

COMMERCE NEWS

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Contact: Jim Dyke
(202) 482-4883
Gordon Helm, NOAA
(301) 713-2370
Mark Wolf-Armstrong, RAE
(703) 524-0248

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NOAA Enters Into Landmark Public-Private Partnership to Protect Nation's Estuaries

Joint \$3.4 Million Program to Restore Coastal Habitats

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA fisheries), an agency of the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) today announced a comprehensive, public-private partnership with Restore America's Estuaries (RAE), a grassroots coalition of coastal community-based organizations dedicated to restoring and protecting America's estuary habitats.

"I applaud the efforts of NOAA and RAE in making this partnership a reality," said Commerce Secretary Don Evans. "Our most successful conservation efforts begin at the grassroots level. This partnership reflects an important trend of government reaching out to local communities to gain consensus and provide the resources they need to preserve their coastal resources for future generations."

The new partnership will focus on restoring the nation's most productive marine ecosystems in its estuaries. Estuaries are the bays and sounds where rivers meet salt water, creating the ideal living environment for countless fish, shellfish, birds, and other wildlife.

The partnership with RAE is the largest single-year award made under the Community-Based Restoration Program by the NOAA Restoration Center. The three-year partnership agreement starts with a commitment this year of \$ 3.4 million from NOAA and RAE member organizations with similar levels of funding expected over the next two years. The Bush Administration and the commerce department have requested an additional \$2 million in funding to expand community-based restoration projects, bringing the total for FY 2002 to \$10 million.

"This partnership between Restore America's Estuaries and NOAA is an ideal match, with broad and far-reaching impact," said John Atkins, chair of Restore America's Estuaries and president of Save the Sound in Long Island. "The health of our nation's estuaries will be significantly improved as a direct result of this partnership."

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NOAA officials will mark the partnership at the Historical Steamboat Dock Museum in Keyport, N.J. on Saturday, July 7, 2001. This national partnership agreement will provide a minimum of \$600,000 to Hudson-Raritan estuary restoration activities over the next three years. The celebration will follow an oyster gardening event sponsored by NY/NJ Baykeeper, an RAE member organization. Volunteers including students, girl scouts, members of boat clubs and their families will plant oysters onto a restored reef in Keyport Harbor in an effort to restore oysters to Raritan Bay. Oysters are natural water filters that can contribute to improving the health of the Bay.

Under the agreement, restoration projects will be undertaken in the Gulf of Maine, Chesapeake Bay, Long Island Sound, Narragansett Bay, the Hudson-Raritan Estuary, the Albermarle and Pamlico Sounds, Louisiana's Mississippi Delta, Galveston Bay, San Francisco Bay, Puget Sound, and Tampa Bay. RAE member groups will use funding to launch an array of on-the-ground restoration projects such as the installation of fishways, salt marsh and oyster reef restoration, installation of new tide gates and the creation of salmon habitat. Other projects include exotic plant removal, marsh creation, re-vegetation and reconstruction of barrier islands, installation of streamside forest buffers, shoreline stabilization, creek clean-ups and more.

"With this strategic alliance we further our critical journey to restore the health of our estuaries, the nation's coastal sanctuaries where we live intertwined with the natural world," said Restore America's Estuaries President Mark Wolf-Armstrong. "Besides rebuilding essential habitat, this partnership will empower communities and engage thousands of volunteers toward our national goal of restoring one million acres by 2010."

In addition to funding the projects, NOAA fisheries representatives provide project monitoring and technical expertise to community-based organizations' efforts in restoring and protecting estuary habitats. The partnership represents the best of both worlds B the experience and expertise of trained scientists and the energy and drive of local citizens interested in making their community a better place to live in today and for the future. The result will be the improved health of our nation's estuaries for all to enjoy.

"Through our highly successful Community-Based Restoration Program, NOAA already has implemented nearly 200 projects involving tens of thousands of volunteers in all coastal regions of the U.S.," said Scott Gudes, acting NOAA administrator. "Building on this performance, we are proud to join with the 11 RAE member organizations to focus private and public funding on the urgent problems we face along our coasts. When the day is over, we will sleep better knowing that we have restored vital coastal resources that we all depend on."

The NOAA Restoration Center, housed in NOAA fisheries, is home to the Community-Based Restoration Program, a highly successful program involving communities in the restoration of local marine and estuarine habitat. The program has partnered with federal agencies, states, local governments, non-governmental and non-profit organizations, businesses, industry and schools to restore or protecting habitat around the nation. NOAA fisheries and its partners provide funding and expertise to coastal community projects that promote coastal stewardship and a conservation ethic.

Founded in 1995, Restore America's Estuaries is a national leader in efforts to protect, conserve, and restore estuarine habitat. The organization currently is leading a national campaign to restore one million acres of the nation's estuaries by the year 2010. Restore America's Estuaries led in the passage of the Estuary Restoration Act in 2000, establishing that goal with supportive federal legislation. Restore America's Estuaries members include 11 of the nation's top coastal community-based environmental organizations: the American Littoral Society; Chesapeake Bay Foundation; Conservation Law foundation; Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana; Galveston Bay Foundation; North Carolina Coastal Federation; People for Puget Sound; Save the Bay (Narragansett Bay); Save San Francisco Bay Association; Save the Sound (Long Island Sound); and Tampa BayWatch. These organizations represent a combined membership of over 250,000 citizens. For more information see: <http://www.estuaries.org/>.

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.

For more information on NOAA fisheries please visit: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

For more information on NOAA please visit: <http://www.noaa.gov>

For more information on the NOAA Restoration Center please visit: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/>