

## **Project Description:**

### **Project Title: UTMSI Wetlands Center**

**Description:** The UTMSI will create a wetland at their site in Port Aransas, Texas. The site will be approximately 3.5 acres and will be bound on the north by the south jetty of the Aransas Pass Ship Channel and the Pier Laboratory, on the south by the service road north of the UTMSI Visitors Center, on the east by the UTMSI property line, and on the west by the UTMSI boat basin bulkhead. The site is old spoil disposal sediment currently covered with grassland prairie and upland vegetation. The salt water return from the lab's running seawater system runs on the north side of the Pier Laboratory and is fringed with Black Mangrove, Spartina, and a diverse group of halophytes. The SEP project will create a high and low salt marsh with tidal channels. The major objective will be getting tidal flow into the marsh from the south jetty and the UTMSI boat basin bulkhead. There will be several tidal channels entering the marsh. Each channel will be complete with submerged sea-grasses and fringed with Black Mangrove and Spartina. The marsh will also include several islands and upland areas that will serve as bird nesting and loafing sites. Plants incorporated into the marsh will include salt wort, pickle weed, sea-ox-eye daisy, sea purselane, sea lavender, key grass, salt grass, and wolfberry. SEP monies will be used for tidal access points, excavation and site contouring, as well as marsh planting and habitat creation. Material excavated from the site will be used to create a series of dunes that will protect the marsh from storm surge. The public will be able to tour the perimeter on their own, and attend guided tours to the interior.

**Benefits:** The UTMSI marsh at Port Aransas will serve as a model marsh for the Gulf of Mexico. It will benefit the environment by providing food and shelter for a variety of native fish, shellfish, birds, and mammals. The marshes will also result in the reduction of pollution by filtering particulates and excess nutrients from runoff. In addition, the new habitat will protect shorelines from erosion and will help reduce the effects of flooding.

**Eligible Counties:** Aransas, Kleberg, Nueces, and San Patricio.

**Estimated Time to Complete:** 1-2 years.

**Estimated Cost:** \$1,500,000.

**Minimum Contribution:** \$10,000.