

**Grant Application****Application Number: 2015-327-0229****General Information**

Grant Title: For costs associated with pre-acquisition due diligence required prior to purchasing tracts with high habitat value for preservation in the National Wildlife Refuge system.

Status: Submitted For Review

Program Area: Environment

Date Started: 11/23/2015

Result Area: Land

Date Submitted: 11/28/2015

Investment Type: Project Support

Requested Amount: \$300,000

Geographic Area(s): Brazoria County

Approved Amount: NA

Fort Bend County

Term: 1 years

**Audit Information**

Created By: chapmansuzette@hotmail.com on  
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12:14:35 PM

**Organizational Information****Organization**

Legal Name: FRIENDS OF BRAZORIA WILDLIE  
REFUGES

Current Name: Friends of Brazoria Wildlife  
Refuges

Previous Name(s): Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges has not operated under any name other than that identified in the attached IRS determination letter and does not do so now.

Tax Identification: 760440298

Website: <http://refugefriends.org/>

Type: Non-Profit Public Charity

Primary Phone: 979-297-1815

Fax Phone: --

**Executive Director/ CEO****Physical Address****Mailing Address**

Name: Mr. Ed Barrios

Post Office Box 505

Post Office Box 505

Title: Chairman

Lake Jackson, TX 77566

Lake Jackson, TX 77566

Phone: 979-297-1815

Email: [barrios@refugefriends.org](mailto:barrios@refugefriends.org)

**Grant Application****Board Of Directors****Board Information****Board Governance****How many times a year does your board meet?**

8

**During the past year, what was the average member attendance at board meetings?**

80%

**Does your organization limit the number of terms a board member may serve?**

No

**If yes, what is the maximum number of years a member may serve consecutively?**

N/A

**Does your organization have a board-approved Conflict of Interest policy?**

Yes

**Are any members of your board related to your organization's CEO/Executive Director?**

No

**Board Member Contribution**

Total Amount Given: \$11,900

Percentage Who Gave: 100%

**Board Committees****Core Committees**

- Executive Committee:
- Audit Committee:
- Fund Development Committee:
- Governance Committee:

**Additional Committees**

- Committee 1: Migration Celebration Planning Committee
- Committee 2:
- Committee 3:

**Audit Information**

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**Grant Application**

Board Members		
Name	Affiliation	Member Type
Ed Barrios	Retired - Dow Chemical Company, Chemical Engineer	Chair
Ron Bisbee	Retired USF&WS Refuge Mgr; Consultant- seismog. wk	Member
Martin Cornell	Retired - Dow Chemical Company, Chemist	Member
Mickey Dufilho	Retired Dow Environ. Div; Biology Prof B'port Coll	Member
Phil Huxford	Landscape contractor; former Chair Migrat'n Celebr	Member
Jeanne Manry	Retired business owner; data processing & analysis	Member
Neal McLain	Retired engineer; webmaster-Friends & other grps.	Member
Tom Morris	Retired - Dow Chemical Company, Engineer	Member
David Plunkett	Retired Dow Environ Div; Chair Migrat'n Celebrat'n	Member
Richard Schauffhausen	Retired - Financial Advisor	Member
Tom Taroni	Rtd. Dow Engr; Gulf Coast Bird Observ. board mem.	Member
Torrey Tvedt	Retired Dow Engineer. Engineering consultant	Member

**Financial Details**

**Requested Amount & Project Budget**

	YR 1
Requested Amount:	\$300,000
Project Budget:	<u>\$437,550</u>

**Organization Budget**

	YR 1
Revenue:	\$286,410
Expense:	<u>\$252,163</u>
Net Income:	\$34,247

**Funding**

**Grant Application**

Organization Contributions			
Committed			
	150 Individual Donors - 2 fundraising events	\$116,940	
	14 Individual Donors	\$10,662	
	FOBWR - events & program support	\$7,420	
	Dues from FOBWR members	\$410	
	Committed Total	<u>\$135,432</u>	
	Contributions Total		\$135,432
Organization Earned Income			
Committed			
	Bird of Prey Shows - program income	\$12,320	
	Interest Income	\$1,105	
	Committed Total	<u>\$13,425</u>	
	Earned Income Total		\$13,425
Organization Foundation Support			
Committed			
	Houston Endowment - pre-acquisition funding	\$128,613	
	John P. McGovern Foundation	\$112,688	
	Houston Endowment - revolving reimbursement	\$20,000	
	Phillips 66	\$10,000	
	Trull Foundation for Poole Tract Acquisition	\$10,000	
	Committed Total	<u>\$281,301</u>	
	Foundation Support Total		\$281,301
Organization Public Support			
Committed			
	USF&WS - Urban Initiative (Houston)	\$8,088	
	Federal Court Fines - law enforcement restitution	\$1,735	
	Committed Total	<u>\$9,823</u>	
	Public Support Total		\$9,823
Project Contributions			
Pending			
	Dow Chemical Company	\$10,000	
	Community Fund of Brazoria County	\$8,500	
	Individual Donations	\$4,000	
	Pending Total	<u>\$22,500</u>	
	Contributions Total		\$22,500

**Grant Application**

Project Foundation Support

Pending

Houston Endowment \$300,000

National Fish & Wildlife Foundation \$115,000

Pending Total \$415,000

Foundation Support Total \$415,000

**Application Questions**

**Organization**

1. State your organization’s mission and vision in two or three sentences.

The mission of the Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges (“the Friends,” “the Friends Group”) is to support the Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex in their charge to manage the conservation and restoration of wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the Brazoria, San Bernard, and Big Boggy National Wildlife Refuges and to support and advocate for their public use mandate for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, interpretation and environmental education.

2. Summarize your organization and its work in two or three sentences.

The Friends believe that public education, refuge improvements, and volunteer efforts are critical to conserving a unique habitat: the Columbia Bottomlands Ecosystem. Improving public access and facilities at the Refuge constitute a significant amount of our work. To that end, the Friends obtain resources for Refuge facilities, programs, and materials; recruit volunteers; and participate in habitat improvement, natural history experiences, community outreach education programs, environmental education programs, fund-raising, and facility improvements.

3. How is the work of your organization relevant to the community today? Please limit your response to three to five sentences.

The Friends Group’s work remains relevant by directly addressing three community interests: recreation in the natural environment, environmental education, and habitat conservation. Our work supports environmentally-compatible recreational activities on the Refuge: we build trails, walkways, pavilions, and observation blinds to accommodate visitors and to maximize their enjoyment of the Refuge. Concerns about climate change, habitat destruction, and species preservation have fueled interest in our environmental education programs for younger generations. We address these concerns by providing programs in schools, educating youth about the value of the Columbia Bottomlands Ecosystem, its flora and fauna, the human impact on habitat, and the students’ roles in its protection. Finally, the public is increasingly aware of growing threats to our natural resources and have a renewed interest in habitat conservation. We support habitat conservation by planting trees, seeding prairies, controlling invasive species, and securing grant funds to facilitate the acquisition and protection of acreage with high habitat value.

4. Provide a brief overview of your core programming. As you describe each program, focus on how it produces and maximizes benefits for the people of greater Houston. Please limit your response to three or four sentences per program.

**Grant Application**

Our programs serve two overarching goals: (1) to showcase the Refuge and (2) to increase appreciation of the Columbia Bottomlands Ecosystem. We achieve both goals through programs that focus on environmental education, public awareness, and habitat-compatible recreational activities. Program participation produces intrinsic benefits for the people of greater Houston: they learn something new; they spend a day recreating outdoors; they breathe clean air; they feel connected to nature; they develop a sense of stewardship for the natural environment that sustains them. Core programming consists of the following:

- **Birds of Prey Program:** Since 1994, the Friends Group, USF&WS, EarthQuest, and local sponsors have delivered a Birds of Prey show to area schools. This is a 30-minute environmental education outreach effort utilizing several different raptors including a Peregrine Falcon, Andean Condor, Black Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, Barred Owl and Harris Hawk. In 2015, we conducted 53 shows - the most shows ever - at Migration Celebration, nine civic organizations and 40 schools in the Brazosport, Angleton, Danbury, Sweeny, Van Vleck, Columbia-Brazoria, Damon, Bay City and Alvin school districts. Birds of Prey also performed shows at seven schools in Aransas. A record total of 20,219 students, teachers and administrators attended these educational events.
- **Refuge Junior Naturalist Program:** Our group provides the volunteers for this USF&WS program. It offers a unique opportunity for fifth- and sixth-graders to work with wildlife biologists and other refuge professionals on projects at the Brazoria and San Bernard National Wildlife Refuges from June to December. Participants learn basic naturalist skills, including nature photography, GPS, field sketching, plant and animal identification. They then apply their newly-learned skills to real projects.
- **Discovery Environmental Education Program (DEEP):** The Friends also serve as volunteers for this USF&WS program, now in its 21st year. Throughout the school year, the program offers field trips for elementary and intermediate school students. This year, 3,500 students representing four school districts and several private schools in Brazoria County, Rice University, and Houston area schools are participating in the program. Activities at the Refuge provide students with hands-on experience, augmenting the schools' science curriculum in the area of natural ecological systems. Our volunteers, many of whom are members of the Cradle of Texas Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists, lead and coordinate the investigations.
- **Migration Celebration** is our largest and most highly-attended annual event. In collaboration with USF&WS, Migration Celebration takes place each spring in southern Brazoria County. The three-day event begins formally with a fundraising dinner and featured speaker. Weekend activities center on environmental education and include hiking, kayaking, and van tours; demonstrations; presentations; and workshops. A Children's Discovery program offers activities for youth. The public attends all weekend activities at no charge. The Friends Group makes recreational activities at the Refuge possible. We recruit volunteer work crews to build trails, observation platforms, and boardwalks and to create and install signage. Also, our membership runs the annual citizen-science program that has been monitoring bird fidelity at the Big Pond unit of the San Bernard NWR. We purchase items needed for unique purposes, such as binoculars, an electronic gate at the Brazoria Refuge, and equipment for the Big Slough Discovery Center. Finally, Friends volunteers have donated countless hours to projects such as bird banding, invasive plant species control, and hosting visitors at the Discovery Center, Auto Tour Loop, and Migration Celebration. The Friends also supply the majority of the volunteers for USF&WS's Sea Turtle Patrol Program and the San Bernard Christmas Bird Count.

**Engagement**

5. What is the service area or geographic focus of your organization (i.e. neighborhood, city, county, region, etc.)? If you serve more than one area, please respond for your primary program(s).

Our Charter charges us with supporting the Texas Mid-coast Wildlife National Wildlife Refuge, an area that encompasses Brazoria, Fort Bend, Matagorda, and Wharton counties. We support and work on Refuge land in all of those counties. However, we conduct the majority of our activities in Brazoria County, because it contains 90% of the Refuge's acreage.

**Grant Application**

6. Who are the primary beneficiaries of your core programming? Please limit your response to three to four sentences.

Our core programming benefits three groups, beginning with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. We benefit this agency by securing funding for land acquisition and facilities improvements on the Refuge. We also coordinate volunteers for their habitat restoration projects, such as re-seeding prairies or planting trees in forests. Our group exists solely to help sustain the integrity of the Columbia Bottomlands Ecosystem. By supporting USF&WS, our programming also benefits the general public. People throughout the area benefit from the preservation of forests and wetlands, which improve air quality (through carbon sequestration) and water quality (by protecting freshwater inflow into the Refuge's wetlands). Finally, our programming benefits adults and children who directly participate in our activities. Individuals and families not only enjoy expanded use of the Refuge for outdoor recreation but also broaden their perspectives through environmental education.

7. Are the primary beneficiaries described above the same as the people you seek to engage through that programming? (For example, land conservation efforts may benefit the general public while programming engages landowners or policymakers; a school-based clinic may benefit student health while programming engages parents, school leaders and partnering medical schools; a mentoring program may benefit youth while programming engages youth, adult volunteers to mentor them and school leaders to host the program). If not, please describe any other constituents you seek to engage. Please limit your response to two or three sentences per constituent.

Those who benefit from programming and those we engage are not the same. Programming that benefits USF&WS engage members of the Friends Group, The Cradle of Texas Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists, Texas Mid-coast NWR, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), private and corporate foundations, private landowners, and units of local government. Programming that benefits the general public engages Texas Mid-coast NWR, Texas Parks & Wildlife, environmental groups, industry, the business community, units of local government, and volunteers. Finally, programming that benefits participants engages students, parents, school boards, science teachers, and volunteers such as the Cradle of Texas Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists.

8. Using relevant and descriptive data, provide a summary of the constituents you have engaged in each of the past three years. Include what has been both successful and challenging in your engagement efforts and what strategies you are now employing as a result.

The Friends Group has engaged a diverse group of constituents who represent business and industry, educational institutions, community organizations, and private foundations. When the point of engagement is not programming, it is to request volunteers or financial support.

Over the last three years, outreach efforts succeeded in large part because we linked each organization to an activity that matches its mission or utilizes its expertise. This strategy has allowed us to secure volunteers and donations from likely and unlikely sources. We engaged obvious groups such as the Texas Master Naturalists Cradle of Texas Chapter and Gulf Coast Bird Observatory; these organizations help us organize programs, provide volunteers, or host and facilitate educational programs.

Engagement efforts not only built successful community partnerships but also fostered funding. The Friends tapped into our area's abundance of chemical companies, almost all of which have budgets for grants or donations. We even obtained unsolicited funds from Union Pacific Railroad and Texas Trails (Texas Parks & Wildlife).

Challenges relate to volunteers. All of our programs rely on a steady stream of reliable volunteers. Once we find them, we must coordinate, schedule, and communicate with them, throughout the year, to implement programs. Primarily, we must arrange opportunities where they feel valuable and comfortable. We meet the challenge through recruiting year-round outreach and recruitment.

Engagement has taught us the value of making new contacts to secure funding and volunteers. We recognize the opportunities that arise from partnerships with corporations. We will continue to seek out those whose corporate goals include donating money as well as sharing employees' time and expertise.

**Grant Application****Capability**

9. Describe your organization's greatest abilities. What does your organization know how to do especially well in its primary program(s)? Please limit your response to six to eight sentences.

We believe that the Friends Group performs exceedingly well in three areas: (1) securing funding for our programs, (2) obtaining volunteers for our activities, and (3) conveying the importance of habitat conservation community-wide, to all audiences. At a national convention sponsored by USF&W in Madison, Wisconsin, members of other Refuges' Friends groups as well as Refuge managers remarked upon our skills in those three areas, indicating that only a handful of Friends Groups raise the level of funds or offer the range of programs that we do.

In large part, our success in obtaining funds and volunteers stems from our ability to convey the message, year-round, about habitat appreciation and conservation. We deliver the message at the Discovery Center at the Brazoria NWR every day from Christmas through New Year's Day, when most organizations reduce programming, and through our wildly-popular Birds of Prey program at schools, which raised over \$21,000 in 2015. We do it by reaching 3,500 students every year to present environmental education. Migration Celebration provides a unique opportunity for us to present environmental education in many different formats and venues that appeal to both adults and children. We meet hundreds of people at outreach programs; that effort involves taking reptiles, amphibians, butterflies, and display boards to different locations throughout the year. We talked to over 400 people at the Festival of Lights in Lake Jackson and more at the grand opening of the Buffalo Bayou trail system and Kellogg, Brown & Root Kids Day, part of USF&WS Urban Initiative Program targeting Houston. Also as part of the Urban Initiative for Houston, we host visits to the Brazoria Refuges for Houston inner city students to stimulate interest in Houston's refuges. We believe that by disseminating our message thoroughly, consistently, and well, we are able to attract volunteers and financial support from a wide variety of sources.

10. Describe your organization's most significant achievements over the last three years. When appropriate, include dates (mm/yy) for specific accomplishments. Please limit your response to eight to ten sentences.



## Grant Application

Elsewhere in this proposal, we have described Migration Celebration, a highly-successful program that continues to grow. In April of 2015, we hosted this three-day event - hosting nearly 1,000 visitors despite heavy rain - and raised just under \$30,000. In October, we held our second "A Taste for Nature" fundraiser to raise \$40,000 in match for a \$160,000 grant from Texas Parks and Wildlife Recreational Trails Fund. The grant funds the repair and expansion of the Bobcat Woods trail at the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge. This year, the retired Vice President of BASF Freeport and current Port Commissioner spearheaded fundraising; we also invited the Vice President of Dow Chemical Company's US Gulf Coast Operations to serve as honorary chairman. The event not only netted over \$54,000 but also allowed us to engage influential industry representatives in our efforts.

Second, the Friends Group has increased our scope by hosting events in Houston and bringing Houston youth to Brazoria's Refuges. We have embraced our role in USF&WS's Urban Initiative and actively support the agency's plan to involve Refuges near major cities in those cities' activities. Through the Urban Initiative, we were invited to the Buffalo Bayou expansion. For three years in a row, we brought our reptiles and butterflies to promote the Refuges at Kellogg, Brown & Root's "Kids Day," which is attended by over 10,000 people. We built three native and pollinator gardens for birds and butterflies in Houston with the Houston Parks Department. Also, we visit inner city recreational centers to invited minority students to visit the Refuges during the summer. We participate in the Woods Project, which sponsors inner city students' visits to parks and refuges for volunteering. Through these outreach efforts and partnerships, our Refuges have become the most active of the six refuges in the Houston metropolitan area.

Finally, securing a second \$300,000 grant from Houston Endowment had far-reaching consequences in terms of expediting land acquisition. From its first acquisition in 1997 through 2011, USF&WS placed 18,500 acres in conservation; it took 14 years to reach that threshold. The first Houston Endowment grant facilitated the acquisition of 8,386 acres valued at \$11,693,398. The second grant leveraged the purchase of 2,579 additional acres appraised at \$6,603,002; this grant also paid for appraisals totaling \$11,320,000 on another 4,899 acres that are not yet under contract. Our collaboration with Houston Endowment facilitates and speeds the addition of valuable acreage to the Refuge.

11. Describe the financial and operational plans that ensure your organization's sustainability over the next three to five years. Please limit your response to six to eight sentences.

Raising funds to finance our projects is always challenging. However, the Friends Group diligently pursues grants and donations while also implementing fundraising activities. Because we do this throughout the year, our organization has sufficient income to sustain our programs and complete projects on the Refuges. Board members with administrative skills and grant experience carefully and responsibly monitor revenue and expenditures. Looking long-term, our board has specific plans to engage new, different, and more private businesses throughout the year. Our meetings with these companies will focus on volunteer and financial support.

## Results

12. What opportunity or problem does the project address?

## Grant Application

Less than 100 years ago, the Columbia Bottomlands Ecosystem spanned 700,000 acres and over 1,000 square miles of bottomland hardwood forest adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico. Though vastly reduced in size, this unique floodplain Ecosystem still contains an array of nationally- and internationally-significant wetland habitats: rivers, bayous, sloughs, marshes, ponds, lakes, and native prairie. By virtue of its location near the Gulf, the habitat is a literal haven for Nearctic-Neotropical migratory birds. Millions of these migrants make landfall in the Bottomlands during spring and fall migration, and they rely on the remaining forest to rest and feed before and after crossing the Gulf. Resident birds, migrant species, and waterfowl use the Bottomlands for breeding, feeding, nesting, resting, or wintering. The Columbia Bottomlands Task Force found that 237 species of birds, totaling at least 29 million individuals, migrate through the forest every year. In 2011, The American Birding Association reported that over half of the 600-plus species of birds known to inhabit the United States travel through the Columbia Bottomlands.

Now reduced to 150,000 acres, the original habitat has been decimated by logging, grazing, agriculture, commercial and residential development, and drainage. Every year, thousands of acres are lost. In the last 18 months, hundreds of acres were cleared for pipeline easements. Houston's expansion southward compounds the local economic stresses on the Ecosystem.

The entire Ecosystem is at risk, and a new threat – climate change – is a growing factor. The negative effects of habitat loss stemming from climate change are not limited to birds. A World Bank report entitled "Turn Down the Heat: Why a 4°C Warmer World Must Be Avoided" (November 2012) describes the effects of climate change - and the subsequent consequences of deforestation - on human populations. First, warming leads to more evaporation and evapotranspiration, which enhances surface drying and, consequently, the intensity and duration of droughts – a major and growing concern in Texas. (Conversely, preserving bottomlands not only helps prevent water loss through evaporation but also protects the water table.) Furthermore, the report states that deforestation accounts for almost 20% of carbon emissions. If greenhouse gas emissions and other stresses continue at or above current rates, the Ecosystem's resilience could be overcome by an unprecedented combination of change in climate, associated disturbances (flooding, drought, wildfire, insects, and ocean acidification) and other stressors that include land use change, pollution, and over-exploitation of resources. Also, if increases in global average temperatures exceed 2° to 3° above pre-industrial levels, approximately 20% to 30% of plant and animal species assessed world-wide could face an increased risk of extinction. In turn, species extinctions, declining species abundance, and shifts in species and biome distributions compound the loss or degradation of ecosystem services (Leadley, 2010). This matters. Ultimately, the Columbia Bottomlands Ecosystem, like all others, is composed of its species as well as the interactions between them and their physical environment. Biologically-rich ecosystems are usually diverse, and researchers agree that a strong link exists between biological diversity and ecosystem productivity, stability and functioning (McGrady-Steed, Harris, and Morin, 1997; David Tilman, Wedin, and Knops, 1996; D Tilman et al., 2001). Loss of species within the Ecosystem will have profound negative effects on its functioning, its stability, and its ability to provide goods and services to human societies.

The World Bank report recommends leaving forests standing as one of the most cost-effective ways to lower emissions. The Friends concur. Once destroyed, old growth forest will take generations to replace. The current quantity of land in conservation is not adequate to protect either the Ecosystem or its dependent wildlife and human species. Fortunately, USF&WS can use State and federal grant funds to purchase Bottomlands tracts. Fifteen tracts are targeted for acquisition. The major obstacle impeding the purchases is funding for pre-acquisition due diligence: negotiations, appraisals, surveys, title reports, title policies. A third \$300,000 Houston Endowment grant for pre-acquisition costs will facilitate the conservation of 7,000 acres of prime habitat in this unique and uniquely valuable Ecosystem.

13. What are the results—the outcomes for those you serve—that your organization is committed to achieving with this project?

## Grant Application

With this project, the Friends Group upholds our ongoing commitment to protect habitat in the Columbia Bottomlands Ecosystem. The positive results of protecting land do not end. They become evident, they accumulate, and they compound exponentially, year after year. We expect the project to produce specific outputs and outcomes. Outputs relate to tasks that facilitate land acquisition:

- Pre-acquisition due diligence completed with federally-required documents in hand
- Purchase contracts with landowners finalized
- Closings completed
- Tracts added to the Refuge system

Outcomes focus on numerical increases that assess the project's ultimate impact on the environment and the public:

- Approximately 7,000 more acres of prime wildlife habitat conserved and added to the Refuge
- Increase in number of all birds present
- Increase in bird populations on adjacent tracts
- Increase in migrant Neartic-Neotropical birds
- Increase in breeding pairs
- Increase in quality of health in migrating populations
- Increase in plant species established
- Increase in forest growth & re-establishment of under-story plants that support bird populations
- Improved water quality
- Increase in air quality and carbon sequestered
- Decrease in excess run-off to San Bernard and Brazos rivers
- Reduction in erosion of sediment on San Bernard and Brazos rivers
- Increased public access to forest, birding sites, San Bernard and Brazos rivers
- Increased public education through outdoor interpretation & environmental education opportunities

### Project

14. Briefly describe your project.

**Grant Application**

Acquiring and protecting tracts of land will not have an immediate impact on the effects of climate change. However, it will stop habitat loss on acquired tracts - immediately and permanently - that results from other human activities. To that end, the Friends Group requests \$300,000 for pre-acquisition support to facilitate the acquisition and protection of 15 tracts in Brazoria and Fort Bend County. Located within the Brazos and San Bernard rivers' watersheds and Halls Bayou, the properties total approximately 7,000 acres and are valued at over \$10,000,000.

These are significant tracts in the Columbia Bottomlands Ecosystem - the only expanse of hardwood forested wetlands in Texas adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico. Preserving this acreage furthers our goal of conserving this internationally-significant Ecosystem, found nowhere else in the United States, in perpetuity, as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Adding these tracts to the Refuge moves us closer to our goal of protecting a total of 70,000 acres of bottomland hardwood forest in the Colorado, San Bernard, and Brazos rivers' floodplains. In some cases, at the USF&WS's direction, tracts may be protected under the State wildlife management or State parks systems. The acquisitions will enhance the existing corridor of prime waterfowl and forest songbird habitat. When we conserve forested wetlands tracts like these, we also support the restoration of wetland coastal marshes. In addition, protecting the land protects the rivers' watersheds, which supply fresh water to existing estuarine marshes in the Refuge. For their part, the estuaries are critical to the coast's biological resources, including fish and shrimp, which support commerce and recreation. These tracts are significant in and of themselves and as part of a mosaic of wetland forest blocks that together protect the ecosystem.

Of the 15 targeted tracts, five are located in Fort Bend County. Currently, USFW&S has four tracts in Fort Bend County: 1,800 acres on Buffalo Creek, a 100-acre donated conservation easement next to the Buffalo Creek tract, 360 acres on the San Bernard River, and a 20- acre tract. Expanding the Refuge in Fort Bend County will not only foster more recreational and volunteering opportunities for that County's residents but also will provide more venues for the Friends' growing environmental education and outreach programs.

USF&WS will use State and federal funds to purchase the tracts. However, public funds for pre-acquisition due diligence are extremely limited. Therefore, the Friends Group seeks funds for appraisals, surveys, title documents, land consultant fees, and closing costs that precede the tracts' actual purchase. Pre-acquisition activities are the first step to purchasing, protecting, and preserving acreage in the Columbia Bottomlands. In the pre-acquisition stage, Michael Lange, formerly of the Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Refuge and now with the Trust for Public Land, and Thomas Smith of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation negotiate with landowners and conduct due diligence required to secure clear title. Pre-acquisition activities are:

- Contract appraisals
- Conduct biological ascertainment inspections
- Obtain title reports
- Complete appraisals and value approvals following standards
- Perform site inspections
- Conduct environmental site assessments
- Obtain updated land surveys
- Order title policies
- Complete any necessary title curatives
- Prepare just compensation statements
- Submit written offers to landowner (with purchase agreement)
- Establish escrow closings

By facilitating land acquisition and conservation, the project will stop and prevent de-forestation. Consequently, it will provide green space, improve air quality, store excess runoff and river overflow, protect freshwater inflows to adjacent coastal salt marshes, buffer hurricane impact, conserve biodiversity and wildlife, sequester carbon dioxide (reducing green house gases), and maintain the quality of life for area residents.

15. Other than securing funding, what steps or activities are critical to the overall success of the project?

**Grant Application**

The project's success hinges on activities in two areas: (1) communicating with landowners and (2) completing due diligence required to purchase the tracts. Mr. Lange and Mr. Smith must contact landowners to explain the acquisition process as an environmental alternative that protects the land, to ensure their willingness to sell, and to provide updates as the process moves toward closing. Due diligence activities entail work to confirm clear title, assess fair-market value, determine meets and bounds, and verify the tracts' environmental integrity.

16. What evidence of success has led you to use this approach?

One simple fact confirms the success of this approach: it has resulted in the Refuge acquiring and protecting 36,000 acres in the Columbia Bottomlands since 1997. We will note that all of the due diligence activities are proscribed by the federal government prior to completing a legal sale. However, Mr. Lange and Mr. Smith succeeded because they not only know the approach but also apply it diligently, methodically, and completely to facilitate acquisitions – and the Friends secured funds for due diligence. The evidence is tangible. From the initial Houston Endowment grant in September, 2011 through October, 2015, 15 significant Bottomland hardwood tracts totaling 10,965 acres were acquired from private landowners. At appraised market value, land values total \$18,296,400. The Houston Endowment grant leveraged the purchases, which used funds from the Migratory Bird Commission, North American Wetlands Conservation Act, Land and Water Conservation Funds, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service under the Wetland Reserve Program. This application includes a map showing the tracts preserved, tracts under negotiation now, and expansions that resulted from Houston Endowment's support.

17. How will your organization know when it has achieved the intended results? What information or evidence will you use to verify success?

The pre-acquisition project has three goals: (1) completing due diligence on selected tracts with high habitat value; (2) acquiring those tracts through fee title purchase; and (3) adding the tracts to the National Wildlife Refuge or Texas Parks and Wildlife Management Area. Success is easy to measure: every dollar spent will facilitate the purchase of land that becomes part of the Refuge. With every closing, we will know that we have achieved our goals. Specific to this request for pre-acquisition due diligence funding (our first goal), we will use information directly related to due diligence: the number of completed surveys, appraisals, title reports, and title policies. Because pre-acquisition activities facilitate the other two goals, we also will monitor the number of sales contracts finalized, the number of closings, and the number of acres and tracts added to the Refuge.

18. Who will lead the project? Why was he or she selected?

**Grant Application**

Jennifer Sanchez, Project Director, Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), will oversee the project with the expert assistance of Michael Lange, Senior Project Manager, Texas Gulf Coast, for Trust for Public Land (TPL), and Thomas E. Smith, land consultant for National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). These individuals were selected because of their experience with habitat conservation through land acquisition. Ms. Sanchez oversees all land acquisitions for the Texas Mid-coast NWR. Mr. Lange created the Columbia Bottomlands habitat acquisition and preservation program in 1993 and managed the effort until 2015, when he assumed a similar role with TPL. Mr. Smith has not only started refuges across the United States but also is the acknowledged expert on the acquisition and negotiation process.

Mr. Lange holds a BS in Biology from Arizona State University. He worked for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) for over 36 years as a Refuge Manager, Wildlife Biologist, and Coordinator for the Columbia Bottomlands project. Mr. Lange helped develop the framework for the Columbia Bottomlands conservation effort under the initial Austin Wood's Conservation Plan. He has forged partnerships and, to date, obtained over \$67 million dollars to acquire, preserve, and protect 36,000 acres on 65 tracts in this unique Ecosystem. Mr. Lange coordinates negotiations with willing sellers and realty services to meet federal requirements for title insurance, federal appraisal standards, environmental assessments, and land surveys.

Thomas E. Smith develops partnerships with landowners and provides market value appraisal reports, land surveys, and extensive land consulting advice. In 2012, he moved from Albuquerque, New Mexico to Lake Jackson, Texas. The move allowed him to focus exclusively on land acquisition in the Columbia Bottomlands; his relocating also eliminates inter-state travel costs. Mr. Smith has personally directed and successfully completed the purchase of over one million acres of land in the western states that are now managed as 40 units of the Refuge System, waterfowl production areas, fish hatcheries, and research stations. He holds a BS in Forestry and a graduate degree in Business Administration from Michigan Tech University. He completed courses at George Washington University Graduate School in Economics of Natural Resources, U.S.

Department of Agriculture School in Administrative Law, and the Department of Justice as approved Land Title Examiner for property to be acquired by the U.S. federal agencies. For 36 years, Mr. Smith worked for USF&WS in four Regions and Washington D.C. as a Forester, Real Estate Appraiser, Land Title Examiner, Regional Realty Management Chief, Regional Realty Supervisor and Acting Chief, and Assistant Regional Director for Wildlife Refuges and Realty. Since retiring from USF&WS in 1994, Mr. Smith has worked for NFWF as a Land Preservation Consultant. In that role, he has completed more than 18 land preservation projects in the western states, preserving, to date, over 100,000 acres of habitat now managed by USF&WS, state and local public agencies, and non-profit conservation organizations. The recipient of numerous awards for his unmatched performance and achievements in conservation, Mr. Smith provides consulting services to the Texas Mid-coast NWR Complex and conservation partners to preserve the Bottomlands.

19. Are any partners or intermediaries critical to your organization's success with this project? If so, who are they and what are their roles?

The pre-acquisition project's success depends on its partners, the most critical of which is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Region 2 Realty Division. Michael Lange will not only coordinate the process but also will be the primary point of contact for landowners. In addition, Mr. Lange's role will include site inspections, environmental assessments, and biological ascertainments. Supporting Mr. Lange is Thomas E. Smith of NFWF, who now has an office at the Mid-coast NWR Complex. In his role as land consultant, Mr. Smith will conduct negotiations with landowners and secure titles, surveys, appraisals, and similar documents required prior to closing. Julia Ela, NFWF Account Manager, will support Mr. Smith from NFWF's Washington, D.C. office.

Securing and strengthening partnerships for land acquisition is an ongoing process. Other partners who facilitate acquisitions through funding support or outright land donations include the Trust for Public Land, the Conservation Fund, the Community Foundation of Brazoria County, Chevron Phillips, the Nature Conservancy, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Galveston Bay Foundation, John P. McGovern Foundation, Texas Department of Environmental Quality, and Joe Hudson (private landowner and donor of the Hudson Woods tract).

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**Participants**

20. Describe the characteristics of the people you seek to engage through this project or program. This description should include the specific traits you will target and/or track (i.e. age, education level, ethnicity, gender, income level, neighborhood location, occupation and/or specific needs).

The proposed project focuses on the acquisition of land from 15 private landowners in Brazoria and Fort Bend counties within the Columbia Bottomlands Ecosystem. Demographics are not a factor in the engagement process. Rather, adding acreage to the Refuge entails engaging property owners who want to sell their land. At minimum, the landowners must meet three criteria: they must own tracts with high habitat value, they must hold clear title to their property, and they must be willing sellers. Typically, the landowners are individuals who had used their land to generate income and no longer want to do so. Often, the landowner's family has inherited the property and has no desire to run an operation or maintain the land. Frequently, the landowners have tested the real estate market but either could not locate a buyer with sufficient means or they had no acceptable offers. The majority had learned from other landowners that USF&WS and Trust for Public Land buy large tracts and will pay appraised value. An occasional few have environmental interests at heart. These particular sellers engage with USF&WS and Trust for Public Land because they want their land preserved as habitat.

21. Approximately how many people within reasonable reach of your organization fit this description? How did you calculate this number?

Mr. Lange and Mr. Smith have identified 15 landowners for the proposed project, all of whom meet the primary criteria: their land contains valuable habitat, they hold clear title, and they want to sell. We cannot calculate the number of landowners who fit the description without contacting every landowner in the Refuge area – unsolicited - to interview them about their land. However, our knowledge of areas with desirable habitat and the number of inquiries from interested landowners suggest that hundreds of landowners could fit the description.

22. What is the actual number of people you expect to engage over the coming year? How do you ensure that the people you actually engage have the same characteristics as those you seek to engage?

Over the coming year, Mr. Lange and Mr. Smith will continue to engage the 15 landowners they have targeted for the proposed project. In addition, Mr. Lange and Mr. Smith have identified other landowners who own Bottomland and coastal habitat within in the project area. Through site visits, Mr. Lange and Mr. Smith have assessed the habitat value of the tracts. They will confirm that the owners hold clear title by conducting title searches.

**Documents**

File Name	Type	Size
2015 FOBWR Operating Budget - Projected.xls	Operating Budget	30 KB
990 Aug 6.pdf	IRS 990 Tax Return Form (or Statement of Exemption)	1103.85 KB
Financial Statement nov 28 2015.xlsx	Financial Statement	15.98 KB
Project Budget - pre-acquisition 2015.docx	Program Budget	13.22 KB

**Confirmation Statements**

**The organization, programmatic and financial information being submitted in this application is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge.**

Yes

**I am authorized to submit this request on behalf of this organization.**

Yes

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## Grant Application

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### Submitted By

Name: Ms. Suzette Chapman

Title: grant writer

Phone: 979-798-1947

Email: chapmansuzette@hotmail.com