

PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP THE CABO ROJO SALT FLATS INTERPRETATIVE CENTER



**Structure to be restored and converted into the Cabo Rojo Salt
Flats Interpretative Center**

Presented to:

**Centennial Refuge Legacy Awards
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation**

By:

**Comité Caborrojeños Pro-Salud & Ambiente Inc.
(CCPSA)**

April 2003

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Applicant's Organizational & Financial Information

- Board of Directors
- Mission & Capabilities of the Proponent
- IRS 501(c)3
- IRS 990
- Income Statement & Balance Sheet

I. PROJECT NAME AND SUMMARY

CABO ROJO SALT FLATS INTERPRETATIVE CENTER: To restore an existing structure adjoining the salt mining operation at the entrance of the Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge (Salt Flats Segment) to convert it into an interpretative center administered by the local, non-governmental environmental group, Comité Caborrojeños Pro-Salud y Ambiente Inc (CCPSA). The group will operate the Center organized as a National Wildlife Refuge Support Cooperative Association (Friends Group).

II. PROJECT ABSTRACT

Around 1,900 acres (Salt Flats Segment) were added to the Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge in 1999 as a result of a joint effort of the Commonwealth and Federal Government. Together with the adjoining Los Morillos Segment of the Boquerón Commonwealth Forest this area is considered Resource Category 1, habitat vital to many species of migratory birds and several endangered and threatened species of plants and animals. In spite of the above, at the present time there are no interpretative facilities to inform and educate the ten of thousands yearly visitors to the area, residents and tourists, regarding this unique natural and historical resource and the negative impacts of environmental negligence of users. Comité Caborrojeños Pro-Salud y Ambiente (CCPSA) intends to address this need working in close collaboration with the Caribbean Islands NWR of the Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS), the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Department of Natural & Environmental Resources (DNER) through the Cabo Rojo Salt Flats Interpretative Center.

The project consists of restoring an existing structure adjoining the salt mining operation at the entrance of the Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge (Salt Flats Segment) to convert it into an interpretative center administered by the local, non-governmental environmental group, at a cost of \$290,700. CCPSA is requesting a \$85,000 grant from Fish & Wildlife National Foundation to be matched by \$205,700 in local challenge funds. The group will operate the Center organized as a National Wildlife Refuge Support Cooperative Association (Friends Group). The center will be strategically located adjoining road PR-301 leading into the salt flats and comprise interpretive exhibits/signage, research/administrative offices, compost restrooms & solar/wind powered electricity, an observation tower, a refuge store, parking area and access for handicapped in a perimeter of approximately 2,000 square meters. The restoration of the existing structure will represent the area allowing the facilities to blend in with their surroundings. Local FWS officials recognize that the Center is an important step in expediting the plan implementation and a critical component of the strategy to gain broad community & users support for conservation of the Refuge.

Experience and research indicate that for reserves to be successful, and for people to benefit from them, they must provide meaningful benefits to the local community. As a result of the project public/citizens awareness of the benefits provided by this endangered coastal ecosystem will be considerably increased, promoting more environmentally conscious users while attracting volunteers and supporters that could contribute economical and/or good or services to complementary activities within the Refuge. The foundation investment will serve as catalyst to mobilize local resources that will leverage the federal dollars in a ratio of 2.41:1 to carry-out a worthy project that truly represents a legacy to environmental conservation and community involvement in the Cabo Rojo Refuge.

III. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A. PROJECT NEED

Around 1,900 acres (Salt Flats Segment) were added to the Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge in 1998 as a result of a joint effort of the State and Federal Government. Together with the adjoining Los Morillos Segment of the Boquerón State Forest this area is considered Resource Category 1, habitat vital to many species of migratory birds and several endangered and threatened species of plants and animals. It also holds a wealth of historical resources, including the salt works, which have operated, continuously for over one hundred years and the Cabo Rojo Lighthouse. The reserve is an area of odd contrast between arid land and sea. In a region surrounded by water, cacti grow less than a hundred yards from mangroves. This combination of regions has created a set of six distinct and interrelated ecosystems considered by many ornithologists the most important migratory location in the Caribbean. These six ecosystems include: dry forest, mangroves, salt flats, marine lagoons, beach, and sea (coral reef and sea grass prairies).

In spite of the above, at the present time there are no interpretative facilities to inform and educate the ten of thousands yearly visitors to the area, residents and tourists, regarding this unique natural and historical resource and the negative impacts of environmental negligence by users. CCPSA intends to address this need working in close collaboration with the Caribbean Islands NWR of the Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS), the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Department of Natural & Environmental Resources (DNER). This innovative partnership will engage local people in the work of the refuge contributing to enhance habitat conservation and compatible wildlife dependent recreation in the reserve comprised by the Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge and the Boquerón State Forest.

B. OBJECTIVES

- Establish within a one-year period the Cabo Rojo Salt Flats Interpretative Center operating on a appealing schedule to the general public, including weekends and holidays.
- Provide interpretation to a minimum of 25,000 yearly visitors to the Salt Flats / Los Morillos Area.
- Promote increased community involvement in the management and conservation activities of the Cabo Rojo Refuge.
- Expose the public to household environmental conservation technology such as compost restrooms solar / wind powered electricity and recycling.
- The creation of 10 new jobs for local residents and retaining 45 existing jobs over a one-year period.
- Provide for the long-term financial sustainability of the interpretative center incorporating revenue-producing activities compatible with sustainable wildlife dependent recreation in consultation with the FWS.

C. METHODOLOGY

The center will be strategically located adjoining road PR-301 leading into the salt flats. Please refer to the aerial photo as Exhibit 2. The proposed concept comprises:

- Interpretative ecological/historical exhibits depicting the six interrelated ecosystems of the area and its cultural value.
- Research/administrative offices to supply logistical support to the Center as well as research & conservation activities within the reserve.
- Wooden deck area for conferences/artisan exhibits with a utility room.
- Parking area, access for handicapped and security fence around perimeter comprising approximately 2,000 square meters.
- Compost restrooms & solar / wind rechargeable batteries.

- Optional guided interpretative tours for a fee on foot and in mountain bikes through specially designated areas in consultation with the FWS & NRCS. This will complement refuge guide maps for visitors that prefer self-guided walks.
- A bird watching observation tower (FWS is to start construction in August 2002).
- Security/interpretative signage of the area including information on sustainable development technology such as composting, solar / wind power and recycling.
- Refuge Store featuring articles related to the existing cultural & environmental resources and vending machines.

The restored structure will blend in with its natural surroundings. The interpretation of the natural resources, history, and wildlife of the area will draw upon existing information including the research “An Interpretation Plan for Los Morillos de Cabo Rojo Historical & Ecological Reserve” commissioned by the DNER in 1998. Materials by other parks and reserves will be researched to find out what concepts have been successful and identify ideas to convey pertinent information to the visitors through appropriate signage, brochures, maps, and exhibits. Interpretative walks & displays will allow for “reflection spot” areas where a stop can be done to allow visitors to reflect on their surroundings. The resource interpretation plan will seek to interest and involve visitors in the reserve and its preservation by explaining the significance of the area. In addition it will attempt to limit or control abusive behaviors, promote positive ecotourist behavior within the refuge, and instill in visitors a lasting interest for the reserve while ensuring that both the visitors and the resources are protected from harm. Understanding that explanations about any area can quickly become boring, “hands-on” participatory activities that would invite participation and retain visitor interest will be developed. This will hopefully lead to strong awareness and concern for the conservation of natural resources that in turn, can be expressed through volunteer activities, monetary gifts, or additional grants.

Please refer to the preliminary layout plan (Exhibit 3) and photos of the existing structure to be restored (Exhibit 4) and the implementation time table (Exhibit 5).

D. MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

This community/governmental initiative will significantly expand the refuge management efforts. At the present time it is the shared responsibility of the NRCS and the FWS to establish and implement such efforts. In light of limited human and economic resources some important aspects of this effort have to be fulfilled. Local NRCS and FWS officials recognize that the Center is an important step in expediting the implementation plan and a critical component of the strategy to gain broad community & user support for conservation of the Refuge.

E. EVALUATION

The evaluation component of this project will monitor results with regard to two distinct, but closely related, aspects: 1) the restoration and Center establishment effort, and 2) the effectiveness of the interpretation activities. The first will consider as success criteria the timely implementation of renovation activities following plans & specifications within budgetary constraints and the long-term financial sustainability of the Center. The latter will consider as success criteria the impact of the interpretation on the behaviors of users and citizens as measured by the magnitude of volunteer and concerned citizens involvement, observation of refuge rules & regulations by users, and the general opinion of visitors of the interpretative materials developed. Data collection instruments will be developed for each success factor and progress in achieving desired objectives monitored in an on-going manner.

F. RESULTS

Experience and research indicate that for reserves to be successful, and for people to benefit from them, they must provide meaningful benefits to the local community. As a result of the project public/citizens awareness of the benefits provided by this

endangered coastal ecosystem will be considerably increased, promoting more environmentally conscious users while attracting volunteers and supporters that could contribute economical and/or good or services to complementary activities within the Refuge. This has been the case with the ongoing CPSA's coral reef restoration project with the NFWF that has attracted large media attention to the proven effective methodology developed. As a result, this methodology is now in the process of being shared with other locations within the Caribbean and Puerto Rico through complementary potential initiatives now in the making.

IV. WHY THE FOUNDATION SHOULD USE FEDERAL FUNDS FOR THIS PROJECT

The Foundation's investment will serve as catalyst to mobilize local resources that will leverage the federal dollars in a ratio of 2.41:1 to carry-out a worthy project that truly represents a legacy to environmental conservation and community involvement in the Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge. CCPSA is a well-respected, non-governmental organization, with a proven track record of successful environmental initiatives that is willing and capable of implementing the proposed project, exemplifying unique/innovative partnership that could be modeled by other reserves in Puerto Rico and elsewhere.

V. EXHIBITS

EXHIBIT 1

CABO ROJO SALT FLATS INTERPRETATIVE CENTER ESTIMATED START-UP & OPERATIONAL BUDGET (1st year)

Renovation of Existing Structure

Architectural & Engineering Fees (Includes applicable permits)	\$ 6,000.00	
Site Preparation (Includes demolition of deteriorated wooden barn) *	5,000.00	
Renovation/Construction (Includes: new roofing, handicap access ramp, security door & windows, restrooms, wooden decks & terrace, electrical, telecommunication fixtures & plumbing, parking area improvements, wood & masonry works & others according to plans & specifications	125,000.00	
Compost Bathroom System	12,000.00	
Solar Electrical System	20,000.00	
Security System	2,000.00	
Sub-Total	<u>\$ 170,000.00</u>	\$ 170,000.00

Interpretative Exhibits (Interior)	12,500.00
Interpretative & Security Signage (Exterior)	12,500.00
Equipment (See attached list)	18,700.00

Personnel

Center Interpretative Coordinator (50% time)	9,000.00	
Interpretative/Sales Clerks (2) (50% time)	11,500.00	
Sub-Total	<u>\$ 20,500.00</u>	\$ 20,500.00

Benefits	3,500.00
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Professional & Personal Services

Accounting (monthly & annual audit)	3,000.00	
Legal	500.00	
Janitorial & maintenance	2,000.00	
Interpretative guides **	4,500.00	
Sub-Total	<u>\$ 10,000.00</u>	\$ 10,000.00

Insurance (Property & General Liability)	3,500.00
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Utilities (Tel., water & Internet access)	2,000.00
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Materials

Interpretative materials (production & printing of brochures, map guide & posters)	20,000.00	
Store Initial Inventory (related to refuge historical & ecological resources)	15,000.00	
Sub-Total	<u>\$ 35,000.00</u>	\$ 35,000.00

Office Supplies (paper, toner, printer ink, envelopes, pencils, sharpener, staple, calculator, etc.)	1,500.00
Travel (related to project planning & development within P.R.)	1,000.00
TOTAL	<u>\$ 290,700.00</u>

* Removal of discarded equipment & vehicles will be the responsibility of the salt mining operator.

** Guides will be activated by appointment only at a rate of \$12.50/hr.

EQUIPMENT LIST

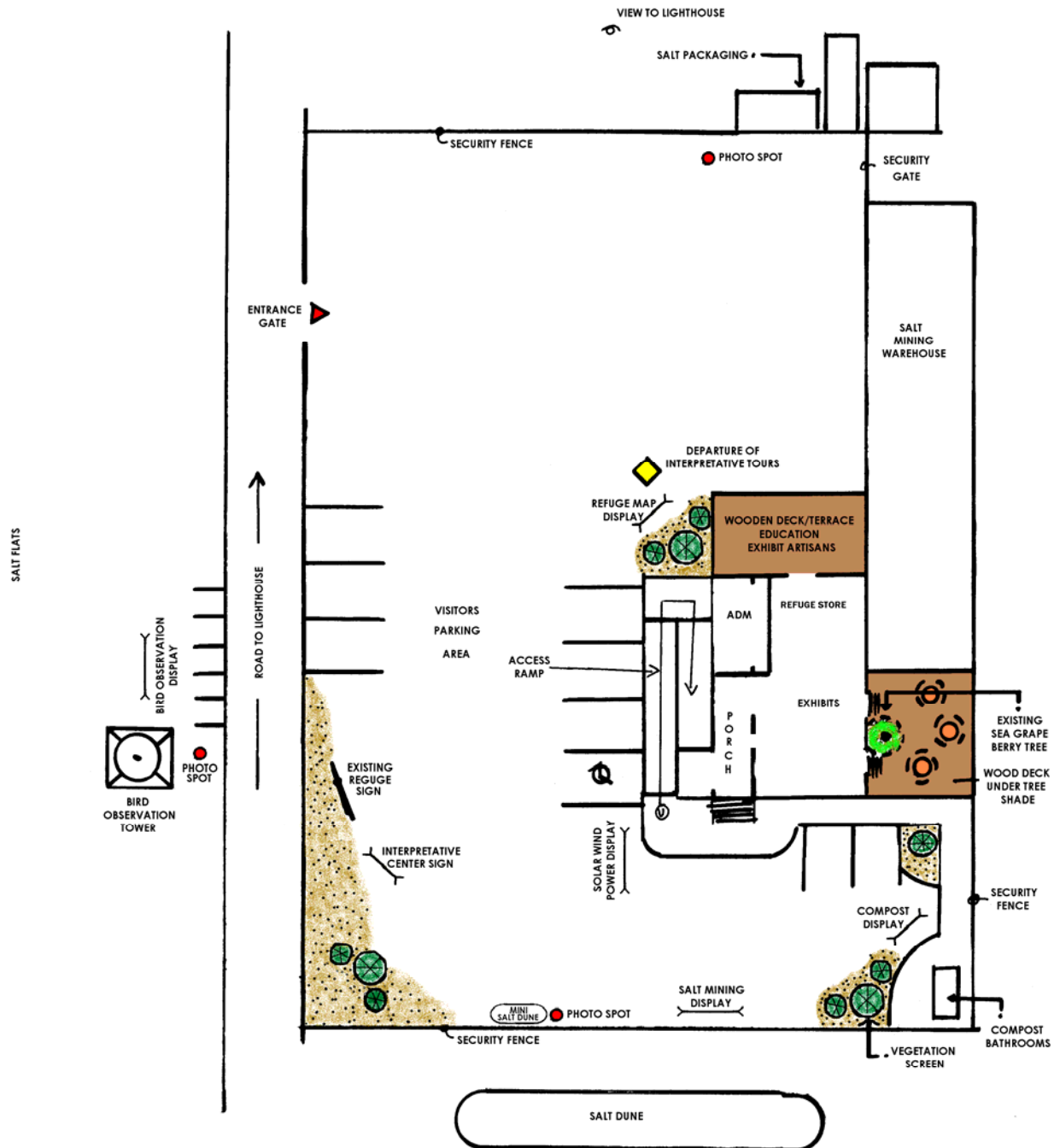
Desk (2)	\$ 600.00
Table	100.00
Horizontal file	500.00
Chairs (2)	200.00
Sales Displays	2,000.00
Computerized Point of Sale	3,500.00
Personal computer w/printer & software	2,500.00
Scanner	150.00
Fax machine	150.00
Air conditioner	2,750.00
Photocopier	1,500.00
Spotting telescopes w/tripod (2)	750.00
Mountain bikes (11)	4,000.00
TOTAL	<u>\$ 18,700.00</u>

EXHIBIT 2
Cabo Rojo Salt Flats



EXHIBIT 3

Cabo Rojo Salt Flats Interpretative Center Preliminary Layout Plan



NOTE: Drawing is not at scale. Reforestation of the premises with indigenous vegetation will be done as part of the project.

EXHIBIT 4
Structure to be restored



EXHIBIT 5

[illegible]