

# COASTAL CONNECTIONS



VOLUME 8, ISSUE 2

A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION FOCUSED ON TOOLS FOR COASTAL RESOURCE MANAGERS

APRIL/MAY 2010

## News and Notes

### North Carolina Is Site of Coastal Society Conference

"Shifting Shorelines: Adapting to the Future," The Coastal Society's 22nd international conference, will take place June 13 to 16 in Wilmington, North Carolina. Presentations will highlight innovative scientific, management, and policy approaches that are needed to deal with shifting shorelines. For more information, visit [www.thecoastalsociety.org](http://www.thecoastalsociety.org).

### CELCP Fiscal Year 2011 Funding Applications Are Due

Applications for 2011 funding opportunities through the Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management's Coastal and

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*Coastal Connections* is a publication of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Coastal Services Center, produced for the coastal resource management community. Each issue of this free bimonthly newsletter focuses on a tool, information resource, or methodology of interest to the nation's coastal resource managers.



## FOCUS

### Identifying High-Priority Habitat

*Trying to pinpoint the most strategic lands and resources for conservation or restoration? This planning tool can help.*



*Church, Edisto Island*

Springtime drivers taking in the view along Highway 174 on South Carolina's Edisto Island may wonder whether they have travelled back in time.

Purple azalea bushes dot the grounds of a centuries-old church, its white-clapboard cupola reaching for the sky. Small roadside markets sell mustard greens and the catch of the day and sunflowers as big as pie tins. Branches of live oak draped with Spanish moss form majestic canopies above. And azure creeks carve winding pathways to the Atlantic through the golden-green marsh.

It's not a mirage but a scene that's here to stay. A coalition of community organizations led by the Edisto Island Open Land Trust was successful in getting the U.S. Department of Transportation to designate the highway as the Edisto Island National Scenic Byway. The land trust has also been able to conserve almost 50 percent of the 72-square-mile island.

The NOAA Coastal Services Center was one partner in the effort. Aided by the state Department of Natural Resources, the Center helped Edisto Islanders visualize conservation possibilities through the use of the Habitat Priority Planner, a geographic information system tool (at [www.csc.noaa.gov/hpp/](http://www.csc.noaa.gov/hpp/)).

"The Edisto Island Open Land Trust had needed a geographic information system (GIS) for quite some time," says Marian Brailsford, executive director of the land trust and a prominent scenic byway advocate. "The Habitat Priority Planner, along with information given by Edisto Islanders, helped us incorporate photos and information into the island map, which was a wonderful plus for the designation application."

What's more, visualizations generated by the Habitat Priority Planner enabled the Edisto Island Open Land Trust to "see" and document gaps in its conservation and data coverage. Having identified these gaps, the land trust collected extra geospatial data depicting scenic, historical, and natural resources. The added information will bolster future applications for conservation-related funding.

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## Minimizing the guesswork in habitat conservation

The Habitat Priority Planner helps level the playing field for organizations and stakeholders seeking to conserve or restore habitat with limited dollars and resources.

- ♦ **It's easy to use and free** – The tool is ideal for teams of people working on habitat management decisions within or across organizations. Customizable visualizations, maps, reports, and data tables enable them to view and add resource information and select high-priority habitat. Only one person with intermediate GIS skills is needed to operate the planner for an entire group.
- ♦ **It has flexible data requirements** – “Unlike other tools, the Habitat Priority Planner is not data hungry,” says Danielle Bamford, an environmental scientist at the Center. “It requires just one data set—land cover—to begin the process, and users can add any local data sets that are available.” Users can also download and work with outside data sources, like land cover information from the Center’s Coastal Change Analysis Program (C-CAP).
- ♦ **It's stakeholder-centric** – “Tool users often come into the process with a mental checklist—for example, ‘We want to find freshwater wetlands at least 10 acres in size that have drinking water wells and are near conserved wetlands’” says Bamford. “The Habitat Priority Planner helps them check off that list and find land that fits those characteristics.”
- ♦ **It supports strategic, long-term planning** – Users are able to add information that illustrates the area’s overall habitat quality and projected conservation impact. They can also locate critical gaps in area data or protected habitat. “Having this kind of information makes it much easier for resource managers to justify choosing one property over another,” notes Bamford. “They can also create stronger applications for funding,” she adds.

For Edisto Islanders, the Habitat Priority Planner and GIS aids are gifts that keep on giving. “We hope to

use our visuals online to help orient visitors and identify points of interest along the scenic byway,” says Brailsford. “Thanks to NOAA and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, we are able to map our land conservation program and use accurate maps for grant applications and PowerPoint presentations.”

For more information on the Habitat Priority Planner, contact [Danielle.Bamford@noaa.gov](mailto:Danielle.Bamford@noaa.gov).

## Tool Combines Habitat Planner and Map Viewer

In 2004, the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) started working with regional and local partners to identify and map high-priority habitats for conservation in Alabama’s Mobile and Baldwin counties.

The resulting document, part of a larger habitat conservation effort, marked a big step forward. But because the document was not digitized, map information was static and limited in its long-term usefulness.

In 2008, the partners were given the opportunity to build an online viewing tool that would enable the maps to be customizable, dynamic, and printable. Furthermore, users of the tool would not need advanced geographic information system (GIS) skills. The Habitat Mapper, developed by the NOAA Coastal Services Center, is the result.

First, the partners identified priority conservation areas in Mobile and Baldwin counties using the Habitat Priority Planner. Next, the online viewer helped partners without GIS experience to “see” local conservation priorities combined with extra local information on natural resources and human uses.

“We’re excited about our new and improved Mississippi-Alabama Habitats Tool and its habitat mapper,” says Roberta Arena Swann, the director of the national estuary program. “With more information available to resource managers, they can more objectively analyze the data and narrow down the patches of habitat critical to our coastal environment’s long-term sustainability.”

To learn more, contact [Lauren.Long@noaa.gov](mailto:Lauren.Long@noaa.gov).

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## Here Comes Peter Cottontail

*With a Little Help from the Center*

A project involving the NOAA Coastal Services Center's Habitat Priority Planner tool is helping resource managers in southern Maine protect the endangered New England cottontail.

Project partners used the planner, along with land cover data from NOAA's Coastal Change Analysis Program, to determine the best habitat areas for this species. Tool users also added data on rabbit occurrence counts and the managed areas—such as railroads and utility lines—favored by rabbits.

The final analysis enabled project partners to decide which areas should be considered for conservation or monitored during winter months.

Project partners included the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state managers, and nonprofit organizations.

For more information, contact [Chrissa.Stroh@noaa.gov](mailto:Chrissa.Stroh@noaa.gov).

## Geospatial Courses Boost Conservation Planning Skills

Expand your habitat-planning capabilities with the following trainings:

**Introduction to Coastal GIS** – Participants gain the knowledge and skills needed to use ArcGIS desktop software in coastal applications.

**GIS Tools for Strategic Conservation Planning** – Attendees apply geographic information system (GIS) tools, methodologies, and analyses to strategic conservation planning. Course is co-taught by the Center and The Conservation Fund.

**Habitat Priority Planner Training** – Students use this ArcGIS extension to advance conservation, land use, and restoration planning efforts.

To learn more, visit [www.csc.noaa.gov/training/](http://www.csc.noaa.gov/training/).

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## News and Notes

Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP) are due April 9, 2010. The CELCP program provides state and local governments with matching funds to purchase significant coastal and estuarine lands or conservation easements from willing sellers. To learn more, see [http://coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/land/celcp\\_fundingop.html](http://coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/land/celcp_fundingop.html).

### Reserve's Solar Panels Replenish Electric Grid

The South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve installed a 13-kilowatt photovoltaic system on its education and visitor's center, quickly generating enough energy to run its electric meter backwards. The solar energy system will save an estimated 75 percent in annual electricity costs. In addition, plans are underway to install a solar-powered water-pumping system, tankless water heaters, and other energy-saving technology. To watch a video of the moment when the solar panels began pouring electricity back into southwestern Oregon's electric grid, see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSZS0jffAuc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSZS0jffAuc).

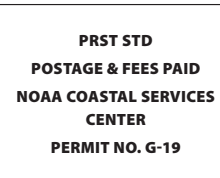
### Conference Spotlights Floodplain Management Essentials

The Association of State Floodplain Managers will convene its 34th annual gathering from May 16 to 21 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The theme, "Building Blocks of Floodplain Management," will spotlight state-of-the-art techniques, programs, and resources to reduce flood risk and accomplish flood mitigation efforts. For more information, visit [www.floods.org](http://www.floods.org).

### OCRM is Exploring Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion

The Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM) is exploring licensing authority issues for ocean thermal energy conversion (OTEC) projects under the Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion Act. OTEC technology uses the temperature differential

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between the deep cold and the relatively warmer surface waters of the ocean to generate electricity. NOAA plans to hold a workshop in Hawaii from June 22 to 24 that will focus on the regulatory thresholds for environmental impacts and risks of OTEC projects. For more information, contact [Whitney.Blanchard@noaa.gov](mailto:Whitney.Blanchard@noaa.gov).

### ACCOLADES

**Lisa Auermuller**, a watershed coordinator for Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve, received the 2009 Outstanding Floodplain Management Award from the New Jersey Association for Floodplain Management. Auermuller was honored for her efforts to strengthen informed decision-making on coastal issues and floodplain management.

**Ed Whereat**, a program coordinator for the Delaware Sea Grant College Program, was presented with the 2009 Friend of the Bays award from the Center for the Inland Bays. The award is given to an individual or organization making exemplary efforts to restore, conserve, and protect Delaware's inland bays.

### TRANSITIONS

**Alison Leschen** is the new reserve manager at Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. She formerly worked as a marine biologist for the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries... **Nancy Hoene**, a published author and erstwhile freelance writer, joined the Minnesota Sea Grant College Program as communications coordinator and senior editor... **Valerie Grussing** has become the new cultural resources coordinator for the National Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Center. Grussing previously served as the MPA Center's cultural resources research fellow... **Abbey Seth Mayer**, the director of the Hawaii Office of Planning, is serving as acting program manager for the Hawaii Coastal Zone Management Program following the retirement of **Douglas Tom**... **Mike Szabados** has retired from his position as director of the Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services (CO-OPS). **Rich Edwing**, the center's deputy director, is serving as acting director.

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Please send us your questions and suggestions for future editions. To subscribe or contribute to the newsletter, contact our editors at Coastal Connections • NOAA Coastal Services Center • 2234 South Hobson Avenue • Charleston, South Carolina 29405 • (843) 740-1200

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