



Florida Department of Environmental Protection

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3900 Commonwealth Boulevard
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-3000

Charlie Crist
Governor

Jeff Kottkamp
Lt. Governor

Michael W. Sole
Secretary

September 16, 2009

Matt Menashes
Executive Director
National Estuarine Research Reserve Association
444 North Capitol Street, NW
Suite 322
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Menashes:

I strongly support the National Estuarine Research Reserve proposal, "A Partnership to Restore Fish Habitats Associated with the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) and Associated Restoration Reference Sites", for the NOAA Coastal and Marine Habitat Restoration National and Regional Partnership Grants program.

This grant would fund a restoration effort at the Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve that would abate further degradation of estuarine fishery habitat along the shores of the Tolomato river and restore those habitats that were degraded or destroyed by erosion such as salt marsh, oyster reef, and tidal mud flats. The site is also an important cultural site for the reserve as it was an area of native American occupation during the pre-ceramic archaic period (8,000-2,000 BC.), it also served as the site for the 17th century Spanish mission of Tolomato (1620-1702), and the location of a historic wharf during the English occupation period (1764 – 1789).

This area has been identified as a high priority restoration site due to the continued loss of these habitats and cultural sites from wave erosion due to the close proximity of the intracoastal waterway. Erosion has been extensive with the loss of not only estuarine habitats but upland forest as the substrate erodes, causing trees to collapse into the river and the need to continually relocate riverside trails.

Partnerships with several agencies and organizations will be employed to implement the project. Archaeological survey and investigation involved in this project will be done in partnership with archaeological staff of the St. Johns County Growth Management Division and the Lighthouse Archaeological Marine Program (LAMP). The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission will provide expertise and guidance on the conservation and protection of marine species. The St. Johns River Water Management District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Florida Inland Navigation District will be consulted regarding involvement of a navigable waterway and permitting issues.

The project will provide several opportunities to utilize the expertise of the GTMNERR's active volunteer corps. Volunteer service to the project will be a major contributor of in-kind matching contributions to the project. During and following construction of the living shoreline, volunteers will assist with regular monitoring of the site to document stability of the artificial reef, growth of natural oyster beds and salt marsh cordgrass in the protected area, accretion of sediments at the site, emergence of a natural community of vegetation, and changes in the species and population of fish larva, juveniles and adults found within the site. Project time contributed by state-funded staff will also be used as an in-kind contribution. The data gathered through this project will be a valuable resource to future marine habitat restoration efforts, helping to establish best practices to control and prevent erosion and restore critical habitat and native species.

If I may be of further assistance please let me know.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael Shirley
Director
Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve
505 Guana River Road
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32082