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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **You 'Otter' Know: Schuylkill River is Healthier than Ever!**

The rebirth of the Schuylkill River has never been more apparent than with the recent sighting of a North American river otter at the fish ladder near the Fairmount Dam.

Reveling in its 10 seconds of fame that were caught recently on videotape, the otter was seen passing through the fish ladder on its way upriver to its eventual home. The sighting of an otter in a densely populated, urban area is a good sign that the overall health of the Schuylkill River continues to improve. In addition, 37 species of fish have returned to the river.

Philadelphia Water Department Aquatic Biologist Joe Perillo, who was the first to see the otter on tape, notes that, "Otters will eat almost anything from insects to snake eggs. But their favorite food is fish: minnows, sunfish, suckers, carp and trout." Fish need clean water to live in and with an adequate supply of readily-available fish; it appears that the River otter is expanding its range along the Schuylkill River which now includes the Philadelphia area.

The Water Department's three water pollution control plants are doing more than ever to protect our water resources and their efforts are paying off. Since the passage of the Clean Water Act of 1972, approximately \$1 billion were invested to upgrade the wastewater treatment processes and technologies at these plants. With these advances, Philadelphia's once dying rivers -- the Delaware and Schuylkill -- have come back to life during the past 30 years.

However, the recovery of the rivers is a delicate balancing act and a difficult one, and the Water Department is committed to continue improvements to the rivers. It's plans for controlling combined sewer overflows, storm water and sanitary waste, to local streams and rivers are already well underway for capital improvements to the City's combine sewer system. The Department's comprehensive watershed plan is being undertaken with many regional partners who are teaming up to protect and preserve our watersheds.

Challenges to water quality that still need to be addressed include stormwater and agricultural runoff, and acid-mine drainage, which continue to impair over 900 miles of the Schuylkill River. The Schuylkill Action Network (SAN), a group of 60 local, state, and federal organizations and 250 members is lead by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources and the Philadelphia Water Department. The SAN is working diligently to reduce pollution to the Schuylkill River. The SAN was only one of 10 watersheds in the nation awarded a targeted watershed initiative grant of \$1.1 million starting in 2005 to implement 30 restoration projects throughout the watershed.

One of the most exciting ventures the Water Department has embarked on is the development of an environmental learning center, the Fairmount Water Works Interpretive Center located on the east bank of the Schuylkill River. The water environment comes alive at the Center, especially now that the public can view the tape of the North American River otter in an exciting new exhibit which will include the 10 best video clips taken at the fish ladder during the past year.

Later this spring, the Interpretive Center will install a direct digital video link from the fish ladder to a permanent exhibit in the Center, where visitors can see the fish – and anything else – going up- or downstream as they pass by the underwater viewing window in the fish ladder. The video images come from an innovative wildlife digital video system with high-resolution that operates 24 hours a day by wireless remote control.

The Interpretive Center is housed in the Fairmount Water Works; one of the city's first pumping stations. The Center offers visitors conventional and interactive computer exhibits, classroom programs for students, a water laboratory and the opportunity to experience the Schuylkill River from the decks of the Water Works and a riverbank esplanade.

The Fairmount Water Works Interpretive Center is open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sundays from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. The Center is closed on Mondays and City holidays.

The Interpretive Center is the region's premier ecotourism facility, and has been recognized by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection as the Delaware River Basin's Watershed Education Center.

To view the otter online, visit: [www.fairmountwaterworks.com](http://www.fairmountwaterworks.com).

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