



# OCEAN TRUST NEWS

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Contact: Ocean Trust 703-450-9852 For web information visit: [www.epa.gov/gmpo](http://www.epa.gov/gmpo)

## **Ocean Trust Accepts EPA Gulf Guardian Award for Bahia Grande**

*Award Recognizes Community Effort to Restore Largest Wetlands Estuary In US*

Tampa, Florida November 14, 2007 The EPA Gulf of Mexico Program awarded the seventy- nine partners associated with the Bahia Grande Restoration Project a Gulf Guardian Award for 2007 at the November 14 Gulf of Mexico Program awards ceremony. Thor Lassen, president of Ocean Trust accepted the award on behalf of the Bahia Grande partnership. This was the third award given to the Bahia Grande project managed by Ocean Trust, and the fifth national conservation award for Thor Lassen and Ocean Trust.



The objectives of this project are to restore the Bahia Grande wetland complex to its pre-degraded ecological state as a thriving mangrove-lined coastal estuary for fisheries and marine wildlife, and to develop a large, dedicated public support group to help maintain the estuary. This area covers 21,763 acres within the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, just west of Port Isabel, Texas. The project began with the acquisition of the property in 2000 when Ocean Trust also joined the project sponsoring initial work and helping build a partnership that now includes universities, local/state and national government entities, private foundations, businesses, schools, and families. Community efforts resulted in the construction of a pilot channel to connect the Brownsville Ship Channel to the Bahia Grande in 2005 re-flooding of the area and abating the blowing dust from the basin, but the substrates of the shoreline still need stability. Ocean Trust and UTB/TSC are leading the efforts to establish native grasses and other plants around the perimeter to secure the sediments and prevent erosion. Data gathered following the 2005 flooding provided an encouraging glimpse of how rapidly the system could recover with adequate tidal exchange. In 2007, Ocean Trust finished the construction of four internal channels and opened the connections between the three large basins that make up Bahia Grande, setting the stage for construction of a permanent channel connection to the Gulf of Mexico that will begin in 2008.

"Gulf Guardian awards showcase accomplishments from a broad spectrum of environmental leaders -- from committed individuals to dynamic corporations," EPA Regional Administrator Richard Greene said. "I applaud their success in preserving the vital resources of the Gulf Coast, one of our most valuable national treasures." Bryon Griffith, Director of the Gulf of Mexico Program said This is the 8<sup>th</sup> year of the Gulf Guardian Awards Program and the winners in all categories represent the very best of environmental accomplishments in the Gulf of Mexico



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