



Contact: Kim Amendola
727-551-5707

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 3, 2008

NOAA Teams Up With Local Experts to Restore Alabama Shorelines

NOAA has announced plans to invest \$1 million over three years to help restore Alabama's Mobile Bay, partnering with local organizations and citizens to reverse the loss of wetlands caused by coastal development.

As part of an innovative restoration practice called "Living Shorelines," NOAA's Restoration Center will work with a number of organizations including the University of South Alabama, the Association of National Estuary Programs, and Mobile Bay National Estuary Program to use natural techniques to reduce coastal erosion, improve water quality, and prevent future damage from boat wake, storms, and climate change.

"This effort in Mobile Bay demonstrates that by working together, we can make a difference in the fight against shoreline erosion," said Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA Administrator. "Habitat restoration gives our coasts a fighting chance against ever-increasing threats, making them more resilient and resistant to dramatic change."

In the past, shorelines were typically stabilized with hardened structures, such as bulkheads and seawalls, to prevent or minimize coastal erosion. However, scientists have found that these structures can actually increase the rate of coastal degradation. Waves reflect off the hardened structures, scouring the area in front of the wall and causing additional shoreline erosion. Bulkheads and seawalls also block tidal water flow to coastal wetlands, as well as hamper natural flood control, water treatment potential, and access for juvenile fish to their nursery habitat.

Living Shorelines offer a variety of natural techniques to stabilize and restore wetlands. Some of these methods include the strategic placement of native vegetation, sand, and other organic materials, including submerged oyster reefs. Wetlands and offshore reefs reduce the force of waves naturally, preventing coastal erosion and protecting important areas near the shoreline.

"Through our relationship with NOAA, the University of Alabama will be able to expand its oyster restoration program to include the restoration of a variety of habitats," said Dr. Robert Shipp, principal investigator for the university's project team. "This expansion will enable us to have a more holistic, ecosystem-wide approach to restoring these important coastal resources."

The following Living Shorelines projects are planned for Alabama:

- Luscher Park on Dog River: The goals of this project are to control erosion, create habitat, and establish an educational site for showcasing environmentally-appropriate erosion control technologies as viable alternatives to sea walls and bulkheads. The Mobile National Estuary Program will implement this project in partnership with NOAA and the Association of National Estuary Programs.
- Alabama Oyster Reef and Fisheries Habitat Enhancement Program: The University of South Alabama will implement this multi-year program in cooperation with NOAA, conducting a scientific study to assess the multiple

benefits of near-shore oyster reef restoration to prevent shoreline erosion at both Point Aux Pines and Alabama Port in Mobile Bay. The program will assess current marine habitats; conduct large-scale habitat creation and restoration activities; undertake targeted research projects; and perform public outreach, education, and communication.

Since 1999, NOAA's Restoration Center has invested more than \$7 million in the state of Alabama. In cooperation with its partners, NOAA has restored salt marshes and seagrass, created and restored oyster reefs, and educated communities about the value of habitat and restoration. Altogether, these projects have engaged more than 1,100 volunteers and resulted in the restoration of approximately 90 acres of coastal habitat.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, 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 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.