

NEWS RELEASE

Judd Gregg

United States Senator for New Hampshire
393 Russell Building, Washington, D.C. 202-224-3324 www.senate.gov/~gregg/



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Contact: Erin Rath/Jeff Turcotte

SENATOR GREGG RE-INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO PROTECT SENSITIVE COASTAL ECOSYSTEMS

Forest Legacy program used as model for Senator's Coastal Protection Act

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH) recently joined Senator Ernest Hollings (D-SC) in introducing legislation authorizing the purchase of sensitive coastal ecosystems with the goal of better ensuring their protection from development or conversion. The Coastal Protection Act, first introduced in the 107th Congress by Senators Gregg and Hollings, creates a Coastal and Estuarine Land Protection Program, headed by the U.S. Department of Commerce, which will award grants to states with approved coastal management programs or National Estuarine Research Reserves through a competitive grant process for the purpose of acquiring property or interest in the property. The measure authorizes a funding level of \$60 million for Fiscal Year 2004. Senator Gregg and Senator Hollings are the Chairman and Ranking Member respectively of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee that oversees funding for the Department of Commerce.

Senator Gregg stated, "This coastal protection measure promotes coordinated land acquisition and protection efforts in critical coastal and estuarine areas. It does this through the fostering of partnerships between non-governmental organizations and federal, state, and local governments. With Americans rapidly moving toward the coasts, pressures to develop sensitive coastal ecosystems are increasing. There are fewer and fewer undeveloped and pristine areas left in the nation's coastal and estuarine watersheds. These areas provide important nursery habitat for two-thirds of the nation's commercial fish and shellfish, provide nesting and foraging habitat for coastal birds, harbor significant natural plant communities, and serve to facilitate coastal flood control and pollutant filtration.

"This coastal land protection program provides much needed support for local coastal conservation initiatives throughout the country. In my role on the Commerce, Justice, State Appropriations Subcommittee, I have been able to secure significant funds for the Great Bay estuary in New Hampshire. This estuary is the jewel of the seacoast region, and is home to a wide variety of plants and animal species that are particularly threatened by encroaching development and environmental pollutants. By working with local communities to purchase lands or easements on these valuable parcels of land, New Hampshire has been able to successfully conserve the natural and scenic heritage of this vital estuary. Programs like the Coastal and Estuarine Land Protection program will now enable other states to participate in these community-based conservation efforts in coastal areas."

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The measure is supported by The Trust for Public Land, Coastal States Organization, The Nature

Conservancy, Land Trust Alliance, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and the American Sportfishing Association.

Senator Gregg was honored last month by a regional and national fisheries group for his commitment to protecting the Great Bay estuary: the Coastal Conservation Association of New Hampshire, an organization comprised of recreational fishermen committed to marine conservation, honored Senator Gregg with its “Conservationist of the Year” award. In addition, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission bestowed its annual “Chairman’s Award for Distinguished Meritorious Service” on Senator Gregg. Last year, several environmental groups, including the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership, honored Senator Gregg for his long-term efforts to conserve New Hampshire’s Great Bay estuary. As both the Chairman and former Ranking Member on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee that oversees funding for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Senator Gregg has been able to secure federal funding over the last several years to leverage the protection of 4,451 acres of important habitat at Great Bay. One of these success stories includes protection of the Great Bog in Portsmouth, a 260 acre tract of land in Portsmouth once planned as a housing development.

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