



Ocean Trust Receives Interior's Top Conservation Award

*Bahia Grande Partnership Recognized for Outstanding Conservation -
Award Marks 4th National Recognition for Ocean Trust*

Washington, DC - Acting Interior Secretary Lynn Scarlett presented Thor Lassen, president of Ocean Trust and Kenneth Merritt, project leader of the USFWS South Texas Refuge Complex the Department of Interior's Cooperative Conservation Award for the Bahia Grande Restoration Project and Partnership during a ceremony on May 4, 2006.

Ocean Trust accepted the award as the principal non-governmental organization (NGO) working with the South Texas Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge to restore 10,000 acres of degraded wetlands and fisheries habitat in Bahia Grande, Texas.

"This award belongs to every one of the Bahia Grande restoration partners," said Lassen after the ceremony. "The success and national recognition Bahia Grande is receiving is due to the large public and private participation in the project." Sixty public and private entities have joined Ocean Trust and the USFWS to restore one of the largest coastal estuaries in the US. Visit www.oceantrust.org/restoration.htm for more information.

The Bahia Grande restoration project involves 21,763 acres of land in the Bahia Grande Unit of the South Texas Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. Before the acreage was cut off from tidal influence in the 1930s, it comprised wetlands which were an important estuarine nursery for fish, shellfish, wildlife and wintering waterfowl, but with the loss of tidal exchange became a site of massive fish kills and dust storms.

With the help of partners like the NOAA Community-based Restoration Program, Marco Sales, University of Texas at Brownsville/Texas Southmost College, and many others, Ocean Trust has constructed two native plant nurseries, established a Bahia Grande field research station, conducted numerous outreach activities with schools, and is constructing channel connections to restore tidal exchange throughout Bahia Grande.

Previous national recognition received by Ocean Trust include: 2005 White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation, 2004 NOAA Environmental Hero Award (Lassen), and 2000 *Seafood Business* magazine Person of the Year (Lassen).

Left to right: Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks Matt Hogan; Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dale Hall; Acting Interior





OCEAN TRUST

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*Secretary Lynn Scarlett; Ocean Trust President Thor Lassen; USFWS South Texas
Refuge Leader Kenneth Merritt.*