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New Grants Totaling More Than \$600K to Benefit Columbia River Estuary

PORTLAND, Ore. – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation today announced that seven projects designed to benefit salmon, sea birds and native plants have been selected to receive a total of \$600,000 from the Columbia River Estuarine Coastal Fund.

The seven projects will help restore tidal wetland and spruce swamp habitats, control invasive plant species and improve the quality of habitat for seabirds, wildlife and fish throughout the Columbia River watershed. The individual grants range from \$37,000 to \$200,000. Grant recipients will bring about \$600,000 in additional cash or in-kind contributions to their projects, meaning that a total of more than \$1.2 million will be added to conservation efforts.

“These projects will mitigate the environmental impacts of illegal dumping and bring additional benefits to the fish, wildlife and communities that were affected,” said Robyn Thorson, the director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Pacific Region. “It took the work of many people to ensure that the fines that followed negligent pollution went straight back to the impacted resource, and today’s announcement is a testament to their diligence.”

The Columbia River Estuarine Coastal Fund was established in 2004 to receive community service payments ordered by court settlements resulting from violations of federal pollution laws. In total, 30 projects have been funded to date through this program.

“The recovery process for several key species will surge as a result of these grants,” said Jeff Trandahl, executive director of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. “Simultaneously, more citizens of the watershed than ever before will be engaged in the restoration effort, providing a ‘win-win’ for wildlife.”

(MORE)

The projects selected to receive grant funds are:

Youngs River Island Habitat Restoration

Grantee: Columbia Land Trust

Grant Award: \$37,000 / Match: \$23,000

The project will result in the restoration of 80 acres of intertidal scrub-shrub and emergent wetland habitat in the lower Columbia River estuary. Grant funds will be used to breach a dike, remove non-native invasive plants, plant 4,750 native trees and shrubs, and monitor the results on Haven Island in the Youngs River watershed near the mouth of the Columbia River in northwestern Oregon. The project responds to a variety of established plans and priority conservation needs of the Youngs Bay Watershed and the Columbia River Estuary.

Lower Grays River Tidal Wetland Restoration

Grantee: Columbia Land Trust

Grant Award: \$96,000 / Match: \$99,000

The project will reconnect approximately 50 acres of intertidal wetlands, including tidal channel habitat, and implement actions to improve habitat function over 30 acres in the Grays River. This project will result in construction of approximately 2,000 feet of tidal channel, dike removal, invasive plant species control on 30 acres, and planting of 13,500 native plants to restore spruce swamp, intertidal scrub-shrub and riparian shoreline habitat.

Germany Creek Conservation and Restoration - Phase II

Grantee: Columbia Land Trust

Grant Award: \$95,000 / Match: \$108,000

The project will restore 25 acres of in-stream, floodplain, and riparian habitat, and permanently protect 30.63 acres of floodplain, riparian, and upland habitat on Germany Creek in Cowlitz County. The acquisition will build upon 155 acres of already conserved habitat on Germany Creek extending 1.5 miles upstream from its confluence with the Columbia River.

Nelson Creek Restoration Phase I

Grantee: Columbia Land Trust

Grant Award: \$72,000 / Match: \$157,856

Columbia Land Trust will implement a comprehensive restoration project on 180 acres to restore Sitka spruce swamp, riparian corridors, and tidal sloughs and channels. The project will benefit waterfowl, shorebirds, salmonids, endangered deer, and other faunal groups. Project partners include Willapa Hills Audubon Society, Julia Butler Hansen National Wildlife Refuge staff, and Lower Columbia College.

Miami Wetlands Enhancement

Grantee: Tillamook Estuaries Partnership

Grant Award: \$198,938 / Match: \$100,000

The project will enhance 22 acres of rare tidal spruce swamp and 30 acres of uplands in the Tillamook Bay estuary. This project will improve wildlife habitats and habitat for 5 salmon species, improve aquatic habitat and wetland connections to the Miami River, restore the historic character of the site vegetation, and permanently protect 18 acres.

The project goal is to restore historic wetland function, emphasizing habitat conditions for anadromous salmon and trout.

Ridgefield Restoration and Watershed Coordination

Grantee: Friends of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge

Grant Award: \$55,360 / Match: \$84,280

This project will continue on-the-ground long-term restoration of floodplain habitats on the Ridgefield Refuge and associated Gee Creek Watershed and will continue watershed partnerships and outreach within the community. The project includes surveying 737 acres of floodplain habitat for invasive plants and controlling key invasive plants, planting 1,340 native plants within 4 acres of riparian and oak woodland habitat, and engaging community volunteers in restoration efforts.

Nehalem Watershed Conservation Planning

Grantee: The Nature Conservancy

Grant Award: \$63,028 / Match: \$26,312

The Nature Conservancy will conduct a conservation planning effort for the Nehalem watershed to identify the most effective conservation actions to improve native fish, wildlife and habitat resources in this biologically important area. The conservation actions identified in this plan will help coordinate activities to help recover coastal coho and Chinook salmon while also benefiting a broad array of other species. As a result of this project, local conservation groups, potential funders, and other stakeholder groups will have a clear idea of where to concentrate conservation efforts in the watershed and will have built partnerships to implement that coordinated conservation vision.

Background and History

The Columbia River Estuarine Coastal Fund was established in 2004 through the collaboration of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Attorney's Office for Oregon and the Western District of Washington. An initial \$1.2 million in payments to start the fund came from fines imposed on shipping companies that illegally discharged oily waste into the Pacific Ocean. The U.S. Coast Guard, the Environmental Protection Agency's Criminal Investigative Division and the Washington Department of Ecology investigated the cases.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Portland, Oregon successfully prosecuted three foreign shipping companies charged in 2004 with violating federal pollution laws. Tipped off by whistleblowers, inspectors from the U.S. Coast Guard and the Washington State Department of Ecology conducted on-board investigations and found evidence of intentional discharges of oily waste from these ships. The shipping companies ultimately pleaded guilty to felony violations of environmental laws and were ordered to pay criminal fines and develop comprehensive environmental compliance plans to prevent future violations. A significant part of the criminal fines in each case was suspended on the condition that the suspended amounts be made as community service payments to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for conservation and restoration projects in the areas impacted by the discharges.

Among the largest community service payments ever allocated to restoration in the Pacific Northwest, the grants will directly benefit the natural resources impacted by the pollution.

Together with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation established the Fund as a grant-making program for projects in and along the Lower Columbia River below Bonneville Dam, and the coasts of Oregon (south to and including Tillamook Bay) and Washington (north to and including Willapa Bay). The Foundation will oversee implementation of the grants.

About the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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.

About the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)

A nonprofit established by Congress in 1984, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation sustains, restores and enhances the nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats. Since its establishment, the foundation has awarded nearly 10,500 grants to more than 3,000 organizations in the United States and abroad and leveraged – with its partners – nearly \$600 million in federal funds into more than \$1.4 billion for on-the-ground conservation. For more information, visit www.nfwf.org.

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