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MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
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MDEQ Announces NFWF Funded Land Acquisition Project

(JACKSON, Miss.) -- The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) announced on Thursday the receipt of a \$17.43 million grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). The money will be used to fund a project titled "The Acquisition of Priority Tracts for Coastal Habitat Connectivity – Phase I." This project was developed in consultation with state and federal resource agencies and is designed to remedy harm and reduce the risk of future harm to natural resources that were affected by the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill.

"Strategic land acquisition is a foundational step in conserving coastal habitats. By acquiring priority lands in the Coastal Preserves Program, we are systematically conserving habitats that will protect our downstream natural resources by slowing and filtering nutrient runoff, allowing for the movement of habitats, and providing a refuge for wildlife," said Gary Rikard, MDEQ Executive Director.

This project seeks to enhance coastal habitat connectivity and increase core conservation areas within the Mississippi Coastal Preserves system, the Gulf Islands National Seashore, and the Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge. The conservation of coastal habitats is one of the fundamental steps in building and maintaining a sustainable, resilient coastal environment. This project will address this conservation need by acquiring key land parcels that provide multiple long-term benefits for the Mississippi Gulf Coast ecosystem.

Priority parcels have been identified, utilizing the Mississippi Comprehensive Ecosystem Restoration Tool (MCERT), based on several key factors including adjacency to land parcels that are currently

managed by the state or federal government, the existence of a target species or habitat, and/or the susceptibility to changing conditions, such as marsh migration, changes in water salinity or quality, altered fire regime, etc. This approach represents a significant opportunity to expand and complement existing conserved lands through targeted, science-based acquisition. This project will leverage approximately \$13.5 million in RESTORE funding.

This project represents another obligation of funds to Mississippi by NFWF's Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund (GEBF). In early 2013, a U.S. District Court approved two plea agreements resolving certain criminal charges against BP and Transocean related to the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. Provisions within the plea agreements direct a total of \$2.544 billion to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation over a five-year period. From that amount, NFWF will receive more than \$356 million for projects to protect or restore natural resources in Mississippi in the aftermath of the oil spill.

For additional information on GEBF projects in Mississippi, please click [here](#).

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