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Gulf of Mexico Program

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COASTAL ROOTS PROGRAM WINS 2ND PLACE GULF GUARDIAN AWARD

STENNIS SPACE CENTER, Miss. – The Gulf of Mexico Program recently announced that Coastal Roots: School Seedling Nursery Program for Wetland Restoration, will receive a second place Gulf Guardian Award for 2003 in the Youth and Education Category. The award will be presented to representatives of the Louisiana Sea Grant College Program based at Louisiana State University during 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. First, second, and third place awards 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.”

Coastal Roots is a coastal restoration and nursery program jointly managed by the Louisiana Sea Grant College Program. It was created in 2001 by Dr. Pam Blanchard with LSU’s Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Ed Bush with LSU’s Department of Horticulture, and David Bourgeois, a Sea Grant Extension Agent with the LSU Agricultural Center. Coastal Roots helps restore critical Gulf of Mexico coastal habitats, helps students develop a sense of stewardship towards wetlands restoration, and informs the public of coastal restoration needs. The program currently includes 15 schools in 11 south Louisiana parishes.

“I’m very proud of the students, teachers, and organizations that have come together to make Coastal Roots work,” said Blanchard. “They all have a sincere interest in protecting and restoring our fragile coastal environments. No matter the heat, the mud, or the mosquitoes, our Coastal Roots students and teachers put themselves on the line to help restore a small part of what has been lost.

Bush added, “What’s outstanding about Coastal Roots is that it integrates classroom instruction about coastal land loss issues and basic horticulture concepts with field experience.” “Students are growing trees that will have a positive impact on rehabilitating a disturbed coastal habitat. They can

see the direct connection between what they learn in the classroom and what's happening on our coast."

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 the Louisiana Sea Grant College Program and the Coastal Roots Program, call Marilyn Barrett-O'Leary at 225-578-6349.