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New US Gulf of Maine Restoration Plan Promises Economic Opportunity

“Provides manageable solutions that will create jobs”

Portland, ME (December 8, 2010) – After more than two years of development the *US Gulf of Maine Habitat Restoration and Conservation Plan—a needs assessment for Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts* (the *Plan*) was released today.

“Living on an island 12 miles off the coast, I’ve seen first hand the importance and value of the Gulf of Maine ecosystem,” said Congresswoman Chellie Pingree (ME-1st District), through her representative Nick Battista at a press conference. “It’s a critical economic engine that sustains thousands of jobs and hundreds of coastal communities, yet it faces enormous pressures and in places is already seriously degraded. This plan identifies the major problems and provides manageable solutions that will create jobs and help grow the economy.”

Although the Gulf of Maine is renowned for its natural resources, scenery, and recreational value, it suffers 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.

“There have been numerous plans and many excellent programs throughout the Gulf of Maine region, but this is the first time that the extent of the challenges has actually been quantified,” said Ted Diers, chair of the Northeast Regional Ocean Council. The *Plan* identifies more than \$3 billion of investments within the first five years of implementation to begin addressing issues of degraded water quality, loss of fish and wildlife habitat, invasive species, and the growing impacts of climate change on the region’s ecological health.

“Completion of this *Plan* is an important milestone,” said Malia Hale, director of National Restoration and Water Resources Campaign for National Wildlife Federation. “For the Gulf of Maine to receive the kind of attention as other Great Waters like the Great Lakes or Chesapeake Bay, Congress wants to see a comprehensive plan in place supported by the region’s stakeholders. We now have that plan.” (In 2009 Congress authorized the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and appropriated \$475 million to “jumpstart” the program.)

Fixing problems like these takes a significant investment—the \$3 billion called for in the new *Plan* is only for the first five years, with sustained investments at that level needed for at least 20 years—but according to a [recent Brookings Institution economic report](#) (on the Great Lakes) the investments are a great opportunity. That report predicts up to a 3-1 return on investment in the form of jobs, business activity, property values, tourism, and other factors.