

News Release

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### **Cedar Bayou and Vinson Slough Dredging to Begin Next April**

Aransas County Commissioner Charles Smith announced during Commissioners Court on Monday that the Texas General Land Office has awarded the county a \$1,071,032 grant to assist with the Cedar Bayou project. The grant funds are from the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act of 2006, also known as GoMESA. Smith explained that while additional funds are still needed, with the announcement of this grant, the county can now proceed with the project. He said that a request for bids will be published in late October, dredging will begin next April, and the pass will be open in October 2014. Construction can only take place between April 15 and October 15, while the most famous of our winter Texans, the endangered whooping cranes, are enjoying the weather in their summer home, a wetland complex in the Wood Buffalo National Park in northern Alberta, Canada.

Greg Harlan, a local grants consultant, has been assisting the county with the project. He indicated that GoMESA funds are to be used for coastal conservation, restoration and hurricane protection. The Act shares a portion of outer continental shelf (OCS) oil and gas leasing revenues with Texas, Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, the four Gulf oil and gas producing states.

Cedar Bayou is a tidal inlet between San Jose and Matagorda Islands. The inlet is approximately 3 miles in length and connects the Gulf of Mexico with Mesquite Bay, which in turn connects to San Antonio Bay and Aransas Bay through shallows and small connections, and from there to several other bays in the Aransas-Mesquite-San Antonio Estuary system. Vinson Slough is a 22,000-acre wetland complex connected to Cedar Bayou on the back side of San Jose Island, and ultimately connects with Aransas Bay. Flow through Cedar Bayou has been intermittent, at best, since 1979, when the pass was closed with sand in order to protect critical estuarine habitats in the bay system from the Ixtoc I oil spill near Campeche, Mexico, from entering into the Aransas bay system. An average of approximately 10,000 to 30,000 barrels per day were discharged into the Gulf for nearly 10 months. Prevailing currents carried the oil towards the Texas coastline.

When open, the pass rejuvenates bay waters, which provides the estuaries of San Antonio Bay, Aransas Bay, Carlos Bay, and Mesquite Bay the inward and outward flow of Gulf water necessary for maintaining rich and healthy estuary

systems. Lack of a quality flow of seawater has resulted in numerous adverse impacts, including decline in the health of the wetlands and an overall reduction in the populations of fish, crab, and shrimp in the coastal areas.

Commissioner Smith indicated that the county and its project partner, the Coastal Conservation Association, are providing a significant share of the \$9,000,000 project, with additional funds from The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, which has committed grants totaling \$3,250,000. He said that, in addition to this recent award, the General Land Office has supported the project from the early stages, with grants to a non-profit organization, Save Cedar Bayou, for hydraulic analysis, biological and environmental assessment, and the preliminary engineering design.