

COASTAL AMERICA 2010 AWARDS PROGRAM NOMINATION FORM

Please circle the award type (only one) you are recommending this team for:
Partnership Award - Spirit Award - Special Recognition Award

1. Full Name of Nominated Team: Florida Panhandle Living Shoreline Initiative .

2. Nominator Contact Information:

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3. What is the lead Federal Agency (if any) for this project? (Or lead organization for Special Recognition Awards): U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

4. Please provide an overview of the project you are nominating (1 page max.) Include a short abstract (200 words max) describing the project, including its objectives, scope and longevity. Also, address how the project supports Coastal America's mission and goals. Questions to consider are: How does the project demonstrate the "value added" of a partnership effort? (I.e. how did the partners collaborate to accomplish what a single entity could not accomplish alone?) This section should also describe how the partners have worked with the Regional Implementation Team in the development of the project.

ABSTRACT: Together with several partners, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Florida Panhandle Coastal Program formed the Panhandle Living Shoreline Initiative to establish living shorelines (LSL) as the primary means for protecting eroding shorelines in the coastal areas of northwest Florida where needed, thereby steering coastal protection towards soft alternatives and away from hardening. Seawalls often the default tool used to prevent erosion, can cause many problems including loss of habitat. Constructing LSLs in appropriate areas is one way to help preserve the ecological services that natural low to medium energy shorelines provide. Salt marsh, bivalve reef, and submerged aquatic vegetation habitats are considered "poor and declining," by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the LSI approach benefits all. Educating property owners about LSLs is key.

Initiative goals include: 1) Encouraging use of soft alternatives for shoreline protection instead of hardening. 2) Development of best management practices for LSLs 3) Working with government agencies to establish a "green tape" regulatory process for LSLs 4) Establishing community partnerships with schools and civic organizations to grow plants for shoreline restoration. 5) Promoting LSLs through education and outreach with large audiences including private property owners, public land managers, contractors, regulators, and local officials.

NARRATIVE: Our Panhandle Living Shoreline Initiative grew out of a meeting with a small group of coastal partners who got together in 2006 to talk about LSL and Grasses in Classes, a program that involves school children in growing plants to be used for salt marsh restoration. In June 2008, Initiative partners hosted a LSL workshop in Panama City, and about 150 people participated! Although LSL-type projects were being constructed along the coastlines of Florida and other states long before they became known as LSLs, the Initiative helped bring attention to soft alternatives for shoreline protection and promote a "green tape" regulatory process for such projects.

In November 2011, the Northwest Florida District of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) adopted LSI-friendly language into new environmental resource permitting laws for eroding shorelines <150 feet long. If a property owner meets certain criteria, they no longer need a state permit to plant native wetland vegetation or install an oyster breakwater within 10 feet of mean high water line.

Panhandle LSL Initiative goals and objectives are relevant beyond the Panhandle, Coastal Program partners around the rest of the state have hosted several more workshops since 2008, and have evolved into a state-wide LSL Initiative working together around the coast of Florida.

Our initiative partners are targeting small property-owners, including those who have requested seawall permits from DEP, and helping them to design and construct LSLs where appropriate. We have also constructed large-scale LSLs. This has been a great outreach project that has resulted in on-the-ground restoration and much education. The program is ongoing and we expect these benefits to continue.

5. Project Need and Resource Benefits/Outputs (2 pages max.) Provide a summary of the project background and the expected resource benefits. For restoration projects, describe any long-term monitoring/management program. For education and outreach projects, describe how the project supports the conservation goals of the partnering organizations. If appropriate, include a description of how the project supports existing Federal, State, and local conservation plans, projects and programs.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is to work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The USFWS' Coastal Program was established to support that mission in high priority coastal areas through a watershed-based, pro-active, non-regulatory, and voluntary approach to fish and wildlife conservation. The program seeks to achieve on-the-ground restoration results and provides technical assistance and funding to help do so. Partnerships with other agencies and private groups are essential for program success. After the first Chesapeake Bay/Estuary Program was established in 1985, the Coastal Program evolved into a nationwide network of 22 entities, including the Florida Panhandle Coastal Program (FPCP), which was established in 2001.

The FPCP's objective is to protect, conserve, restore, and enhance coastal areas and resources, including coastal wetlands and uplands, estuaries, and riparian corridors within northwest Florida. The FPCP serves 16 counties, which include 250 miles of shoreline along the Gulf of Mexico. This fringe of bays and estuaries supports hundreds of species of wildlife, including the federally protected Gulf sturgeon, Florida manatee, piping plover, beach mice, and sea turtles. Also, our coastal upland areas feature an ecologically rare and fragile system of coastal dune lakes.

Although some states are pro-active in their shoreline management, no federal agency has been tasked to provide coastal planning at a national level according to a 2007 report by the National Resource Council. To help turn the tide on coastal armoring, multiple partners have established a Living Shoreline Initiative to establish living shorelines as the primary means of erosion prevention in the coastal areas of northwest Florida. The goal is to steer coastal protection toward soft alternatives and away from hardening. In a state where nearly 80% of the residents live near the coast, there are still some natural, undeveloped shorelines left in the Panhandle that we can help preserve. The Living Shoreline Initiative is also broadening program emphasis beyond the Panhandle of Florida to the rest of the state.

A living shoreline is a coastline treatment that offers a soft alternative to armoring by using natural habitat elements for erosion control. Living shorelines provide habitat for estuarine, coastal, and riverine organisms through strategic placement of native vegetation, sand fill, organic materials, and/or rock or shell.

A functioning living shoreline can among other services:

- protect and stabilize the shore at the land/surface water interface by attenuating waves, absorbing wave energy, and buffering uplands from storms;
- reduce velocity of upland stormwater runoff to surface waters;
- trap sediment for vegetative growth;
- maintain tidal water exchange;
- improve water quality by filtering nutrients and pollutants;
- create a natural buffer between water and land providing wildlife habitat;
- facilitate movement of estuarine species into freshwater wetlands; and
- provide shade, thereby lowering water temperatures and increasing oxygen retention.

There are two basic types of living shorelines approaches. The first, suitable for low-moderate wave energy areas, is a totally soft option with no hard structure. It includes natural vegetation (salt marsh, submerged aquatic vegetation, upland shrubs, and trees), biodegradable materials (fiber logs, organic matting) to provide stabilization until the plants become established, and sand fill (if necessary) for installation of native plants.

The second type of living shoreline approach, suitable for shorelines with higher wave energy, is a hybrid between hard and soft applications. It uses the same materials as the soft application but also includes a breakwater that could be built from a minimum amount of rock, rubble, oyster/shell, or wood structures to hold the soft materials in place, and can provide the wave attenuation needed to allow planted native plants to become established. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the state agency responsible for restoring oyster reefs for the benefit of improved harvest, is now expanding its efforts beyond its traditional role in harvestable waters to non-harvestable areas, where those areas can benefit from the ecological services oysters provide. These services, provided by hundreds of thousands of “bivalve engineers”, include filtering nutrients and suspended material; improving water quality and clarity; providing habitat and food sources for a host of fish, birds, and other invertebrates; and protecting the shoreline.

6. Partnership functioning - Funding & Other Support (1 page max.) Provide an overview description of each of the partners involved in the project. Include a breakout of the financial and in-kind support provided by each of the individual partners along with a one sentence summary of each element's contribution(s).

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Florida Panhandle Coastal Program (FWS) works cooperatively with multiple partners to promote and support use of environmentally-friendly methods of shoreline stabilization for the benefit of fish and wildlife and people; catalyzed formation of the Panhandle Living Shoreline Initiative; provided in-kind support and nearly \$1 million of funding since 2002 for LSL projects, development of best management practices, coastal resource protection, and public education.

Bay Area Resource Council provides staff to act as Project Coordinator for the implementation of the Northwest Florida Grasses in Classes Program which incorporates the principles of the Living Shoreline Initiative by including school children to grow and plant shoreline vegetation. In-kind: \$32,000. Grant funding (non-USFWS): \$19,905.

Florida Department of Environmental Protection Ecosystem Restoration Section provides design, consultation, logistical support and on-the-ground efforts to coastal property owners throughout the Florida panhandle interested in utilizing LSL methodologies to provide shoreline stabilization and intertidal habitat. In-kind: \$280,000. Grant funding (non-USFWS): \$50,000.

Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance brings together partners and stakeholders, leveraging funding and technical expertise to successfully implement on-the ground LSL projects and Grasses in Classes programs in the Choctawhatchee Bay watershed. Grant funding (non-USFWS): \$683,200. In-kind: \$676,000.

Ecological Consulting Services, Inc. (ECS) designed and managed shoreline protection and restoration project at Deadman's Island, Gulf Breeze, using LSL techniques to protect historical and ecological resources, and did smaller projects with residents. Grant funding (non-USFWS): \$1,148,000. City of Gulf Breeze cash and in-kind: \$1,335,000. ECS in-kind: \$10,000.

Apalachicola Riverkeeper constructed LSL demo project on Apalachicola Bay; worked with property owners to encourage use of LSL methods for shoreline stabilization; developed public outreach materials about natural coastal resources and LSLs; worked with county officials to incorporate LSL concepts into local shoreline ordinance. In-kind: \$195,500. Grant funding (non-USFWS): \$64,500.

University of Florida Sea Grant Extension Program for Santa Rosa, Escambia, Okaloosa-Walton, and Bay Counties provides assistance with educational signage and community workshops on living shorelines, aquatic habitats, and stormwater runoff. In-kind: \$7,200.

St. Andrew Bay Resource Management Association conducted water quality analysis, compiled coastal wildlife surveys, and worked with private property owners to use LSLs techniques for shoreline stabilization, including bulkhead removal prior to planting. In-kind: \$86,000.

Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve plays an important role in educating the public, including children, about natural coastal resources and use of soft shoreline techniques for shoreline stabilization, helps develop LSL projects, and organize volunteers for them. In-kind: \$5550.

7. Team Partners: List all partners and identify project/team leads with an asterisk (*). Please provide all contact information using the format as shown in question 2 above.

IMPORTANT: If approved; only team members identified in this form will be eligible to receive the Coastal America Award. Please ensure that you correctly identify ALL TEAM MEMBERS.

Partners:

Apalachicola Riverkeeper
Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve
Bay Area Resource Council*
Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance*
FDEP Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas
FDEP Northwest District Environmental Resource Permitting Program*
FDEP Ecosystem Restoration Section*
Santa Rosa County Extension Office*
Okaloosa County Extension Office
Bay County Extension Office
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*
Escambia County Extension Office
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Project/Team Leads*

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Additional Information: All nominations must be submitted to the Coastal America National Coordinating Office. Winners will be selected and awardees will be notified in accordance with the published milestone schedule. Project photos are welcomed as accompaniments to Award Nomination forms. All materials should be sent via email to the Award Program Coordinator

Contact:
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