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**NOAA ANNOUNCES \$408,363 FOR SOUTHEAST FISHERY HABITAT RESTORATION
*Projects in Florida, North Carolina & South Carolina***

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced awards totaling \$408,363 for four local organizations in the southeastern United States to facilitate restoration of coastal and marine habitat critical to fishery resources. The projects are funded by the Community-based Restoration Program within the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries). NOAA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The awards were made on a competitive basis through NOAA's Community-based Restoration Program (CRP) and will support projects in Florida, North Carolina and South Carolina. Staff from the NOAA Restoration Center and NOAA Fisheries southeast region work closely with awardees to implement projects with community volunteers. Projects involve community members in hands-on activities from initial implementation to monitoring and maintenance, all of which promote stewardship and a heightened appreciation for living marine resources.

"NOAA and the Bush Administration are committed to working with regional authorities to improve our understanding of the environment. This grant helps to restore coastal and marine habitats critical to fishery resources," 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."

"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 following projects were awarded habitat restoration funds:

Florida

- NOAA awarded \$100,000 to the city of Sanibel to restore natural tidal flushing between Clam Bayou and Dinkins Bayou located on Sanibel Island, Lee County, Florida. Due to coastal road development, Clam Bayou has become an impounded freshwater system resulting in the complete collapse of this 470-acre mangrove dominated estuary. This hydrologic restoration project will support the installation of box culverts to reestablish tidal flow and will benefit marine fisheries by providing critical improvements to feeding, spawning and rearing habitats.

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North Carolina

- NOAA awarded \$137,493 to the city of Jacksonville to fund habitat restoration activities within the Chaney Creek watershed. Awarded funds will be used to stabilize the estuarine system through the restoration of 2 acres of salt marsh, the creation of 1.5 acres of oyster reef and the reestablishment of 1.5 acres of submerged aquatic vegetation. Significant community support and outreach will be conducted in order to educate the local community and recruit additional volunteers to help with the project.
- NOAA awarded \$114,188 to the North Carolina Coastal Federation, Inc. to fund oyster reef and salt marsh habitat creation in Stump Sound, Onslow County. The goal of this project is to create 4-acres of oyster habitat and plant 200-feet of shoreline with salt marsh to help restore Stump Sound to a more stable, productive marine system. A community outreach campaign will be conducted to educate the local community and recruit additional volunteers to assist with all aspects of the project.

South Carolina

- NOAA awarded \$56,682 to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources to fund post-restoration monitoring of oyster reef habitat restoration sites in the coastal estuaries of South Carolina. NOAA has supported the South Carolina Oyster Restoration and Enhancement Program (SCORE) for several years. SCORE has been highly successful at motivating a large volunteer force (currently more than 900 volunteers) to collect shucked oyster shell and use it to construct reefs for oyster spat settlement. The goal of the current funding is to utilize a portion of this volunteer base to aid in the scientific evaluation of reef success. Results from this study will be used to improve the science of oyster reef restoration by designing a framework of optimal restoration strategies.

NOAA's Community-based Restoration Program has been helping community organizations develop and implement habitat restoration projects of local priority since 1996. The 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. More than 150 projects in the southeast region have been implemented using NOAA funding to leverage state and local contributions. Community involvement, a key component of the program, enhances stewardship that will be critical to improving future conservation practices. NOAA Restoration Center personnel are available for advice and direction in project development and implementation.

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>