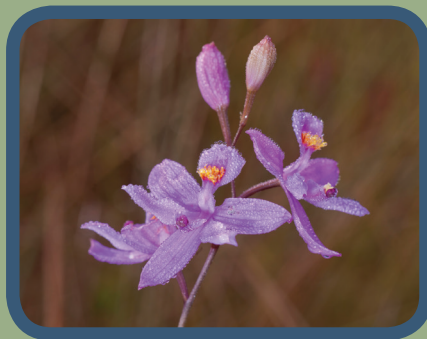




Celebrating Five Years of Conservation Success with the
Gulf Coast Project Assistance Fund



A collaboration with the Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation and
Galveston Bay Foundation with support from the Knobloch Family Foundation

Background

Natural historian Jack Davis called the Gulf of Mexico the “American Sea.” It’s home to some of the country’s most beloved landscapes – picture perfect barrier islands and sandy beaches, mysterious swamps, towering coastal forests, and quiet marshes teeming with life. Together, these complex ecosystems support more than 15,000 species of plants and animals and support economies and cultures that have influenced the world.

For decades these vital landscapes across the Gulf have been damaged by the combined effects of pollution, uncontrolled development, and hurricanes. Land trusts have been on the front lines of protecting critical coastal habitat in the face of these challenges.

The Deepwater Horizon (DWH) oil disaster of 2010 added insult to injury on a massive scale, killing wildlife, polluting coastal habitats, and damaging local economies and communities in ways that are still felt today. The legal settlements in the aftermath of the oil disaster made billions of dollars available for ecosystem restoration. Land trusts from across the Gulf formed the Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation (Gulf Partnership) to work together on a coordinated, region-wide response to insure that ecosystem restoration funds went to projects that would directly address the damage from the DWH oil spill.



Becky Stowe



Mike Arguelles

The opportunity and the challenge

Land conservation is one of the most effective strategies for restoring the wetlands, marshes and other coastal habitats that were damaged by the oil spill. The model is a proven and straightforward one – nonprofit land trusts work with willing landowners to purchase or put conservation easements on key lands and then restore the natural resources that are critical to the overall health of the ecosystem.

In 2014, the Gulf Partnership and the Galveston Bay Foundation (GBF) received a \$500,000 grant from the Knobloch Family Foundation (Knobloch). The grant was specifically aimed at accelerating the pace of land conservation across the Gulf Coast in response to the DWH oil spill.

It worked. The Knobloch grant has been the catalyst for over \$53 million dollars of strategic land protection in the coastal regions of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. The return on investment in conservation, community and habitat values is extraordinary. The success of the Knobloch grant shows the outsized returns that an upfront investment in land conservation can bring.

Project Assistance Fund by the Numbers			
Due Diligence Funds Invested	Projects Closed	# Acres Protected	Conservation Dollars Leveraged
\$386,152	18	27,813	\$53,670,032

Funding due diligence

The Gulf Partnership and GBF used the Knobloch funds to set up the Gulf Coast Land Conservation Project Assistance Fund (PAF). The PAF was designed to provide matching grants to land trusts, funding the due diligence activities required for high quality land conservation projects. Member organizations of the Gulf Partnership were invited to apply for up to \$25,000 per project and were required to match the PAF contribution.

What does *due diligence* mean?

Land trusts use public money and charitable donations to protect land forever. Land trusts must have legal and environmental reviews on every land purchase and conservation easement to ensure that the public is getting its money's worth. Due diligence activities may include appraisals, appraisal reviews, surveys and legal descriptions, title review, legal review, baseline documentation reports, recording fees, and environmental assessments.

18 of the projects have been completed to date, attracting funding for land purchases and conservation easements from:

- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund
- Deepwater Horizon Natural Resources Damages Assessment
- North American Wetlands Conservation Act
- United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service
- Knobloch Family Foundation
- United States Forest Service
- State and local governments



Yael Girard



Land Trust for Mississippi Coastal Plain

What's Next?

All of the original grant of \$500,000 has been allocated and Partners are working to close on seven additional projects. The Gulf Partnership, with help from a capacity-building grant from the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, is working to attract new funding sources to continue this successful, innovative fund.

Help us protect more coastal marshes, rivers, forests and farmlands in the Gulf Coast region by investing in the Project Assistance Fund. Learn more at www.gulfpartnership.org.



Gulf Coast Project Assistance Fund Completed Projects

ALABAMA



Jay McIlwain



US Fish and Wildlife Service

Fort Morgan, Gulf Shores, Alabama

Partner – Alabama Coastal Heritage Trust

Due Diligence Funds Used – \$1,000

Land Costs – \$822,000

Conservation Values – Habitat for endangered species

Acres Protected – 1.45

The Alabama Coastal Heritage Trust, an all-volunteer land trust, purchased 1.45 acres of critical habitat for the endangered Alabama Beach Mouse along the Fort Morgan Peninsula, in Baldwin County, Alabama. The property contains white sand beach and primary and secondary dunes within the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge boundary and is adjacent to Bureau of Land Management lands. This acquisition provides connectivity across some of the last remaining habitat for the Alabama Beach Mouse.

FLORIDA



United States Forest Service

Cassidy Tract, Columbia, Florida

Partner – The Conservation Fund

Due Diligence Funds Used – \$19,100

Land Costs – \$12,000,000

Conservation Values – Longleaf pine, listed species habitat

Acres Protected – 9,819

The Cassidy Tract is a critical inholding in the Osceola National Forest in Columbia County, Florida. Acquisition of this tract protects habitat within the headwaters of the Suwannee River, a major tributary to the Gulf of Mexico. Species protected onsite include: numerous bird species, Florida black bear, gopher tortoise, and gopher frog; and as the site is restored, additional species associated with longleaf pine will begin to return. Species protected downstream include: sea turtles, West Indian manatees, bottlenose dolphins, one of the state's largest populations of wintering oystercatchers, and numerous other bird and fish species. Protection of the subject tract will also help restore the endangered longleaf pine ecosystem in the Southeast.



Meghan Mick

Gulf Coast Program, Florida

Partner – Trust for Public Land
Due Diligence Funds Used – \$58,275
Land Costs – \$11,272,000
Conservation Values – Recreation, public access, wetlands protection
Acres Protected – 105

As part of their Gulf Coast Program, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) acquired and developed four public parks and donated them to local governments.

- Captain Leonard Destin Park, Okaloosa County
- Innerarity Point Park, Escambia County
- Lynn Haven Park, Bay County
- Island View Park, Franklin Count

TPL worked to conserve natural lands and wildlife habitat, increase public waterfront access, and promote the health of the Gulf and associated rivers and estuaries in the Florida panhandle counties which were impacted by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. TPL protected wetlands, bird rookeries, and other natural features while providing low-impact recreational opportunities at the four new parks. Unfortunately Island View Park was heavily impacted by Hurricane Michael in 2018.



The Conservation Fund

Johnson Tracts, Monroe County, Florida

Partner – The Conservation Fund
Due Diligence Funds Used – \$3,500
Land Costs – \$3,600,000
Conservation Values – Habitat connectivity, endangered species
Acres Protected – 1,300

The Johnson Tract is adjacent to both the Florida Keys Wildlife and Environmental Area and the Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuge, and is surrounded by the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. The site contains a variety of habitat types including tropical hardwood hammock, mangrove forests, salt marshes, bay bottom, and several miles of shoreline. These natural communities are home to numerous state and federally listed species, including the key deer, lower keys marsh rabbit, silver rice rat, whitecrowned pigeon, mangrove cuckoo, American crocodile, West Indian manatee, green and loggerhead sea turtles, and many others. Many of these species are found nowhere else in the continental United States and in some cases nowhere else in the world.



Melissa Hill

Little Orange Creek, Alachua and Putnam Counties, Florida

Partner – Alachua Conservation Trust
Due Diligence Funds Used – \$25,000
Land Costs – \$935,000
Conservation Values – Habitat connectivity, water resources
Acres Protected – 551

This 551 acre parcel was added to the Little Orange Creek Preserve, a 2,367 acre patchwork of ponds, swamps and emergent wetlands. The Preserve functions as a critical link between conservation lands in Alachua and surrounding counties provides critical habit to the Florida Black Bear and other far ranging species. Restoration of the forested wetlands and adjacent uplands will improve vital recharge sites by reducing erosion, siltation, and water contamination.



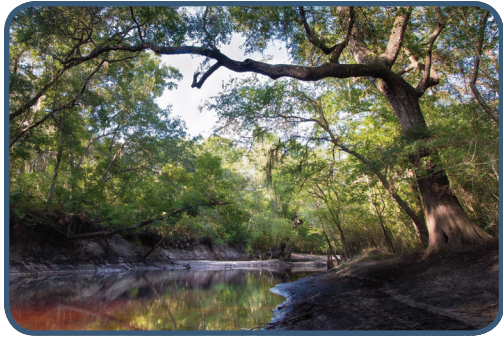
Glenn Gardner

Murphy Marsh, Manatee County, Florida

Partner – Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast
Due Diligence Funds Used – \$20,353
Cost of Conservation Easement– \$1,279,123
Conservation Values – Habitat connectivity, flood protection
Acres Protected – 534

Murphy Marsh is 534 acres of wetlands, woodlands, and flood plains. Vital to the health of the Myakka River, Murphy Marsh is the link that connects three significant conservation areas: Triangle Ranch, Lettuce Lakes, and the Tatum Sawgrass Scrub Preserve. Conserving Murphy Marsh will enable the restoration of the Tatum Sawgrass marsh by re-establishing hydrological flow between the marsh and the Myakka River. Decades ago these lands were severely altered through a series of ditches and dikes. Restoration will significantly increase habitat for animals and reduce flooding downstream.





Alison Blakeslee

The Santa Fe River Preserve is part of a much larger effort to protect the entire Santa Fe River and ensure that it stays a complete and viable conservation corridor. Today, over half (~56%) of the 75-mile length of the river is in conservation on one or both sides. The river and its tributaries and associated springs, sinkholes, and swamps are home to several endemic species and species that have disappeared or declined elsewhere, including the Gulf Sturgeon. As a wildlife corridor, the Santa Fe River is a key east-west link connecting conservation lands in north central Florida with other parts of the Suwannee River watershed, and is used by Florida Black Bear, River Otter, Beavers, Bobcat, Grey Fox, and migratory birds.

Santa Fe River, Alachua County, Florida

- Partner** – Alachua Conservation Trust
- Due Diligence Funds Used** – \$25,000
- Land Costs** – \$2,370,000
- Conservation Values** – Habitat connectivity, endangered species habitat
- Acres Protected** – 716



Glenn Gardner

Triangle Ranch is a working cattle ranch traversed by three miles of the Myakka River. As a piece of old Florida with its mix of wetlands, riparian and upland habitats, more than 120 species of birds and numerous animals from the endangered Florida panther to the threatened crested caracara, call Triangle Ranch their home or use it as frequent visitors. Conserving Triangle Ranch is essential for the protection of the Myakka River, its water quality and biodiversity, and the region’s flood protection.

Triangle Ranch, Manatee County, Florida

- Partner** – Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast
- Due Diligence Funds Used** – \$25,000
- Cost of Conservation Easement** – \$3,314,000
- Conservation Values** – Water quality, wildlife habitat and flood protection
- Acres Protected** – 1,105

LOUISIANA



Stacey Shankle

The Trust for Public Land purchased Fleming Plantation in 2018 and conveyed the 3,455 acre property to the National Park Service to be added to the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. Fleming Plantation provides connectivity between protected areas and large-scale restoration projects. The property was added to the 23,000 acre Barataria Preserve, which is situated in the Barataria Basin, site of the only estuary recognized in Louisiana as part of the National Estuary Program. The parcel is home to extensive bald cypress swamps and a complex of freshwater and intermediate marshes which provide habitat to migratory birds and nursery areas for shellfish and finfish.

Fleming Plantation, Lafitte, Louisiana

- Partner** – Trust for Public Land
- Due Diligence Funds Used** – \$24,000
- Cost of Conservation Easement** – \$2,935,000
- Conservation Values** – Habitat connectivity, flood protection
- Acres Protected** – 3,455



Sean Gardner

The Livingston Parish parcel supports numerous migratory waterfowl, migratory landbirds and waterbird species, including: Northern Pintail, Greater and Lesser Scaup, Mallard, Mottled Duck, Wood Duck, American Widgeon, Redhead, Ringnecked, and Canvasback. Shallow ponds on the tract provide foraging habitat for Wood Stork, American Woodcock, American White Pelican, Little Blue Heron and Black Tern. These lands are adjacent to the 114,520 acre Maurepas Swamp Wildlife Management Area (WMA), links two forested wetland tracts and is within the West PontchartrainMaurepas Swamp Important Bird Area.

Livingston Parish, Louisiana

- Partner** – The Conservation Fund
- Due Diligence Funds Used** – \$6,367
- Land Costs** – \$837,395
- Conservation Values** – Bird habitat, water resources
- Acres Protected** – 1,660

MISSISSIPPI

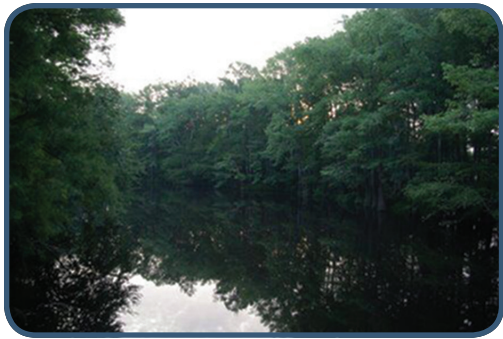


Gretchen Grammer

This project added approximately 1,686 acres to the nearly 18,000 acres currently owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, managed by the State of Mississippi. This acquisition protects wet pine savanna, maritime forest, tidal and nontidal wetlands, salt marshes, salt pannes, bays and bayous. Threatened and endangered species that utilize these habitats include the threatened gopher tortoise and the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. Also, a number of migratory species utilize the habitats provided on this acreage for portions of their life cycle; including Ibis, Martins and Swallows, Rails, Plovers, Sandpipers and Phalaropes, and Gulls and Terns, along with many different neo-tropical species. This acreage also provides salt marsh/ estuarine habitats for many aquatic species occurring in the Gulf of Mexico.

Grand Bay, Jackson County, Mississippi

- Partner** – The Conservation Fund
- Due Diligence Funds Used** – \$8,000
- Land Costs** – \$1,966,000
- Conservation Values** – Habitat connectivity, endangered species
- Acres Protected** – 1,686



Becky Stowe

This project represents the continuation of over 40 years of conservation work along the Pascagoula River, resulting in the protection of an 85 mile long corridor along the River from the Gulf of Mexico to its headwaters. The watershed harbors 327 bird species that use the diverse habitats that range from longleaf pine forests to riverine forests to oxbow lakes. Millions of migrating birds use the bottomlands of the Pascagoula as stopover habitat. Additionally, significant numbers of birds of conservation concern, such as prothonotary warbler and swallow-tailed kite nest in bottomland hardwoods and oxbow lakes within the Pascagoula River corridor. Acquisition of this tract helps conserve habitat for federally listed species such as the Louisiana Black Bear, gulf Sturgeon and Yellow-blotched sawback turtle and numerous other rare species including the pearl darter, American alligator, bald eagle and wood stork.

Pascagoula River, George and Green counties, Mississippi

- Partner** – The Nature Conservancy
- Due Diligence Funds Used** – \$25,000
- Land Costs** – \$3,360,000
- Conservation Values** – Habitat connectivity, federally listed species habitat
- Acres Protected** – 2,100



Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain

The Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain acquired several parcels along the Tchoutacabouffa River that include interconnected oxbow lakes and tributaries that are adjacent to the state-managed Coastal Preserves system. This project permanently protects the floodplain for the Tchoutacabouffa River and wildlife habitat. The lake in the center of the property attached to the Tchoutacabouffa River provides excellent fishing for local residents and outdoor recreationists.

Tchoutacabouffa River Urban Wetlands Acquisitions, Harrison County, Mississippi

- Partner** – Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain
- Due Diligence Funds Used** – \$16,400
- Land Costs** – \$650,000
- Conservation Values** – Flood protection, wildlife habitat
- Acres Protected** – 182



Michael Dickinson

This parcel is a mix of floodplains and pine forests. Longleaf pine is one of North America’s most imperiled forest ecosystems, boasting incredible plant diversity and home for a number of threatened and endangered species. The DeSoto National Forest has been restoring longleaf pine forests for years, and particularly since Hurricane Katrina dealt a devastating blow to the area in 2005. Acquiring this parcel will help the Forest Service simplify prescribed fire and forest management for this nationally significant ecosystem.

White Plains/Sioux Bayou, Harrison County, Mississippi

- Partner** – Trust for Public land
- Due Diligence Funds Used** – \$25,000
- Land Costs** – \$2,465,000
- Conservation Values** – Habitat connectivity, water resources, public access
- Acres Protected** – 476

TEXAS



Callie Easterly

The Bahia Grande property has been conveyed to the Laguna Atascosa NWR, which boasts 415 species of birds that use it for migration, wintering, or breeding – more bird species than almost any other area of comparable size in the United States. The American Bird Conservancy has designated the area as a “globally important bird area” because it provides habitat for a variety of migratory, winter and resident birds, including colonial nesters, shorebirds, and waterbirds. Protection and restoration of this tract is part of the larger Bahia Grande Coast Corridor project – 7,000 acres of critical and strategic lands that create contiguous large blocks of land for endangered animals and birds. Protecting this property from development, now completed, will provide a buffer to disturbance for wildlife, protect water quality and quantity and allow for large scale hydrologic restoration within the Laguna Madre and Bahia Grande.

Bahia Grande, Cameron County, Texas

- Partner** – The Conservation Fund
- Due Diligence Funds Used** – \$20,000
- Land Costs** – \$5,320,000
- Conservation Values** – Habitat connectivity, bird conservation
- Acres Protected** – 1,780



Artist Boat

The preserve is heavily utilized by migratory and resident avian species, including many from various priority species lists. The tract provides exceptional habitat for waterfowl, wading birds, and shorebirds commonly found throughout the upper Texas coast. Shallow estuarine marshes provide nursery habitat for coastal fisheries; palustrine marshes add the benefits of providing a critical freshwater source for many species of birds, amphibians, insects and mammals; and high quality coastal prairie grasslands support ground nesting birds, such as eastern meadowlark and mottled ducks. The preserve also provides buffer lands for habitat as sea level rises and helps protect neighboring communities from inundation during storms.

Coastal Heritage Preserve, Galveston Island, Texas

- Partner** – Artist Boat
- Due Diligence Funds Used** – \$12,557
- Land Costs** – \$1,051,000
- Conservation Values** – Habitat connectivity, bird conservation, wetlands protection
- Acres Protected** – 46



Galveston Bay Foundation

Gordy Marsh, Chambers County, Texas

Partner – Galveston Bay Foundation

Due Diligence Funds Used – \$25,000

Cost of Conservation Easement – \$828,500

Conservation Values – Habitat for endangered species

Acres Protected – 1,740

The Gordy Marsh is a mosaic of high-quality estuarine habitats and coastal tallgrass prairie. 1,739 acres have been permanently protected with a conservation easement. Additional project phases are planned to conserve adjacent parcels of similar, contiguous habitat. The property boasts diverse native grasslands and expansive wetland and shallow-water habitats including brackish, intermediate, and freshwater marshes. The connectivity of the wetland and upland habitat mosaic throughout the property supports abundant populations of migratory and resident bird species, commercially and recreationally significant fisheries, and rare plant communities.



The Nature Conservancy

Laguna Atascosa, Cameron County, Texas

Partner – The Nature Conservancy

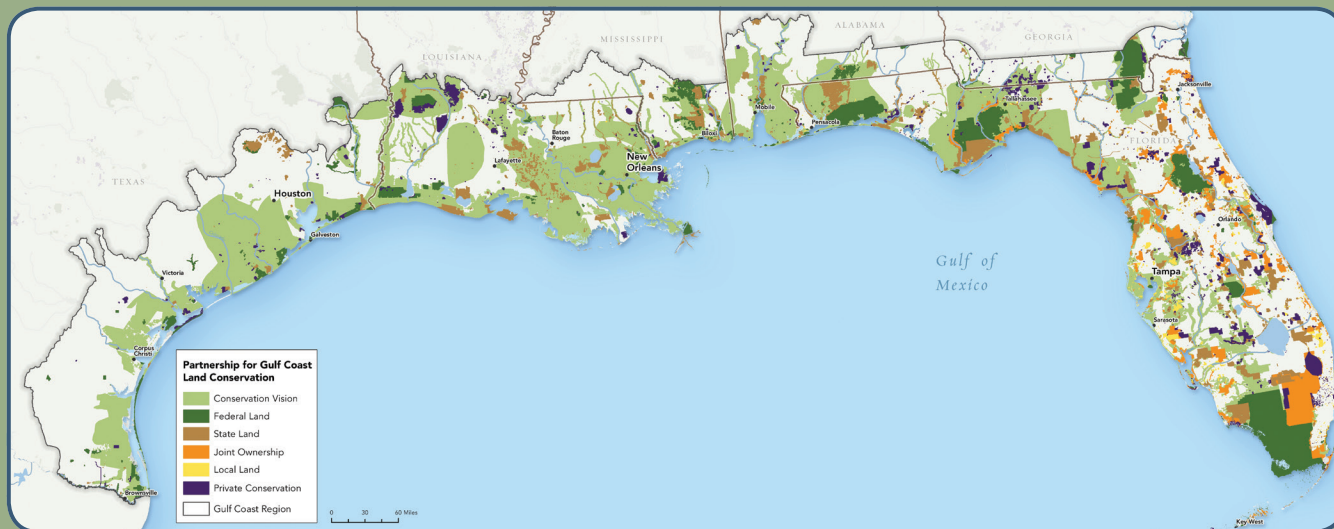
Due Diligence Funds Used – \$4,500

Cost of Conservation Easement – \$1,117,014

Conservation Values – Habitat connectivity, bird conservation

Acres Protected – 562

This project expands the Lower Rio Grande Valley Conservation Corridor. The area is internationally recognized as important habitat for waterfowl, raptors, waterbirds, and federally listed endangered and threatened species including ocelots. The parcels are located in the watershed of Laguna Atascosa which contributes to Laguna Madre, a unique hypersaline bay with the largest expanses of seagrasses and tidal flats on the Texas coast. Laguna Madre is used by large numbers of waterfowl, shorebirds, and fish and shellfish species. This project will complement previous and ongoing conservation efforts by protecting land adjacent to Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge.



A Land Conservation Vision for the Gulf of Mexico

Cover Top Photo Credit: Sean Gardner

Cover Bottom Left Photo Credit: Steve Sinclair

Cover Bottom Middle Photo Credit: Robert Smith

Cover Bottom Right Photo Credit: Robert Smith



www.gulfpартnership.org



Visit our website to read our *Conservation Vision* report and learn more about the Gulf Partnership's strategic conservation goals. To learn more or to donate, visit www.gulfpартnership.org or contact Julia Weaver (julia.weaver@gulfpартnership.org) or Elizabeth Barber (liz.barber@gulfpартnership.org).