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Oak Forest

Living

Protecting Galveston Island

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Inside!

Artist Boat is protecting Galveston Island one acre at a time.

Submitted by Juliane Swan, Development Coordinator



For those who call Galveston their refuge, the island is more than just a stretch of sand and sea; it is a living, breathing landscape woven into the fabric of our personal histories. We know the rhythm of the tides, the specific cry of the gulls, and the way the salt air feels on our faces. Beyond our emotional connection lies a silent, vital reality: Galveston holds a critical role in a global ecosystem, one that is currently standing at a crossroads.

Since 2008, Artist Boat, led by the vision of founder Karla Klay, has been on a mission to ensure that the beauty we enjoy today isn't just a memory for the next generation. Through the creation of the Coastal Heritage Preserve, Artist Boat has worked alongside thousands of supporters to protect 1,039 acres of the island's most significant natural lands. However, the work is far from finished. Klay often reminds us that the "wilds" of our island are not just empty spaces waiting to be filled with concrete and timber. They are vibrant, busy neighborhoods for species that have thrived here for millennia. "People are unique," Klay explains, "and like us, every

blade of marsh grass, each great blue heron, and every wild habitat is truly one in a million." This philosophy is the heartbeat of Artist Boat, suggesting that biodiversity is not a luxury; it is the foundation of a resilient future. When we lose a single acre of wetlands or a specific nesting ground, we aren't just losing "land". We are losing thousands of unique participants in the island's health. Tomorrow's beauty is rooted in the survival of these individual, "one-in-a-million" elements. If we allow them to be erased, we lose the authenticity that makes Galveston, Galveston.

While Artist Boat has successfully protected over a thousand acres, a critical 204-acre section of ancient dune swale is currently under threat. The dune swale on Galveston Island is representative of more than five-thousand years of tight coupling between sand and mud, salt water and fresh water, and plants that tolerate salt and extreme wind. The dunes and swales form and change frequently due to extreme episodic storm events in the Gulf that generate one of the most dynamic ecosystems on our planet. This tight coupling creates a unique fabric of living shorelines and habitats in high and low places across no more than an 8-foot change in elevation.



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This connectivity matters. It is what allows wildlife to move, breed, feed, and survive. It is what allows wetlands to filter water, reduce flooding, and buffer storms. And it is constantly changing, whether from natural forces or human activities.

One of the most damaging forces is development, which levels the island's dunes and coastal prairies, fills and channelizes fresh and saltwater marshes, and eliminates the elevation changes that connect the ecosystem across Galveston Island. This development makes the ecosystem disappear. If these 204 acres are lost, the damage will extend far beyond their boundaries.

This is valued at millions of dollars and is highly sought after for second-home development. The pressure to build is immense, and the clock is ticking. Artist Boat has only a few months left to protect this area from channelization, the filling of wetlands, and the irreversible loss of wildlife habitat. "If we don't save this next section of the ancient dune swale, all the hard work and the Cultural Heritage Preserve itself will be threatened," Klay urges. "Most importantly, it will destroy the homes of all the animals that call this place home." When Artist Boat talks about "tomorrow's beauty," they are talking about resilience. These dunes and wetlands act as a natural sponge, absorbing storm surges and filtering runoff before it hits Galveston's bays. Protecting this land isn't just an act of kindness toward nature; it is a strategic investment in the safety and economic health of the Gulf community.

Protecting land on an island where real estate prices are skyrocketing is no small feat. It requires more than just passion; it requires the kind of "tenacity and creativity" that has defined Artist Boat's work for over 20 years. Karla Klay and her team have spent decades cultivating relationships with unlikely partners, sellers who were initially opposed to conservation but eventually saw the value in preserving the island's soul.

This vital effort involves grassroots fundraising and tapping into government grants to multiply funding efforts. By coordinating complex land acquisitions step-by-step, Artist Boat prevents fragmented development and builds a contiguous sanctuary for the island's natural heritage. This is the "unseen" side of conservation. Behind every acre of preserved land is a mountain of paperwork, a dozen handshakes, and a community of people who refused to take "no" for an answer.

The task of raising the remaining funds to protect the ancient dune swale can feel overwhelming. How can a small organization compete with multimillion-dollar developments? The answer lies in the power of the collective. Artist Boat is inviting everyone (residents, visitors, businesses, and dreamers) to become a conservationist. Their message is simple: you don't need to be a billionaire to save the island. You just need \$10 to be One in a Million.

We often think of "growth" as something that happens at the expense of nature: more buildings, more roads, more infrastructure. But Artist Boat offers a different vision of growth. By honoring the symbiotic relationship between humans and land, they show that we can grow in wisdom, in knowledge, and in community alongside the natural world.

According to Artist Boat, the Coastal Heritage Preserve is the "last place of natural significance on Galveston Island." If we lose it, we lose the baseline of what this island is supposed to be. But if we save it, we create a living classroom, a sanctuary for biodiversity, and a legacy of responsible beauty.



Tomorrow's beauty isn't a guarantee; it's a choice we make today. It's the choice to see the value in a blade of grass, the choice to support a local artist-scientist, and the choice to protect 204 acres of ancient history from being paved over. Artist Boat has already raised \$13.2 million of the \$16 million needed to save this land, but the call is urgent as the remaining funds must be secured by June 2026. The animals that call the dune swale home cannot ask for your help. The marsh grass cannot lobby for its survival. We must be their voice. By joining the "One in a Million" campaign today, you are planting the seeds for a future where beauty and sustainability are one and the same, ensuring that Galveston's bays, prairies, and ancient dunes endure for generations to come. You are planting the seeds for a future where beauty and sustainability are one and the same. Visit **ArtistBoat.org** to join the cause and learn more.

