

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: Northwest Florida Grasses in Classes Program .

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 and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

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: In 2007, the Bay Area Resource Council (BARC) received funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for the implementation for the Northwest Florida Grasses in Classes (GIC) program. The GIC program is a hands-on, interactive education project that enables students to play a direct role in shoreline stabilization and/or restoration projects. By studying the ecological importance of coastal plant species and by participating in the restoration, students gain a sense of stewardship and awareness of the sensitive and fragile community in which they live.

The GIC Program promotes the Living shorelines Initiative in the Panhandle. Goals of the living shorelines project include: 1) Promote establishment of Best Management Practices (BMPs) of soft alternatives using natural vegetation for shoreline protection. Offer an alternative to building seawalls, which currently is the default method of shoreline protection. 2) Involve community partnerships with schools and civic organizations in the growing of plants and assessment and restoration of public and private coastal property. 3) Certify nurseries and contractors in growing coastal plants and installation practices; and 4) Streamline agency-permitting process to promote natural vegetation alternatives to seawalls in appropriate areas.

The program is continuous and self-sustaining.

NARRATIVE: The GIC Program addresses community partnerships and promotes stewardship of coastal and estuarine resources through the propagation, maintenance, planting and monitoring for success by students. With the promotion of the Living Shoreline Initiative in Northwest Florida and implementation of the GIC Program, we are encouraging the restoration and preservation of our coastal ecosystems while addressing critical environmental problems such as erosion and water quality concerns.

Through our local and regional partnerships we have been able to successfully implement the program in at least two schools in each of the five coastal counties of Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, and Bay. Partners were able to identify and approach schools for participation based on their professional relationships with the school. Geographically speaking, a single individual or entity would not have been able to accomplish this task. We currently have 12 schools participating and are working with Gulf and Franklin counties for inclusion into the program.

In addition, our partnerships have allowed us to coordinate and participate in planting field trips and other outreach and education events associated with the program.

To date, our partners have not worked directly with the Regional Implementation Team in the development or implementation of the project. However, the Project Coordinator worked with Margaret Sedlecky, Education Coordinator for the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) during the modification of the Baldwin County GIC Curriculum to meet the Florida State Sunshine Standards.

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 Northwest Florida Grasses in Classes Program is based on other successful programs, including the Chesapeake Bay Grasses in Classes Program, the Baldwin County (AL) Grasses in Classes Program and the Tampa Bay Grasses in Classes Program. However, the GIC program encompasses numerous bays and bayous within our region, not just one specific bay, although the Pensacola Bay watershed is included.

The existing extensive curriculum that had been developed by Baldwin County Grasses in Classes program was modified as needed to ensure compliance with the Florida Sunshine State Standards.

Workshops were held at the Florida Department of Environmental Protection Ecosystem Restoration greenhouse for participating teachers in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties to discuss planting, care, and propagation. Additional workshops were held at the Northwest Florida State College grounds for participating teachers in Okaloosa, Walton, and Bay Counties. Individual workshops for participating schools were also held for students to discuss care and propagation of plants.

Science teachers were provided with all equipment and instructions required to grow grasses. With guidance from our partners and the school's Science teachers, the students will maintain and monitor production throughout the school year. As part of the monitoring process, baseline data that includes water quality sampling and analysis will be conducted at the site prior to and several months after the restoration has taken place. The planting of vegetation is deemed successful when each site has clearly demonstrated the natural propagation of the emergent vegetation.

The grasses that are being utilized for shoreline stabilization includes Smooth Cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*), Marsh-Hay Cordgrass (*Spartina patens*) and Black Needle rush (*Juncus roemerianus*). To date, there has been approximately 19,763 linear feet, 71,499.50 square feet; 3.62 miles of shoreline have been planted.

The program partners are part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Living Shoreline Initiative. The GIC program directly correlates with the Living Shoreline Initiative and each respective partner organization goals of promoting natural shorelines as opposed to the hardening of shorelines. In addition, each partner organization promotes sustainable and conservation practices that support responsible land use practices and eliminate or alleviate water quality impacts.

Project benefits to the coastal ecosystem and support of several federal programs include the following

1. Promotes the establishment of Best Management Practices (BMPs) of soft alternatives using natural vegetation for shoreline protection as an alternative to hardening of the shoreline thereby supporting the National Environmental Protection Act.
2. The planting of shoreline vegetation aids in the uptake of nutrients and/or pollutants from runoff thus preventing these components from entering the waterbody thereby contributing to improved water quality and supporting the Clean Water Act and the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act.

3. The root systems of vegetation help stabilize the soil along a shoreline protecting it from waves and soil erosion thereby supporting the Clean Water Act.

4. Natural shoreline vegetation provides shelter and food for wildlife as well as supporting spawning beds for fish, which helps to support the Endangered Species Act.

5. Natural shoreline vegetation shades and cools water discouraging the growth of algae and aquatic plants, which supports the Clean Water Act.

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).*

The **Bay Area Resource Council** provides staff to act as Project Coordinator and as point of contact for Project Leaders, Teachers, and Students, including the collection of timesheets associated with student/teacher participation and field trips to restoration sites, and monitoring information.

The **Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance, Okaloosa-Walton Counties (CBA)** provides in-kind services with personnel to train and facilitate students/teachers in the Grasses to Classes program. Staff also assists in the monitoring of plants through growing and planting phases to ensure success. CBA has contributed approximately 256 hours/32 days of in-kind service to the implementation and continuation of the program at a rate of \$18.75 per hour/\$150 per day for a total of \$4,800.

The **Florida Department of Environmental Protection Ecosystem Restoration Section** provided 5,000 plant seedlings used in the initial implementation of the Grasses to Classes program. The total dollar amount of the plants were \$6,250.00

The **School Districts of Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, and Bay Counties** have supported and provided school(s) to be used as a site for nurseries and/or production pad areas for the propagation of emergent vegetation.

The **University Of Florida Sea Grant Extension Program: Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa-Walton, and Bay Counties** provide in-kind services with personnel to train and facilitate students/teachers in the Grasses to Classes program. Staff also assists in the monitoring of plants through growing and planting phases to ensure success. The extension offices have contributed approximately 672 hours/84 days of in-kind service to the implementation and continuation of the program at a rate of \$18.75 per hour/\$150 per day for a total of \$12,600.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided grant funding for the implementation of the Grasses in Classes program in the amount of \$30,067.00.

The **National Fish and Wildlife Foundation** provided grant funding for the implementation of the Grasses in Classes program in the amount of \$17,101.25.

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:

Bay Area Resource Council*
Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance*
FDEP Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas
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*
Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Project/Team Leads*

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Additional Information: *All nominations must be submitted to the Coastal America National Coordinating Office by June 10, 2010. 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: Carli Bertrand, Coastal America Award Program Coordinator
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