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Contact: Daphne Macfarlan
NOAA Fisheries Restoration Center
(727) 570-5697

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NOAA ANNOUNCES \$100,000 TO HELP RESTORE CLAM BAYOU

The U.S. Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) awarded \$100,000 to the city of Sanibel, Fla., for a community-based project to restore fishery habitat on Sanibel Island in Lee County. The project is funded by the Community-based Restoration Program within the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries). Funds will be used to help restore historic tidal flushing to Clam Bayou.

During the development of Southwest Florida, a road was constructed to connect Sanibel and Captiva Islands. Construction of this road obstructed all natural water flow between Clam Bayou and Dinkins Bayou, halting tidal flushing between the two mangrove dominated systems. Since this development, Clam Bayou has become an artificially impounded freshwater bayou, resulting in the complete collapse of the estuary. More than 100 acres of mangroves have been lost, healthy oyster beds have disappeared, water quality has declined, and important nursery and estuarine fisheries habitat has rapidly deteriorated.

"NOAA and the Bush Administration are committed to working with regional authorities to improve our understanding of the environment. This grant will help restore historical tidal flushing to Clam Bayou," said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "It builds awareness, appreciation, knowledge and an understanding of the NOAA Restoration Center's Community-based Restoration Program."

To restore tidal flushing between Clam Bayou and Dinkins Bayou, project partners will reconnect the systems by installing box culverts beneath Sanibel-Captiva Road. "Over the years, seeing the Clam Bayou mangroves die and witnessing the huge fish kills and the loss of seagrasses, oyster bars and saltmarsh has been a great sadness to the residents and managers of this important estuary," said Robert Loffin, Ph.D., project manager and the city of Sanibel's Natural Resources director. "The most exciting thing about this project, is that with one relatively simple action, restoring the historic tidal connection, hundreds of acres of the Clam Bayou estuary can once again reach its outstanding potential."

“Protecting and restoring essential fish habitat is critical to our efforts to manage the nation’s fisheries,” said Roy Crabtree, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region administrator. “Estuary restoration is a national priority and we join with our federal, state and local partners to make this project a reality.”

The NOAA Community-based Restoration Program has been working with community organizations to support locally-driven habitat-restoration projects in marine, estuarine and riparian areas since 1996. NOAA-funded projects provide strong on-the-ground habitat restoration components that offer educational and social benefits for people and their communities in addition to long-term ecological benefits for fishery resources. To date, nearly 800 projects in 26 states have been implemented using NOAA funding and leveraged funding from national and regional habitat restoration partners.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat.

The Commerce Department’s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation’s coastal and marine resources.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Community-based Restoration Program:

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration>