NATIONAL WATER RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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For more information, please contact:
Gina Melin, NWRI (714) 280-5709
Jeff Mosher, NWRI (714) 378-3278
www.nwri-usa.org

NANCY RABALAIS, EXPERT ON MARINE HYPOXIA, TO RECEIVE THE 2008 CLARKE PRIZE

FOUNTAIN VALLEY, Calif. – The National Water Research Institute (NWRI) announced today that aquatic scientist Nancy N. Rabalais, Ph.D., will be the fifteenth recipient of the NWRI Athalie Richardson Irvine Clarke Prize for excellence in water research. Rabalais is Executive Director and Professor of the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium in Chauvin, Louisiana, which provides coastal laboratory facilities to Louisiana universities and conducts research and educational programs in the marine sciences.

The 2008 Clarke Prize will be presented to Rabalais on Thursday, July 10, 2008, at the Fifteenth Annual Clarke Prize Lecture and Award Ceremony, to be held at the Hilton Waterfront Beach Resort in Huntington Beach, California. NWRI established the Clarke Prize in 1993 to recognize outstanding research scientists who have demonstrated excellence in water-science research and technology. The prize, which includes a gold medallion and $50,000 award, is presented annually.

For over 25 years, Rabalais has dedicated her career to understanding and mitigating the effects of human-induced changes in water quality, particularly the long-term environmental impacts of excess nutrients and petroleum contamination on marine ecosystems. She has successfully advocated major national legislation and policy changes to protect marine environments.

Rabalais is renowned for her seminal research on understanding and characterizing hypoxia, or severe oxygen depletion, in water resources, bringing this crucial issue to the forefront of water science. Hypoxia is an extensive and persistent phenomenon that is caused by increased nutrients in water. Nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorous, can lead to excessive growth of algae, which in turn can damage marine habitats and harm marine organisms due to lack of oxygen in the water. These “dead zones” significantly impact commercial and recreational fisheries and the health of coastal environments. At present, there are 400 dead zones along the world’s coasts, many of which are located near the mouths of river systems.

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Since the mid-1980s, Rabalais has been the driving force behind identifying and characterizing the dynamics of the large hypoxic region in the Gulf of Mexico, which receives excess nutrients from the Mississippi River. For instance, her team recognized that much of the nutrients in the Mississippi River originated from agricultural runoff caused by increased fertilizer application and artificial soil drainage. Such efforts have delineated the relationship between a large, nutrient-rich river, its watershed, the nutrients in the discharge, and the coastal ecosystem, and have resulted in national and international interest, such as an Action Plan endorsed by states, federal agencies, and tribes to reduce hypoxia through improved nutrient management in the Mississippi River watershed and coastal waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

From providing congressional testimony to working with local elementary schools, Rabalais consistently keeps the hypoxia issue before the scientific community, policy makers, and general public. She continues to conduct critical fundamental work in the area, and serves on numerous boards and panels, such as the Scientific Steering Committee of the Land-Ocean Interactions of the Coastal Zone of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme, the National Research Council Committee on the Mississippi River and the Clean Water Act, and the National Science Foundation Advisory Committee to the Environmental Research and Education directorate. She is considered one of the most prolific researchers focused on marine water quality.

Established in honor of NWRI's co-founder, the late Athalie Richardson Irvine Clarke, the Clarke Prize is awarded to outstanding research scientists who are currently active in the water and wastewater fields. It is one of only a dozen water prizes awarded worldwide and has been distinguished by the International Congress of Distinguished Awards as one of the most prestigious awards in the world.

Recent past recipients of the Clarke Prize include: environmental engineer James L. Barnard, Ph.D., P.E., of Black & Veatch Corporation (2007); water-quality engineer Philip C. Singer, Ph.D., P.E., of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (2006); water-quality engineer Menachem Elimelech, Ph.D., of Yale University (2005); water-quality engineer Vernon L. Snoeyink, Ph.D., of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2004); wastewater engineer George Tchobanoglous, Ph.D., P.E., of the University of California, Davis (2003); and microbiologist Harry F. Ridgway, Ph.D., of AquaMem Consultants (2002).

More information about the Clarke Prize can be found at www.nwri-usa.org/ClarkePrize.

The National Water Research Institute (NWRI) was founded in 1991 by a group of Southern California water agencies in partnership with the Joan Irvine Smith and Athalie R. Clarke Foundation to promote the protection, maintenance, and restoration of water supplies and to protect the freshwater and marine environments through the development of cooperative research work. NWRI's member agencies include Inland Empire Utilities Agency, Irvine Ranch Water District, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, Orange County Sanitation District, Orange County Water District, and West Basin Municipal Water District.

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