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## **COASTAL RESTORATION PROJECT CELEBRATES EARTH DAY AND AUDUBON CENTENNIAL**

(Abbeville, La. 4/22/05) On Friday, representatives of the National Audubon Society, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana (CRCL), Restore America's Estuaries (RAE) and Vermilion Parish joined with members of the public at the Vermilion Parish Library in Abbeville to celebrate completion of a 640 acre coastal restoration project located in the Paul J. Rainey Audubon Sanctuary. The event was held on the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day, which commemorates environmental citizenship worldwide. Completion of this project marks the successful partnership of the public and private sector, and one of the largest NOAA - RAE community-based restoration efforts in the country.

The restoration project constructed approximately 36,000 linear feet of earthen terraces within the Paul J. Rainey Wildlife Sanctuary, the National Audubon Society's oldest and largest wildlife refuge. The terraces were constructed in open water areas of the refuge that had previously been healthy marsh. Marsh within this area, like much of coastal Louisiana, has

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eroded due to altered hydrology, subsidence, and storm damage. Reestablishing marsh via the construction of terraces will provide critical habitat to fish, birds, and other wildlife, as well as reduce erosion along the shoreline of adjacent wetlands.

Construction of this \$820,000 project was funded in part by a direct Congressional appropriation to the Department of Natural Resources, a community-based restoration grant from the NOAA Restoration Center and RAE-CRCL, and by direct and in-kind contributions from the National Audubon Society. In addition to these partners, the project has been supported by Vermilion Parish entities and local school groups including Lafayette Middle School that participated in vegetative plantings of the terraces. Throughout the course of the year additional planting days and educational workshops will be conducted with school groups within the area.

Speaking on behalf of NOAA, Chief of Staff Scott Rayder affirmed the importance of community based restoration efforts. “The partnership generated by the Rainey Sanctuary Restoration Project demonstrates these organizations' commitment to restoring habitat that benefits fisheries, birds, and wildlife,” Rayder said. “This habitat restoration effort supports NOAA’s goal of ecosystem based management, and promotes local stewardship of the habitats that sustain our nation’s fisheries resources.”

Completion of this project exemplifies the conservation goals of the National Audubon Society which is celebrating their centennial anniversary. In 1905 Theodore Roosevelt served as the founding president, and the society remains the nation’s leading bird conservation organization today. Throughout 2005, the National Audubon Society is celebrating 100 years of protecting birds and other wildlife and the habitat that supports them.

Audubon Chief Operating Officer Robert Perciasepe pointed to the importance of sustaining wildlife habitat along Louisiana's diminishing coast and also taking a comprehensive approach to resolving the current coastal crisis. “More and more, Audubon is finding that one of

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the most effective ways to sustain wildlife habitat in the face of dramatic losses is to restore important areas that have been degraded, while also working to prevent the larger problems that caused the degradation in the first place," said Perciasepe. "We hope that this wonderful, collaborative project motivates us all to work toward the restoration of the entire coastal Louisiana area and to tackle the tough up stream issues that affect this magnificent resource."

The development of community-based partnerships demonstrates the ability of Louisiana's citizens to render every asset useful in the pursuit of a sustainable Louisiana coast. These achievements make a powerful statement about the commitment of Louisiana's citizens, our communities and our government agencies to combine local resources with federal programs to implement meaningful restoration and support larger restoration initiatives.

CRCL Executive Director Mark Davis noted the importance of community based restoration projects as an important component in the comprehensive effort to protect and restore Louisiana's coast. "The completion of this project reflects the commitment of the citizens of Louisiana to protecting and restoring valuable wildlife habitat. The Audubon Rainey Sanctuary Project is a fitting example of what can be accomplished when we combine our resources and work together towards a sustainable future for our coast, our communities and our way of life."

Gerry Duszynski, Assistant Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources also expressed his support for the role that community based restoration projects play in protecting coastal Louisiana. "The Department of Natural Resources is proud of the fact that a restoration project such as this could be built in an efficient manner with our partners, to continue protecting Louisiana's resources," said Duszynski.

On this 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day, celebrating the completion of the Rainey Sanctuary Restoration Project captures the spirit of community activism, partnership, and

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environmental protection that the day embodies across the nation and the world. For more information on the NOAA Community-based Restoration Program please visit the NOAA website at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/> or contact Cheryl Brodnax at the NOAA Restoration Center (255) 578-7923, [cheryl.brodnax@noaa.gov](mailto:cheryl.brodnax@noaa.gov).

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