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News Release



For Immediate Release

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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE AWARDS \$70 MILLION IN GRANTS TO SUPPORT LAND ACQUISITION AND CONSERVATION PLANNING FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today awarded more than \$70 million in grants to 29 states - including two to Oregon - to support conservation planning and acquisition of vital habitat for threatened and endangered fish, wildlife, and plant species. The grants will benefit species ranging from the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker in the Southeast to the threatened spectacled eider in Alaska.

Funded through the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund and authorized by Section 6 of the U.S. Endangered Species Act, the grants will enable States, working in partnership with private landowners, conservation groups and other agencies and organizations to initiate conservation planning efforts, and to acquire and protect habitat to support the conservation of threatened and endangered species.

“Today’s grant awards recognize the important work that States and their partners are doing to conserve and recover threatened and endangered species. Grants are an important tool in our efforts to empower local governments and citizens as they seek to develop voluntary conservation partnerships that provide real benefits to listed species,” said Interior Secretary Gale Norton.

The Section 6 grant programs include the \$6.6 million Habitat Conservation Planning Assistance Grants Program, the \$51.1 million Habitat Conservation Plan Land Acquisition Grants Program, and the \$12.7 million Recovery Land Acquisition Grants Program. The three programs were established to help reduce potential conflicts between the conservation of threatened and endangered species and land development and use.

“As someone who has worked for decades at the State and local level on behalf of wildlife conservation, I know these grants really help,” said Fish and Wildlife Service director Steve Williams. “They provide not only a financial boost to grantees but also provide encouragement by supporting on-the-ground efforts.”

Under the Habitat Conservation Plan Land Acquisition Program, the Service provides grants to States or Territories for land acquisitions associated with approved Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs). Grants do not fund any mitigation required of an HCP permittee, but are instead intended to support acquisitions by the State

or local governments that complement actions associated with the HCP.

A Habitat Conservation Plan is an agreement between a landowner and the Service that allows the landowner to incidentally take a threatened or endangered species in the course of otherwise lawful activities when the landowner agrees to conservation measures to minimize and mitigate the impact of the taking. A Habitat Conservation Plan may also be developed by a county or state to cover certain activities of all landowners within their jurisdiction and may address multiple species. There are more than 330 Habitat Conservation Plans currently in effect covering approximately 30 million acres, and some 320 more are being developed.

In Riverside County, California, a \$6.25 million grant will enable the State and its partners to acquire and protect important interconnected habitat to support the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP). This HCP will cover more than 100 Federal and State listed species, including the threatened coastal California gnatcatcher, endangered least Bell's vireo and Stephen's kangaroo rat. The plant communities found in the area, such as Riversidean sage scrub and riparian habitat are representative of the original, native habitats of the region. Preserving these areas as open space will also enable them to be used for outdoor recreational activities such as hiking and mountain biking.

The Habitat Conservation Planning Assistance Program provides grants to States and Territories to support the development of Habitat Conservation Plans, through funding of baseline surveys and inventories, document preparation, outreach, and similar planning activities.

In northern Idaho, a \$563,000 HCP Planning Assistance Grant will help the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) work with the Service and other stakeholders to develop a Habitat Conservation Plan to minimize any impacts of IDL activities to listed species. The HCP will provide conservation benefits to listed threatened and endangered species, including grizzly bear, bull trout, lynx, and the critically endangered woodland caribou, while providing the State of Idaho with assurances that important land management practices can continue. Both Idaho and the species will benefit from this HCP. IDL will be able to fulfill its mandate to maximize the long term return from these endowment lands to the beneficiaries with certainty regarding compliance with the Endangered Species Act, and the conservation of listed species will be enhanced.

The Recovery Land Acquisition Grants Program provides funds to states and territories for acquisition of habitat for endangered and threatened species in support of approved recovery plans. Acquisition of habitat to secure long term protection is often an essential element of a comprehensive recovery effort for a listed species.

For example, a grant of nearly \$1.7 million will enable the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and the Nature Conservancy to acquire portions of the Kyles Ford mussel shoal along the Clinch River, an area believed to be among the most biologically diverse endangered mussel habitats on Earth. The parcel that will be acquired is home to 10 Federally endangered mussel species. By acquiring property along the river corridor, instituting buffer strips, stabilizing stream banks and preventing runoff and sedimentation, this project will mark a significant step in efforts to permanently protect the Clinch River, its habitats, and fauna, and to recover these rare mussel species.

For more information on the 2003 grant awards for these programs see the Service's Endangered Species home page at <http://endangered.fws.gov/grants/index.html>.

Habitat Conservation Planning Assistance Grants in Oregon:

- 1. Agate Desert Multi-species Vernal Pool HCP/WCP (Jackson County, OR)** - A \$143,000 grant will be used to develop a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), coordinated with a State Wetland Conservation Plan (WCP) for the vernal pool wetlands in the urban core of the Agate Desert north of Medford, Oregon, in and around the unincorporated town of White City. These plans would provide the framework for the coordinated conservation of three federally listed species (threatened vernal pool fairy shrimp and two endangered plants associated with vernal pools) and a host of other rare species associated with the unique vernal pools. Coordinated planning will reduce degradation and loss of this unique habitat.
- 2. HCP/EIS for Western Snowy Plover in Oregon (Clatsop, Tillamook, Lincoln, Lane, Douglas, Coos, and Curry Counties, OR)** - A \$200,000 grant will help the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department develop a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that not only provides for the conservation of the western snowy plover, but also takes into account the importance of some 230 miles of sandy ocean beaches for human recreation. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department has jurisdiction over most coastal beaches, including much of the critical habitat essential for the conservation and recovery of the species.

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 542 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

For more information about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Oregon, visit our home page at <http://OregonFWO.fws.gov>, or the Service's Pacific Regional page at <http://Pacific.fws.gov>, or the Service's National page at www.fws.gov

