Projects

Lake Michigan Coastal Wetlands Protection, Shivering Sands Unit:

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, partnering with The Nature Conservancy and Door County Land Trust, was awarded \$1 million to acquire 468 acres in Door County, Wisconsin. The site is characterized by lakeshore, coastal wetlands, dune-swale topography, embayment lakes and large tracts of mixed conifer forest. The proposed acquisition will become part of the Shivering Sands Unit of the Cave Point to Clay Banks State Natural Area, which encompasses 4,000 acres. The project will protect habitat for two federally listed species – the endangered Hines emerald dragonfly and threatened Dwarf lake iris.

Madsen-Ridge Conservation Easement Great Marsh Estuary:

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, partnering with the Great Marsh Land Protection Team, was awarded \$353,500 to permanently protect 177 acres of coastal salt marsh and associated upland buffer through the purchase of a conservation easement. The property is located south of Plum Island Sound and the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge. The Great Marsh is the largest salt marsh in New England covering 25,000 acres. It functions as a major shellfish and fin fish nursery and is a critically important foraging and resting area for migrating birds along the Atlantic Flyway.

Stanley Point/South Willapa Bay Conservation:

The Washington Department of Ecology was awarded \$1 million to protect more than 700 acres of high quality wetlands, including estuarine emergent salt marsh, eelgrass meadows, mud flats, marsh scrub-shrub and freshwater forested wetlands in southwest Washington. The project area includes Willapa Bay, one of the most productive areas for oyster cultivation in the Pacific Northwest. The project area is also adjacent to the 15,000-acre Willapa Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

For more information about the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program, contact the Division of Habitat and Resource Conservation, Branch of Habitat Restoration at (703/358 2236) or the Division of Federal Assistance (703/358 1748), or visit us on the Internet at: http://www.ecos.fws.gov/coastal/coastal_grants/

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