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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

St. Lucie County's South Hutchinson Island Renourishment Project Named One of America's Best Restored Beaches for 2015

SOUTH HUTCHINSON ISLAND – The American Shore and Beach Preservation Association (ASBPA) announced yesterday that the St. Lucie County's South Hutchinson Island Renourishment Project is a winner of its 2015 Best Restored Beach Award.

"ASBPA created the Best Restored Beach award as a way of highlighting the value of America's restored beaches," said Harry Simmons, mayor of Caswell Beach, N.C., and ASBPA president. "As Americans flock to our coastline during the upcoming beach season, most don't even realize they may be enjoying a restored beach."

"The Board has always been aware of the excellent job that the county staff does to protect our natural resources. It makes it that much sweeter when you have a national organization acknowledge it as well," said St. Lucie County Commissioner and Erosion District Chair Frannie Hutchinson.

In September 2004, St. Lucie County suffered the impact on the beaches of both Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne within a period of 21 days. The community determined it could not wait for federal

action study and requested the county construct an interim non-federal project as storm protection for upland property. The exceptional success of the project can be measured in several ways:

- **Storm protection:** To 51 properties, predominantly high-density condominiums, in the southern portion of St. Lucie County.
- **Habitat restoration:** The 2004 hurricanes had almost completely eliminated native habitat for both nesting turtles and shorebirds here, but the restored beach now provides a greater area for critical nesting habitat. Also, nearly 280,000 native dune plants were installed along the project's length. The dune vegetation is still thriving.
- **Recreation:** In addition to the recreational benefits afforded to oceanfront property owners, three county-owned parks are within the project area. These parks provide many amenities including more than 200 parking spaces for access to nearly a half-mile of public beachfront heavily used by inland St. Lucie County residents and tourists.
- **Education & engagement:** The aggressive outreach, education and engagement of stakeholders from the initial planning to the ultimate acceptance of the completed project included winning over many stakeholders who were vocal opponents in the initial planning stages.

"This is a Best Restored Beach," said Lee Weishar, Ph.D., chair of the Best Restored Beach Committee responsible for making the selections, about St. Lucie County's project, "because the community responded to the loss of both storm protection and recreation to move forward with an interim project."

Other winners of the 2015 Best Restored Beaches include:

- Folly Beach, SC
- Santa Monica, CA
- Galveston, TX
- Western Destin Beach, Fla.

Coastal communities have restored more than 370 beaches in the United States, including such iconic beaches as Jones Beach in New York, Ocean City in Maryland, Virginia Beach, Miami Beach, South Padre Island in Texas, Venice Beach in California and Waikiki Beach in Hawaii.

During times of economic hardship, the beach can be an even more desirable vacation destination than other domestic and foreign alternatives, offering families and visitors an accessible and affordable getaway. It is also an employment and tax generator:

- Beaches contribute an estimated \$225 billion annually to the America's economy.
- Each year, governments take in \$570 in taxes from beach tourists for every dollar it spends on beach restoration.
- Well over half of the nation's gross domestic product (\$7.9 trillion) is generated in 673 counties along the oceans and Great Lakes, according to NOAA's National Ocean Economics Program.

To enter the Best Restored Beach competition, coastal communities nominated their projects for consideration, and an independent panel of coastal managers and scientists selected the winners. Judging was based on three criteria: the economic and ecological benefits the beach brings to its community; the short- and long-term success of the restoration project; and the challenges each community overcame during the course of the project.

A complete list of award-winning beaches, and more information about beach restoration and ASBPA, is available online at www.asbpa.org.

Founded in 1926, the ASBPA is a 501(c)3 nonprofit that advocates for healthy coastlines by promoting the integration of science, policies and actions that maintain, protect and enhance the coasts of America.

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