



For Immediate Release

Date: August 5, 2010

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National Wildlife Federation Announces Northeast Great Waters Program

Montpelier, VT (August 5, 2010) – The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) is launching a major new program to ensure that plans designed to restore and conserve the northeast’s “great waters” are put into practice. The launch of this effort signals the first step in NWF’s effort to build strong partnerships with organizations across the region that have worked for years to protect and restore these Great Waters.

“The watersheds and aquatic ecosystems of Lake Champlain, Long Island Sound, the Gulf of Maine, and Rhode Island are our region’s playground, from beachgoing to fishing, and an unmatched economic engine that sustains jobs and provides enormous real estate value to a very densely populated region,” said Curtis Fisher, regional executive director of NWF’s Northeast Regional Office. “I was lucky to grow up close by the Long Island Sound, and I spent most of my time fishing, swimming, camping there. The Sound, like the other Northeast Great Waters, is a regional jewel that must be protected and restored now and into the future.”

The NWF’s Northeast Great Waters program mirrors several other restoration and conservation initiatives in which NWF plays a major role, including the Healing Our Waters® - Great Lakes Coalition, Chesapeake Bay Coalition, Gulf of Mexico Coalition, and America’s Great Waters Coalition. Each of these coalitions involves scores of regional and national groups sharing leadership and working together to advance the implementation of restoration plans created by state and federal agencies.

“Working together with conservation groups, business interests and state and federal agencies, we have been able to accomplish great things,” said Malia Hale, director of National Restoration and Water Resources Campaign for NWF. “Our collective efforts for the Great Lakes have already resulted in a new federal restoration initiative and nearly half a billion dollars of federal funding in 2009 alone. This new program seeks to grow investments in the Great Waters of the northeast, which have lagged behind other regions.”

Northeast ecosystems suffer in varying degrees from the same human-caused impacts affecting other natural systems, including loss of habitat for coastal and migratory fish, pollution from “point source” (combined sewage overflows) and “non-point source” (runoff from farms and municipalities), toxic, industrial legacy sediments in harbors, rivers, and in silt deposits behind dams, marine (salt water), aquatic (fresh water) and terrestrial invasive species, marine debris (plastic and other trash, as well as lost and abandoned fishing gear), and climate change, which threatens severe impacts on coastal and marine ecosystems, businesses, and communities throughout the region.

Fixing problems like these is expensive, but according to a [Brookings Institution economic report](#) on the Great Lakes the benefits are well worth the investment. The report predicts a 2-to-1 “return on investment” in the form of jobs, business activity, property values, tourism, and other factors.

“Over the next 20 years, more than \$40 billion of investments will be required to implement regional restoration plans, including the Long Island Sound Study, the Lake Champlain Basin Plan, the Gulf of Maine Restoration and Conservation Plan, and the Rhode Island Bays, Rivers, and Watershed Systems-Level Plan,” said Hale, who is also co-chair of the America’s Great Waters Coalition. “In recent years federal investments in the region have hovered at only about \$10-20 million per year. To sustain the region’s economy and wellbeing of people and wildlife, we need to step up the pace.”

Leading the effort for NWF is Peter Alexander, a resident of Portland, Maine, who spent most of his childhood summers on the Maine coast. Peter is a driving force behind the Gulf of Maine Restoration and Conservation Plan.

“Peter’s experience with the Healing Our Waters® - Great Lakes Coalition, his role as a Steering Committee member of the America’s Great Waters Coalition, and the work he has done organizing the Gulf of Maine plan eminently suit him to lead our Northeast Great Waters initiative,” Fisher said. “We must ensure the necessary support to sustain the program for the 3-5 years it will likely take to secure truly significant federal investments in regional restoration plans.”

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The [National Wildlife Federation](#) is America's conservation organization inspiring Americans to protect wildlife for our children's future.