



STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
PHIL BRYANT, GOVERNOR
MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
TRUDY D. FISHER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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Contacts: Robbie Wilbur, MDEQ, 601-961-5277
Melissa Scallan, MDMR, 228-523-4124

MDEQ Receives \$7.5 million for Gulf Restoration Projects in Mississippi

(Moss Point, Miss.) -- The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) today announced \$7.5 million for three Mississippi projects that address high priority conservation needs on the Mississippi coast. The projects, developed in consultation with the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality and federal resource agencies, are designed to remedy harm to natural resources that were affected by the 2010 Gulf oil spill.

The monies are the first obligations from NFWF's Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund, created earlier this year as part of the settlement between the U.S. Department of Justice, BP and Transocean to settle certain criminal charges against both companies in relation to the spill.

Today's announcement represents the initial obligation of funds from the first disbursements received by the Gulf Fund. Under the allocation formula and other provisions contained in the plea agreements, \$356 million will be paid into the Gulf Fund over the next five years for conservation projects in the State of Mississippi.

Governor Phil Bryant said, "These projects address natural resources that are vital for improved habitat, and enhances management of storm water runoff, and supports our coastal preserve management which is an essential part of protecting our pristine coastal Eco-system."

"Enjoying the outdoors is a fundamental part of being a Mississippian. These first

NFWF projects address natural resources which are at the heart of the outdoor experience. These projects will improve streams in all 3 coastal counties, and will provide improved habitat for birds in more than 20 locations. I am also very happy that 2 of our 3 projects address issues related to flooding. Our third project recognizes the importance of the Department of Marine Resources coastal preserve management which is vital to the health of our coast," said MDEQ Executive Director Trudy Fisher.

"Today's announcement represents the culmination of months of work on the part of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and our partner in these important conservation efforts, the State of Mississippi. In particular, we appreciate the efforts of Trudy Fisher, Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, whom Governor Bryant has designated as the lead representative for the state. She has worked with us to ensure these funds are directed to high priority conservation needs in Mississippi," said Jeff Trandahl, executive director and CEO of NFWF.

One of the 3 project will focus on expanding the Audubon Coastal Bird Survey program, a year-round volunteer-driven monitoring program for shorebirds that began in the wake of the oil spill. The stewardship program will focus on 22 sites in coastal Mississippi and carry out standardized monitoring; implement best management practices to secure nesting sites and reduce human use and invasive species threats; and educate diverse audiences to increase understanding of the needs and value of coastal water birds.

"Audubon is tremendously excited to be selected to assist Mississippi in its effort to restore our state's natural resources. We are confident that by working with the Mississippi restoration team, under the leadership of Trudy Fisher, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation we will achieve long-term positive results for key bird populations in our region," said Jay Woods, Executive Director/Vice President of Audubon Mississippi.

The Coastal Stream and Habitat Restoration and Management Initiative will create strategies and restoration designs to abate threats to priority coastal streams and restore associated habitat. Through a partnership among the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality's Basin Management Program, Audubon Society, and the Nature Conservancy (TNC), funding will be utilized to complete Phase I of the Initiative and will generate conservation plans and restoration design plans for coastal watersheds in several communities. These plans will be implemented as future funding opportunities become available. Audubon and TNC will be carrying out planning work in Hancock, Harrison and Jackson Counties in conjunction with local governments and citizens.

"The Nature Conservancy is excited about this opportunity to partner with MDEQ, Audubon, and most importantly the coastal communities that will be involved in this initiative. Restoration of these freshwater streams is not only critical, but highlights the connection and importance of inland conservation for the health and resiliency of coastal habitats in the Gulf," said Alex Littlejohn, Associate State Director, The Nature Conservancy.

The third project will restore and improve management of the State of Mississippi's system of Coastal Preserves to enhance the ecological value of these important coastal habitats. These actions are needed to maintain native habitats and to provide appropriate transition zones for inland migration of coastal marshes in the face of sea level rise. Actions on 26 Coastal Preserve sites will utilize invasive species control and native vegetation plantings to restore ecological function to these unique and important habitats.

The program intends to target the most threatening and destructive invasive species including Chinese tallow, giant salvinia, common salvinia, and water hyacinth. By strategically restoring wetlands and removing invasive species, the Coastal Preserves Program project will revitalize ecologically and economically important fish and wildlife resources.

Jamie Miller, Executive Director for the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, said, "This NFWF funding will allow Mississippi to take an important step in enhancing our coastal preserves."

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