



NEWS

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NEW MEXICO PARTNERS PROJECT WINS NATIONAL WETLANDS AWARD

On April 16, Kimberly de Castro of Santa Fe, New Mexico, a participant in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, received the Environmental Law Institute's National Wetlands Award in the Land Stewardship and Development category. The award recognizes de Castro's personal commitment to habitat restoration and her devotion to educating youth about the importance of treating land with respect.

"The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is a win-win approach to habitat conservation for the Service and private landowners," said Service Director Jamie Rappaport Clark. "Through the Partners program, participants receive financial assistance for restoration on their lands that they could not afford on their own. They can also receive technical assistance on designing and implementing restoration projects. At the same time, the Partners program helps the Fish and Wildlife Service fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and wildlife habitat for the American people."

In 1995, de Castro became a Partners for Fish and Wildlife cooperator with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Along with the Service, a number of individuals and organizations helped make the de Castro project a success, including the Playa Lake Joint Venture, the Natural Resources and Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Stewardship Incentive Program, the local soil and water conservation district, and New Mexico's State Game and Fish, Forestry, and Environment departments.

Ms. de Castro dedicated her entire 50-acre property to wildlife, restoring two wetlands and planting more than 5,000 plants. She made significant monetary and personal contributions to the effort.

"The end result, produced by Ms. de Castro's intense personal hands-on management, is a wildlife habitat greatly exceeding expectations of all participating agencies. Her plantings success rate was 90 percent, an almost unheard of rate, because of her personal attention and hard work," Chuck Mullins, state coordinator of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program explained. Mullins nominated de Castro for the wetlands award. In addition to the value of the project for wildlife, the restored land has become an outdoor learning center. In the words of Mullins, "Kimberly's devotion to her land and teaching children about the great outdoors is without equal in the State of New Mexico."

Since its inception in 1987, Partners for Fish and Wildlife has funded more than 17,900 landowner agreements and helped restore 397,000 acres of wetlands, 250,000 acres of native prairie and grasslands, and more than 1,400 miles of riparian (streamside) and in-stream habitat.

Partners projects frequently benefit from cooperative efforts with other Federal, state and local government agencies, as well as private organizations, schools, and businesses. These groups can provide technical expertise or additional funds to help with restoration.

For more information about the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, visit the Service's homepage at www.fws.com or contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Habitat Conservation, Branch of Habitat Restoration, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Rm 400, Arlington, VA 22203; telephone: 703-358-2201; fax: 703-358-2232.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service's 94 million acres include 512 national wildlife refuges, 78 ecological services field stations, 65 national fish hatcheries, 50 wildlife coordination areas, and 38 wetland management districts with waterfowl production areas.

The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes Federal excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies. This program is a cornerstone of the Nation's wildlife management efforts, funding fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, shooting ranges, and related projects across America.