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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**Nature Conservancy, Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program buy land
in partnership to help Corpus Christi protect Nueces River Delta**

A partnership between The Nature Conservancy of Texas and the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program (CBBEP) will help the City of Corpus Christi move much-needed fresh water into the Nueces River Delta to revitalize and protect a wetlands system that's crucial to both people and wildlife in this region of the Gulf Coast.

The two non-profit conservation organizations announced today that the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program will provide long-term funding and The Nature Conservancy of Texas will provide short-term funding and conservation management of a recent 1,470-acre land purchase near the intersection of IH-37 and Hwy. 77, just west of Corpus Christi.

As part of this partnership, a small portion of the property will eventually be acquired by the City of Corpus Christi for an overflow channel and pipeline corridor to deliver fresh water directly into the Rincon Bayou and upper portions of the Nueces River Delta. Providing freshwater inflows directly to the Nueces River Delta is an important component of the City's strategy to satisfy the environmental inflow needs of the estuary while maximizing availability of the water supply system.

"This is a wonderful example of conservation interest blending perfectly with overall city interest in not only protecting the environment in our estuaries, but also providing the city much more flexibility in our water management program," said Tom Utter, special assistant to the city manager for the City of Corpus Christi.

Carter Smith, South Texas program manager for The Nature Conservancy of Texas, said, "This project is all about providing fresh water to Corpus Christi – water for wildlife, water for fish and water for people." Smith is based in the Conservancy's Corpus Christi office.

"The freshwater inflow and the protection of Rincon Bayou will help sustain the tremendous fish nursery in the delta and in Nueces Bay. In addition, the location of the project – at the gateway to Corpus Christi and across the highway from the city's visitor information center at Labonte Park – will have high visibility as a significant natural feature of the region," Smith said, adding that both the Conservancy and the CBBEP plan to promote the site as a center for community conservation education, habitat restoration and scientific research.

The Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program will acquire the land using funds obtained as a result of the settlement of an enforcement action brought by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (or North American Wetlands Conservation Council). The Nature Conservancy of Texas stepped in to purchase the land until that funding becomes available, and will then sell it to the CBBEP. The Conservancy will continue to manage the land for conservation purposes after ownership is conveyed to CBBEP.

"We have long recognized the importance of the Nueces River Delta to the overall health and productivity of our bays and estuaries. The acquisition of this property is just the beginning of what we hope will be a much bigger effort to protect and restore wetland habitat in the delta," said Ray Allen, CBBEP executive director.

Nature Conservancy, CBBEP buy land to protect Nueces River Delta/2

The property, visible on the southeast side of the intersection of IH-37 and Hwy. 77, was part of the historic McGregor River Ranch, founded in 1889, and was purchased from John McGregor, a descendant of the founder. In addition to the sale of 1,470 acres, McGregor is donating an additional 25 acres to the project.

“My family and I are delighted to be able to work hand in hand with The Nature Conservancy and the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program to protect and preserve land that we have owned and loved for generations,” McGregor said.

Much of Rincon Bayou is contained within the land McGregor is selling for the delta protection project.

CBBEP’s Allen noted that the Nueces River Delta historically received inflows of fresh water regularly through natural flooding of the river, but manmade dams along the river have reduced freshwater inflows to about 1 percent of what they were 50 or 60 years ago, creating hypersalinity (super-saltiness) in areas of the delta that once contained freshwater marshes. “In its natural state, an estuary contains a gradient of water salinity, gradually getting saltier as it approaches the bay,” he said.

One of nature’s most robust and dynamic ecosystems, an estuary is where fresh water meets the sea. Estuaries are places of freshwater inflow, sediment deposits and nutrient accumulation, all of which add to the diversity and abundance of the rich life they support. About 90 percent of all marine species use an estuary at some point in their life cycle.

Just west of Nueces Bay and Corpus Christi Bay, the Nueces River Delta is where life begins for many wildlife species in the Coastal Bend. Some of the region’s most biologically significant wetlands are found here, as well as important coastal prairie habitats. Taken altogether, the delta represents a unique mosaic of highly productive wetlands, open water, islands, prairie, and river and bay shorelines.

This rich estuarine ecosystem provides crucial habitat for Coastal Bend wildlife as well as vital freshwater in-flows to the two bays. Many species of wading and shore birds depend on this habitat, including the rare reddish egret and piping plover. The system also supports many other migratory birds, as well as wetlands species such as the diamondback terrapin. The delta ecosystem is likewise important to the health of Nueces Bay, known for its great public sportfishing opportunities. The bay boasts one of the highest densities of redfish on the Texas coast.

It is estimated that more than half of the coastal wetlands in Texas have been lost or degraded due to land-use conversion, habitat fragmentation and urbanization. Nueces River Delta lands, because they are so close to the growing city of Corpus Christi, are especially threatened by these forces.

The mission of The Nature Conservancy of Texas is to conserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth, and the lands and waters they need to survive. The Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program is dedicated to protecting and restoring bays and estuaries of the Texas Coastal Bend. Both organizations are 501(c)(3) non-profit corporations.