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## **HOUSTON AUDUBON AWARDED GRANT TO CONSTRUCT BIRD NESTING ISLANDS**

**HOUSTON (November 16, 2017)** – Houston Audubon was awarded \$239,800 to create two new colonial waterbird nesting islands and enhance existing nesting habitat for thousands of birds that depend on this important habitat. The **Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary Rookery Island Restoration and Enhancement** project located on the Upper Texas Coast at High Island is part of a landscape-scale effort to restore lost colonial waterbirds impacted by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The project is made possible with funding from the Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF).

Houston Audubon’s Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary is the largest of four sanctuaries owned and managed by Houston Audubon in High Island, Texas. The 178-acre sanctuary includes a combination of oak mottes, prairie, wetlands, and ponds with one pond having an island that hosts a productive colonial waterbird rookery that has become a favored breeding and roosting site for thousands of waterbirds.

“The High Island rookery has served as a reliable and productive nesting area since the acquisition and protection of the Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary in 1994,” said Helen Drummond, Executive Director of Houston Audubon. The two additional islands created by the project will be located near the existing rookery at the sanctuary.

“Given the ample foraging area in the nearby Anahuac and McFaddin National Wildlife Refuges and the continued protection of the nesting area by Houston Audubon staff, we are hopeful the expansion of nesting habitat will result in significant recovery of bird species such as Great Egrets, Roseate Spoonbill, Snowy Egrets, and Tricolored Herons,” said Richard Gibbons, Conservation Director of Houston Audubon.

In partnership with Ducks Unlimited, Houston Audubon will construct the two nesting islands using the channel dredge material from adjacent water bodies which will result in deeper trenches that create a barrier to prevent predators from accessing the islands. Additionally, water control structures will direct freshwater runoff into the ponds that keep the islands safe and provide additional foraging areas.

“We strongly value our partnership with Ducks Unlimited. With funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited (DU) prepared the engineering specifications that will guide construction. We will work closely with Ducks Unlimited to bring this project to completion,” said Drummond.

“The High Island rookery at Houston Audubon’s Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary is unique,” said Cliff Shackelford, Nongame Ornithologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. “Not only does the island provide critical habitat, it is also a favorite of many visitors. It is one of very few places where one can go and observe elaborate in-your-face courtship and nesting without disturbing the birds.” The additional islands will be a welcome addition for the birds and the many visitors flocking to High Island, one of the top ten birding destinations in North America.

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