



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Crossed the Finish Line to secure \$16.4 million for acquisition of 204 More Acres of Prairie and Freshwater Wetlands on West Galveston Island**

**Galveston, Texas** — Artist Boat has now raised \$16.4 million by the June 30<sup>th</sup> deadline to secure the next 204 acres of conserved land for the Coastal Heritage Preserve. This is the next critical and last 204 acres within the former Chapoton Ranch and adds to the full vision to conserve 1,400 acres of contiguous barrier island ecosystems on West Galveston Bay creating the Coastal Heritage Preserve. These 204 acres contain endangered coastal prairie and rare freshwater wetlands that are essential to completing an interior 3-mile wildlife corridor on the island. This achievement keeps a 204-acre tract woven into the 3-mile interior relic dune and swale system and connected to the 3 miles of salt marsh living shoreline already protected along West Galveston Bay.

*“Galveston Island was my home for over a decade, and it is an honor for the General Land Office (GLO) to provide more than \$8.2 million in Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA) funding to expand the Coastal Heritage Preserve on West Galveston Island,” said Commissioner Buckingham. “Adding these 204 acres of pristine, unfragmented coastal barrier habitat to the Preserve will help safeguard Texas’s diverse marine life and strengthen our coastal communities’ natural defense against hurricane storm surge and flooding. I look forward to the GLO’s continued work with Artist Boat to ensure the Preserve is protected for generations to come.”*

For 17 years Artist Boat has pursued what many believed was impossible. In 2008, on the wave of Hurricane Ike and during the economic collapse and housing crisis, Artist Boat stepped into a battle few thought could be won. The former Chapoton Ranch on West Galveston Island, spanning 3 miles of living salt marshes along West Galveston Bay and stretching 3 miles through the middle of the island in an interior dune and swale corridor, had been sold to developers in 2006 for more than \$36 million. It was slated for more than 6,000 units of vacation homes, dredging and channelization for boat access to the bay, roads carved through wetlands and prairies, and wholesale transformation of one of the last undeveloped barrier island landscapes on the upper Texas coast. This fight is now over! 1,243 acres are now going to be saved of this ranch - forever!

This is not just open land. It was and remains an iconic scenic viewshed at the gateway to the west end of Galveston Island. It is a heavily used birding and fishing hotspot and a critical migratory stopover in the Central Flyway. It holds salt marshes along 3 miles of living shoreline on the bay side, 3 miles of freshwater marshes and rare coastal prairie in the interior, and it’s made of ancient dune swales that move water across the island to the bay. More than 400 species of birds are known to occur here. Neotropical migrants depend on it in spring and fall. Raptors, cranes, and ducks winter here. Scissor tailed flycatchers and purple gallinules nest here in summer. The black rail and reddish egret live here year-round. These wetlands fuel a fisheries economy unparalleled on the Gulf and produce food webs that sustain both wildlife and people.



In 2008 there seemed to be no way out of losing all 1,400 acres of this barrier island system. But developers became willing sellers after Hurricane Ike and the economic downturn. State and federal natural resource managers stepped forward. Local advocates refused to give up. Artist Boat committed to a long campaign of science driven conservation, grant by grant, donation by donation, transaction by transaction, and acre by acre.

Since that time more than 1,039 acres have been permanently protected as the Coastal Heritage Preserve. This work required 14 separate real estate transactions and more than \$24 million in conservation funding from federal and state agencies, foundations, corporations, and individual donors. It has taken 17 years of persistence, partnerships, and proof that a community-based nonprofit could deliver at scale. This next step brings over \$40 million in conserved land to the island in conserved lands and the Preserve to 1,243 acres.

The total cost to acquire the 204 acres is \$16.4 million. Artist Boat has NOW secured the \$16.4 million in state and federal conservation grants, multiple foundation grants, and donations from over 3,000 individual donors. Major grants partners supporting this acquisition include the Texas General Land Office, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality through the Galveston Bay Estuary Program, the Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation, the Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation, the Knobloch Family Foundation, the Galveston Bay Foundation, and many more foundations and individuals.

Barrier island land is finite. Development pressure on West Galveston Island is real and accelerating. The Coastal Heritage Preserve represents one of the last large-scale opportunities to protect an intact prairie and wetland corridor connected to living shoreline on the upper Texas coast. 17 years ago, in the aftermath of a hurricane and an economic crash, Artist Boat stepped into what looked like a losing fight. Today more than 1,243 acres will stand protected because people refused to give up. The Coastal Heritage Preserve is a Tier 1 project in the Texas General Land Office - Texas Coastal Master Resiliency Plan. Demonstrating how land conservation at the Coastal Heritage Preserve is paramount to the resilience of Galveston Island has enabled this effort to rise to the top in competitiveness for state and federal grants that prioritize resiliency on the coast for people, wildlife, and land. The GLO has been a pivotal partner in assisting the Artist Boat in obtaining funds to conserve land through documented coastal resiliency benefits to Texans.

Over the next five months Artist Boat, Galveston ISD, state and federal agencies, and the willing sellers will complete and approve the due diligence, conservation easements, and deeds to close on the 204 acres by November 2026. Stay tuned for a celebration, what's next on these acres for school children with Galveston ISD, and more conservation!

### About Artist Boat

Artist Boat is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote awareness and preservation of coastal margins and the marine environment through the disciplines of the sciences and the arts. Since 2003 Artist Boat has provided experiential coastal education to more than 225,000 participants and now stewards the Coastal Heritage Preserve on West Galveston Island.