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Gulf of Mexico Program

Office of Public Affairs ♦ Bldg. 1100, Rm. 220F ♦ Stennis Space Center, Miss. 39529-6000
(228) 688-1159 ♦ Fax: (228) 688-2709 ♦ E-Mail: hines-smith.terry@epa.gov ♦ www.epa.gov/gmpo

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AROUND THE BEND NATURE TOURS WINS 2ND PLACE GULF GUARDIAN AWARD

STENNIS SPACE CENTER, Miss. – The Gulf of Mexico Program recently announced that Around the Bend Nature Tours, will receive a second place Gulf Guardian Award for 2003 in the Business Category. The award will be presented to representatives of Around the Bend at the Southern States Environmental Conference and Exhibition scheduled Sept. 23-25, in Biloxi.

Four years ago the Gulf of Mexico Program developed the Gulf Guardian awards as a method of recognizing and honoring the businesses, community groups, individuals, and agencies that are taking positive steps to keep the Gulf healthy, beautiful and productive. The Gulf of Mexico Program began in 1988 to protect, restore, and maintain the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem in economically sustainable ways. Award entries were received from Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. A first, second, and third place award are given each year in six categories – individual, business, youth and education, nonprofit organizations, government, and partnership efforts.

“Our oceans and coasts are precious resources,” said Jimmy Palmer, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Regional Administrator in Atlanta. “Coastal and marine waters provide some of the most diverse and biologically productive habitats on the planet,” he added. “This year’s Gulf Guardian Award winners are doing their part to keep these valuable resources healthy and productive.”

“At Around the Bend Nature Tours we strive to give a sense of Florida as home,” said Karen Fraley, owner and naturalist. “For hundreds of years, since the time of the first Spanish explorers, people have thought of Florida as a place to visit and leave behind. If we can make people think of this place as home, they are more likely to want to preserve and protect it. Our motto is: ‘Go Wild! and hear the Florida Story’.”

For four years, Around the Bend Nature Tours has provided exceptional outdoor education opportunities to school children and the general public by introducing them to the natural environment of coastal Southwest Florida. The program was created to educate people about the local marine environment and to teach them stewardship skills that might promote future preservation of the Gulf of Mexico and surrounding bays. Around the Bend Nature Tours provides tours of the barrier islands, mangrove forests, and salt marshes, bird watching tours, kayak trips and sunset excursions.

Gulf of Mexico Program Office Acting Director Bryon O. Griffith said, “Our 2003 Gulf Guardian Award winners are to be commended for taking action to preserve and restore the Gulf of Mexico.” “One out of every six jobs in the United States is marine-related, generating \$54 billion in goods and services annually. Protecting these waters makes sense economically, aesthetically, and

environmentally. Acting as one community to protect our one and only Gulf of Mexico is essential to our way of life and our standard of living.”

For a list of all the Gulf Guardian Award winners for 2003, visit the Gulf of Mexico Program web site at <http://www.epa.gov/gmpo> and click on the Gulf Guardian Award button on the left.

The Gulf of Mexico Program is underwritten by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is a non-regulatory, inclusive consortium of state and federal government agencies and representatives of the business and agricultural community, fishing industry, scientists, environmentalists, and community leaders from all five Gulf States. The Gulf Program seeks to improve the environmental health of the Gulf in concert with economic development.

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Editor's Note: For more information about the Gulf Guardian Awards and the Gulf of Mexico Program, call Terry Hines Smith at 228-688-1159. For more information about Around the Bend Nature Tours, call Karen Fraley at 941-794-8773.