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NOAA's Fisheries Service Announces \$12.6 Million in Grants to States to Support Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery

NOAA's Fisheries Service has announced \$12.6 million in grants through the Protected Species Cooperative Conservation Grant Program to assist 19 states and territories with conservation projects designed to recover marine mammals, sea turtles, fish, coral and other species listed under the Endangered Species Act.

"This cooperative grant program is our primary mechanism for funding state and regionally led conservation and recovery actions for our listed species," said Eric Schwaab, NOAA assistant administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "The program is part of our long-standing commitment to support the conservation efforts of our partner state and territorial agencies, who work with us to restore species' populations vital to our nation's environment and heritage."

Sixteen proposals were chosen from a pool of 35 applications, the highest number of applications received in a year since the Protected Species Cooperative Conservation Grant Program began in 2003. Authorized under Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act, this competitive grant program supports management, research and outreach efforts designed to bring listed species to the point where ESA protections are no longer necessary.

The program also supports monitoring efforts for species proposed for listing, recently de-listed species and candidate species. As a result of a significant funding increase to the grant program in fiscal year 2010, the number of states and U.S. territories entering into cooperative agreements with NOAA's Fisheries Service has almost doubled, making more state and regional conservation programs eligible to receive these grants.

The 16 proposals selected during the fiscal year 2010 grant cycle include:

1. California Department of Fish and Game (\$442,510): To develop and implement restoration tools (such as captive breeding and release) to recover the critically endangered white abalone.
2. Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife (\$1,019,486): To determine habitat requirements and migratory pathways to provide managers with essential information to recover Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon in Delaware, New Jersey and Connecticut.
3. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (\$384,997): To continue to improve management of the five species of listed sea turtles in Florida waters by monitoring distribution and habitat use, determining reproductive rates and behavior of loggerheads, and characterizing and assessing stranded sea turtles with vessel-strike injuries.
4. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (\$1,432,320): To monitor and map threatened acroporid corals in U.S. waters and enhance coral conservation programs with the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico offices.

5. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (\$779,985): To conduct research and develop outreach materials with Texas partners to assist in the recovery of smalltooth sawfish throughout Florida and the Gulf of Mexico.
6. Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources (\$493,761): To reduce shoreline disturbances and nearshore fishery interactions (e.g., entanglement and hooking) and continue long-term management of Hawaiian monk seals and sea turtles.
7. Maine Department of Marine Resources (\$315,330): To determine spatial distribution, key habitat, and movement patterns of shortnose and Atlantic sturgeon among Maine rivers and nearby states to inform management and recovery actions.
8. Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (\$291,474): To determine the causes of, reduce and respond to leatherback sea turtle entanglement.
9. Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks (\$297,714): To identify feeding habitat for and movement of juvenile and sub-adult Gulf sturgeon in the state's Pascagoula River estuary.
10. New York Department of Environmental Conservation (\$1,325,437): To collaborate with Maine, Connecticut and New Jersey partners in determining Atlantic sturgeon habitat use and movement throughout the Mid-Atlantic Bight and evaluating spatial strategies to minimize Atlantic sturgeon bycatch.
11. South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (\$1,800,800): To determine shortnose and Atlantic sturgeon movements and habitat use with North Carolina partners to inform regional conservation efforts.
12. South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (\$1,273,203): To monitor and conserve the northern recovery unit of loggerhead sea turtles with North Carolina and Georgia partners.
13. Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (\$1,425,959): To enhance conservation and management of sea turtles in Chesapeake Bay and Virginia's Ocean waters through collection of a comprehensive set of data on the life history, health and abundance of resident sea turtle species.
14. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (\$576,668): To collaborate with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in tracking coast-wide status and trends of green sturgeon and managing human caused impacts to the species.
15. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (\$232,190): Working with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to gather important population, abundance and habitat use data on humpback, fin, blue, sperm and Southern Resident killer whales to inform recovery efforts.
16. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (\$561,579): Working with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to monitor eulachon smelt abundance and distribution and evaluate fishing techniques to reduce smelt bycatch.

Applications for the 2011 grant cycle are currently being accepted and are due by Oct. 4, 2010. Interested states and territories need to have an ESA Section 6 cooperative agreement with NOAA Fisheries by Nov. 18, 2010 to be eligible to apply. For more information about Protected Species Cooperative Conservation Grants, the review and selection process, and past awards, please visit: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/conservation/states/>.

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