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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCEANS AND WETLANDS CONNECT ONCE MORE

March, 2009, Huntington Beach, CA – Ocean water filled in dredged channels at the Huntington Beach Wetlands yesterday for the first time in over 100 years! Engineering contractors performed a partial breach on the levee that separates the semi-arid marshlands of the Brookhurst Marsh along Pacific Coast Highway from the teeming ocean waters of Huntington Beach. The levee breach is part of a larger effort to restore Huntington Beach wetlands back to their natural function as a nursery for multiple species of fish and nesting grounds for seabirds.

Gary Gorman, Project Manager for the Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy, had to revise plans to fully breach the levee in March when nesting activity of the endangered Belding's Savannah Sparrow was found within the proposed flood area. Gary worked with the California Department of Fish and Game to design a partial breach that would limit the amount of seawater entering the marsh until nesting season is over in September. A full breach will then take place submerging most of the dry land that is seen there today. "Once this area is fully flooded in September the Belding's Sparrow will know where the water line is and nest above it," stated Gary. This project will ultimately enhance the bird's habitat.

Approximately ninety percent of southern California's wetlands have been lost to coastal development. The Huntington Beach Wetlands were once part of a large tidally influenced wetlands area encompassing almost 3,000 acres beneath the western bluffs of what is now Costa Mesa. Today only about 180 acres of historic wetlands area remains, most of which has been cut off from the ocean for decades. The Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy, a non-profit land trust, acquired the land in 1989 with the hope of one day restoring it back to its natural state. Once completed, 140 acres of wetland habitat will be restored at the Huntington Beach Wetlands.

Neighboring Bolsa Chica Wetlands received attention last fall for the extraordinary return of fish and wildlife shortly after large-scale restoration. Similar success is expected for the Huntington Beach wetlands especially for certain commercially important fish like California Halibut that use wetlands for nursery habitat. Restoring wetlands also reduces damaging effects of erosion, flooding, and storm-surges.

Major funding for this restoration project was provided by the Trustees of the Montrose Settlements Restoration Program (MSRP), created in 2001 to restore natural resources harmed by millions of pounds of DDT and PCBs released into the Southern California marine environment from the 1940s to the early 1970s. Among other resources, fish habitat and recreational fishing were injured by the releases of DDT and PCBs. While the releases were terminated almost 40 years ago, these contaminants continue to harm fishing and fish habitat today.

MSRP is overseen by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, as the lead natural resource trustee, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, California Department of Fish and Game, California State Lands Commission, and California Department of Parks and Recreation.

AES Corporation, the County of Orange, and the City of Huntington Beach are also providing funding for the \$6.2 million restoration project.

For more information and media relations, contact Gabrielle Dorr, MSRP Outreach Coordinator 562-980-3236.

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Acting on behalf of the public to restore coastal and marine resources injured by hazardous substances

