

NORTH AMERICAN

WETLANDS

CONSERVATION ACT

project flash

Oregon Partnerships Receive \$100,000 for Wetlands Project

On June 9, 2004, the North American Wetlands Conservation Council reported to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission that it had approved **\$100,000** in funding under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act's Small Grants Program for **two projects in Oregon**. The Act is nonregulatory and calls for voluntary partnerships to develop and implement wetlands and associated uplands conservation projects to benefit wildlife. Projects must meet certain biological criteria to be considered for funding, and partners must be able to match the grant request 1:1 with nonfederal funds.

Estuary and freshwater wetlands along Oregon's northern coastline provide essential migration and wintering habitat for **Pacific Flyway** waterfowl populations. These wetlands also provide critical rearing and migration habitat for at-risk coastal salmon populations and support a rich diversity of other wildlife, including shorebirds, waterbirds, and songbirds. Losses of coastal wetlands have been dramatic—up to 75 percent of Oregon's tidal salt marshes have been destroyed or highly altered—and remaining areas face intense development pressure.

Alder Creek Farm Acquisition and Restoration Project

The Nehalem Estuary, like other Oregon coastal estuaries, has experienced dredging, filling, ditching, draining, diking, and canalization. These activities have significantly reduced the amount of suitable habitat for aquatic species and migratory birds in this region. This estuary has lost an estimated 40 percent of its most productive high-salt marshes to filling and diking alone.

The Nehalem River system in **Tillamook County** in **Congressional District 5** supports some of the Oregon coast's most important anadromous fish runs. The American Fisheries Society identified the Nehalem Estuary as a high-priority corridor for protection and restoration under its proposed strategy for maintaining of aquatic diversity. Oregon coastal coho salmon are on the federal endangered species list, and Nehalem chum salmon are at very low levels. In addition, housing developments and farming have removed much of the grazing land once available to elk and threaten to remove more.

The Alder Creek Farm, nestled just off highway 101, between the City of Nehalem and the Bayside Gardens neighborhood, is north of the Nehalem Estuary, and its eastern boundary abuts Nehalem City Park. The property has been used as a dairy farm since the early 1900s. Two thousand feet of Alder Creek crosses the farm. Most of the riparian trees along this section of the creek were cut down long ago. The lower end of the creek was diked to keep tidal water off the farmland, and drainage ditches were used to facilitated water removal.

The Lower Nehalem Community Trust (Trust) and its partners, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board,

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Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Tillamook Estuaries Partnership, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., and Tillamook County Oregon State University Extension Service, will use their **\$50,000** grant and **\$220,752** in matching funds to acquire the 50-acre farm and place it under a permanent conservation easement. They will replant 1,600 feet of riparian area, create pools within the creek for wintering salmon, remove a levee to create additional tidal wetlands, and restore freshwater wetlands. Finally, the entire farm will be open for educational and recreational use by the public.

The partnership's efforts contribute to the conservation goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan's **Pacific Coast Joint Venture**. Dusky and cackling Canada geese, mallard, northern pintail, greater and lesser scaups, and Pacific greater white-fronted goose are among the waterfowl species that will benefit from this project. Over 60,000 Canada geese migrate through the area, and counts of wintering American wigeon have reached 28,000. The project will benefit numerous species of songbirds and shorebirds as well.

For more information about this project, contact Gareth Ferdun, Lower Nahalem Community Trust, gareth@ferdun.net, (503) 368-5738, or Keith Morehouse, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, keith_morehouse, (703) 358-1784.

Upper Yaquina Estuary Acquisition Project

Approximately 70 percent of the historic Yaquina Bay estuarine marshes have been lost to filling, diking, and ditching. Protecting the remaining marshes and enhancing and restoring the habitat are essential to help conserve the diversity and enormity of wildlife and fish species found in and around the bay.

In the spring, large numbers of Pacific brant use the bay's estuary for staging as they migrate north from Mexico. The bay is only one of three locations in Oregon where brant are found wintering. Tens of thousands of mallards and northern pintails stopover in the bay during migration, and up to 500 Pacific greater white-fronted geese at any one time stop to feed and loaf in the tidal marshes and adjoining seasonal wetlands. Wood ducks are present year-round, and small numbers breed throughout the project area in freshwater wetlands. American wigeon are the most abundant waterfowl species found within the project area, with as many as 10,000 wintering birds having been recorded. The bay's marshes support the second highest waterfowl use-area in the State.

The bay's marshes also provide critical habitat for species listed under the Endangered Species Act: coho salmon, bald eagle, and marbled murrelet, and they are key habitats for state sensitive anadromous fish species, including chum salmon and Pacific lamprey, as well as for sea-run cutthroat trout and steelhead trout.

The Wetlands Conservancy, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, Central Coast Land Conservancy, and MidCoast Watersheds Council Estuarine Habitat Technical Committee will use their **\$50,000** grant, plus **\$54,050** in matching funds, to acquire **61.8 acres** of the bay's estuarine marsh in **Lincoln County in Congressional District 5**. This project complements conservation work already accomplished by the partnership: the acquisition of 500 acres of wetlands and uplands adjacent to this project's 61.8-acre parcel. Their work also advances the conservation goals of the **Pacific Coast Joint Venture**.

For more information about this project, contact Esther Lev, The Wetlands Conservancy, estherlev@wetlandsconservancy.org, (503) 691-1394, or Keith Morehouse, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, keith_morehouse@fws.gov, (703) 358-1784.