



## **President Announces Wetlands Initiative on Earth Day**

- **President Bush celebrated Earth Day in Wells, Maine, where he visited with volunteers helping protect a wetland that is home to abundant wildlife and helps cleanse water reaching the Atlantic Ocean.**
- **New figures released today by the U.S. Department of Agriculture show that, for the first time in history, America has reversed the annual net loss of wetlands on our farms.** Overall, we are nearing the national goal of "no net loss" of wetlands reaffirmed by President Bush in 2002.
- **The President announced an aggressive new national goal – moving beyond a policy of "no net loss" of wetlands to have an overall increase of wetlands in America each year.** To meet this goal, the President called on Congress to pass his FY 2005 budget request, which includes \$4.4 billion for conservation programs that include funding for wetlands – an increase of \$1.5 billion (53%) over FY 2001.
- The FY 2005 budget proposes to spend \$349 million on our two key wetlands programs – the Wetlands Reserve Program and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act Grants Program -- which is an increase of more than 50% over FY 2001 for those two programs.

### **Background**

**President Bush's Strategy For Increasing Wetlands Acres and Quality Restore, Improve, and Protect: Through a combined effort, the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture and Transportation, EPA, Army Corps of Engineers, and NOAA will, over the next five years:**

- Restore and create at least 1 million acres of wetlands;
- Improve the quality of at least 1 million acres of wetlands;
- Protect at least 1 million acres of wetlands.
- The benefits of these outcomes will be enhanced by further efforts to improve associated uplands and river habitat so that, for example, ducks not only will have the wetland they need for food, but good dry land habitat nearby for nesting.

### **Better Tracking of Wetland Programs:**

- Complete the next National Wetlands Inventory by the end of 2005, instead of the current 2010 due date, and move to more frequent reviews beginning in 2006;
- Improve interagency coordination on remote sensing and ground level data collection on gain, loss, and quality;
- Gain further experience and develop useful protocols for measuring wetland outcomes.

### **Enhance Local Collaboration:**

- The Bush Administration places a premium on and is implementing cooperative conservation efforts as a better way to achieve and sustain success.
- The Department of the Interior today announced a new tool for working in cooperation with local landowners to protect wetlands through a simplified process in the Prairie Pothole region of the Northern Plains states.

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**Moving to an Increase in Wetland Acres and Quality from No Net Loss policy. Wetlands benefit fish and wildlife, reduce flooding, improve water quality, and provide fishing, bird-watching, hunting, and educational opportunities to millions of Americans. The lower 48 states currently contain 110 million acres of wetlands.**

- In January 2001, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released its National Wetlands Inventory which found that the rate of wetland losses had dropped dramatically to an estimated annual net loss of 58,500 acres of wetlands, down from an estimated 290,000 acre annual net loss during 1975 to 1984, and an estimated 458,000 acre annual net loss during 1955 to 1974.
- Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture released its National Resource Inventory of non-federal lands in the lower 48 states covering the period 1997 to 2002, which found agricultural land accounted for a net gain of roughly 26,000 wetland acres per year.
- The President successfully expanded and enhanced the incentive and partnership programs for restoring, improving, and protecting wetlands as a first step in putting the Nation on a path to increasing wetlands. Most significantly, this effort included securing historic funding for 2002 Farm Bill conservation programs that over 10 years would deliver \$40 billion of conservation funds, reauthorizing the NAWCA partnership programs, enhancing fish and wildlife partnership programs and developing new, cooperative conservation programs.
- The President's FY 2005 budget requests more than \$4 billion for conservation programs that include wetlands, notably the Farm Bill Wetlands Reserve Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Conservation Technical Assistance Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (\$1.4 billion more than FY 2001 enacted); \$54 million for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act Grants Program (\$14 million more than FY 2001 enacted); \$50 million for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (\$13 million more than FY 2001 enacted) and \$13 million for the Coastal Program (\$3.7 million more than FY 2001 enacted).

**The increases in these and other programs included in the Initiative will leverage significant additional matching funds from state, localities, the private sector, and conservation, recreation, and sportsmen organizations.**

- In order to protect against losses in the regulatory permitting program for impacts caused by highway construction or private development, the Administration initiated a new Mitigation Action Plan to achieve and monitor success of restoring wetlands to offset any necessary loss. In December 2003, the President reiterated his commitment to assuring no net loss, following a Supreme Court ruling that removed federal regulatory protection of certain isolated wetlands. His FY 2005 budget includes an additional \$5 million to help states address the gap created by the Court.

**About Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve.**

- The Reserve is part of the National Estuarine Research Reserve, a partnership program between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the coastal states. The Reserve hosts about 45,000 visitors each year and includes 1600 acres of diverse coastal northeast habitat types, beaches, dunes, salt marshes, open fields, forest, rivers, and fresh water wetlands.
- Two wetlands restoration projects are underway at the Reserve. The Drakes Island community salt marsh project is restoring hydrology and enhancing 77 acres of salt marsh habitat, and received the Coastal America's Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership Award. The Wheeler marsh restoration project improved 15 acres of salt marsh and intertidal mudflats through the partnership of the Town of York, NOAA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Ducks Unlimited.

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