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GRANT ENABLES CHOCTAWHATCHEE BASIN ALLIANCE TO EXPAND ITS DUNES IN SCHOOLS EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

WATERSOUND, Fla. (May 2, 2014) -- The St. Joe Community Foundation has provided a \$20,000 grant to Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA) of Northwest Florida State College to expand its Dunes in Schools educational program to all Walton County 6th grade students. In addition, the grant will enable CBA to expand the current two-lesson curriculum to eight lessons with topics focused on dunes, dune systems and specifically Walton County's rare coastal dune lakes. Through a combination of science education and a student-led restoration project, the Dunes in Schools program is designed to increase environmental literacy and foster the next generation of dune lake stewards.

"The St. Joe Community Foundation is pleased that the \$20,000 grant to the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance will enable every Walton County 6th grader to learn about our region's rare coastal dune lakes and dune systems," says Janet Greeno, Executive Director for The St Joe Community Foundation. "The Foundation is helping provide education to our young people about these unique environmental treasures so that they can become guardians of nature's assets in the future."

At the beginning of the 2014-15 school year participating teachers will receive training from the CBA Education Coordinator on integrating the Dunes in Schools curriculum, which is intended largely for online delivery, into their yearly instruction schedule. CBA staff in partnership with the University of Florida Extension office will deliver sea oat seedlings and set up a dune nursery in each classroom, conducting the first and only in-person lesson. For the balance of the school year, students and teachers will use online modules to learn about topics such as the physical process of dune formation, dune lake ecology, water chemistry, and plant and animal adaptations to dune life. Each topic will be correlated to state education standards for sixth grade and will include instructions for additional hands-on activities related to each lesson.

Links to outside reading will allow teachers to implement new common core standards into the Dunes in Schools curriculum. Students will use instructions found in their online classroom to care for the dune nurseries and record data about the development of their sea oats. They will use the online discussion boards to share this information with students at other participating schools. The CBA Education Coordinator will moderate the online classroom throughout the year and be available for technical assistance.

This entire learning experience will culminate with an outdoor field trip where students will plant their sea oats to help restore dunes at one of Walton County's coastal dune lakes. Informal agreements are in place with Topsail Hill State Park (home to Morris and Campbell Lake) and Grayton Beach State Park (home to Western Lake) to serve as field trip/restoration sites. The field trips will also include hands-on science activities that will reinforce concepts learned throughout the year.

About the St. Joe Community Foundation

Since its inception, the St. Joe Community Foundation (STJCF) has provided more than \$18 million in grants to improve the quality of life in the communities it serves. STJCF provides charitable grants primarily in Bay and Walton Counties that embrace the arts, strengthen education, protect the environment and improve healthcare. These efforts help build healthy, caring, long-lived communities. For more information, visit www.stjcf.com.

About Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance

Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA) is a non-profit watershed organization formed under the auspices of Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) and dedicated to the health of the Choctawhatchee watershed. For almost 18 years, CBA has been committed to providing education and experiences that empower citizens to take personal responsibility for the health and sustainable use of the Choctawhatchee Basin watershed. CBA focuses efforts in four overlapping program areas: Restoration, Education, Monitoring and Research. Studies show that watershed education and community participation in habitat restoration lead to a culture of long-term community stewardship, wherein citizens incorporate responsible, sustainable resource use into their everyday life.

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