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East Bay Wetland and Water Quality Protection Project Receives GULF GUARDIAN AWARD

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STENNIS SPACE CENTER, Miss. – The Gulf of Mexico Program recently announced that the East Bay Wetland and Water Quality Protection Project in the Galveston Bay system will receive a first place Gulf Guardian Award for 2007 in the Partnership Category. The awards will be presented during the 2007 Clean Gulf Conference on November 14, 2007 at the Embassy Suites Hotel, Bayside Ballroom in Tampa, Florida beginning at 6 p.m.

In Spring 2006, the East Bay Wetland and Water Quality Protection project partners placed 17,000 feet of erosion control structures to protect and restore 7984 acres of diverse coastal habitats along the East Bay shoreline at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), one of the most pristine areas in the Galveston Bay system, from several erosion and saltwater intrusion. Local citizens, students, and Boy Scouts planted cordgrass to restore marshes behind the erosion control structures. Partners included Gulf of Mexico Program, USFWS ANWR and Texas Coastal Program, Galveston Bay Foundation, EPA, NRG Texas LLC, National Fish and Wildlife Federation, Shell Oil, NOAA, Restore America's Estuaries, Galveston Bay Estuary Program, USDA/NRCS and TCEQ.

In addition, eighty two local citizens, students and Boy Scouts planted smooth cordgrass at Marsh Mania events in 2006 and 2007 in an effort to involve and educate participants on the functions and values of wetlands. 16,802 feet of concrete erosion control structures, and 200 feet of reef domes were placed, totaling 17,002 feet of shoreline protection. Project partners monitor and compare the effectiveness of the rip-rap and reef ball shoreline protection techniques. The breakwaters protected 400 acres of intertidal marsh, and subsequently protected 301 acres of brackish marsh, 5,675 acres of intermediate marsh, and 1,601 acres of salty prairie from saltwater intrusion and habitat degradation. Volunteers planted smooth cordgrass behind 1,500 linear feet of the breakwater to restore 7 acres of intertidal marsh. As of summer 2007, marsh continues to rapidly accrete behind the breakwater structures, and in some areas has actually extended beyond them.

The Gulf of Mexico Program initiated the Gulf Guardian awards in 2000 as a way to recognize and honor the businesses, community groups, individuals, and agencies that are taking positive steps to keep the Gulf healthy, beautiful and productive. A first, second, and third place award are given each year in seven categories individual, business, youth and education, nonprofit organizations, government, partnership and bi-national efforts.

"Gulf Guardian awards showcase accomplishments from a broad spectrum of environmental leaders -- from committed individuals to dynamic corporations" EPA Regional Administrator Richard E. Greene said. "I applaud their success in preserving the vital resources of the Gulf Coast, one of our most valuable national treasures"

The Gulf of Mexico Program began in 1988 to protect, restore, and maintain the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem in economically sustainable ways. The Gulf of Mexico Program is underwritten by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is a non-regulatory, inclusive consortium of state and federal government agencies and representatives of the business and agricultural community, fishing industry, scientists, environmentalists, and community leaders from all five Gulf States. The Gulf Program seeks to improve the environmental health of the Gulf in concert with economic development.

Bryon Griffith, Director of the Gulf of Mexico Program said "This is the 8th year of the Gulf Guardian Awards Program and I am proud to say that each year the winners in all categories have represented the very best of environmental accomplishments in the Gulf of Mexico. The 2007 award winners truly exemplify the bond that enthusiastic and committed citizens, communities, governments, and businesses share in addressing complex problems to improve, protect, and sustain our regional and national treasure, the Gulf of Mexico."

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