



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers®**  
New York District



## **Stemming the Tide of Marsh Loss in Jamaica Bay With \$13M Urban Wetlands Project**

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NEW YORK (July 6, 2006)-- In the skyline of one of the most populated, urban areas of the world adjacent to one of the nation's busiest airports Elders Point Island in Jamaica Bay Gateway National Park, King's County, N.Y. is the focus of an impressive marsh island restoration project. Today, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), with the National Park Service (NPS), recognized the first phase of construction underway on a \$13 million wetland restoration project. It is also the first full-scale project to address the marsh island recession issue in Jamaica Bay. All material used during the construction phase will be biodegradable to enhance the environmental conditions of the national park.

Overall, it is part of an ongoing \$27 million environmental mitigation program in the Hudson Raritan Estuary that is being implemented in conjunction with the \$1.6 billion New York and New Jersey Harbor Deepening Project. More than 1.5 million plants will be planted throughout the region and more than 143 acres of wetlands will be restored.

“Working with our partners, this project is the first step towards the long and complex journey of addressing the salt marsh loss within Jamaica Bay that was brought to the attention of the Federal Government by local stakeholders. It also shows our commitment to balancing the needs of the environment with that of deepening the Port of New York and New Jersey. During the first phase, more than \$13 million of construction activity to restore the environment at this site that will provide 70 acres of wetlands for our harbor estuary,” said Col. Richard J. Polo, Jr. New York District Engineer.

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“This will be the first large scale marsh island restored, building on the Big Egg pilot, under the District’s Jamaica Bay Marsh Islands Ecosystem Restoration Program and will further our larger goals within the Harbor Estuary Program through the preservation and restoration of ecologically important habitat and communities that support an optimum diversity of living resources such as fish, wildlife, and plant communities.”

Jamaica Bay is one of the largest areas of open space in New York City and contributes significantly to the overall health of the New York and New Jersey Harbor Estuary. The marsh islands ecosystem is an integral part of Jamaica Bay and is a refuge for a variety of wildlife. It also provides valuable habitat for fish species as well as a nursery for juvenile, migratory birds.

“As we continue our ambitious port redevelopment program -- including the 50-foot harbor deepening -- we also must remain vigilant about protecting the environmental resources that we may impact. This project in Jamaica Bay is another example of our aggressive efforts to be good stewards of the Estuary’s marsh islands, natural shorelines and bays that are integral to the Port of New York and New Jersey,” said Rick Larrabee, Director, Port Department, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

“The recognition that these valuable salt marsh habitats are disappearing was a rallying cry for all stakeholders concerned about the environmental quality of Jamaica Bay. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation is dedicated to working with its partners to find ways to halt future marsh loss and to aid in the recovery of the habitat,” said Lou Oliva, Acting Regional Director. “We are encouraged by the progress made in this initial rebuilding effort. The resources that have been brought to bear and the spirit of cooperation shown at all levels of government and in the community have been truly impressive. We look forward to continuing in this effort as the recovery program expands to return even more of this critical salt marsh habitat to the bay.”

“The National Park Service is very excited and encouraged to be part of this interagency partnership to restore salt marsh islands in Jamaica Bay. As you are aware, Gateway

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National Recreation Area has been focused on an ecosystem-based approach to restoring the still-functioning biological and physical resources of Jamaica Bay through research, demonstration projects, education and interpretation, and collaborative efforts with public groups such as Ecowatchers and Jamaica Bay Guardian, as well as state and federal agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York City Department of Environmental Protection, the Port Authority of NY/NJ, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to name a few,” said Barry Sullivan, General Superintendent of Gateway National Recreation Area., National Park Service.

“As stewards of this tremendous resource, we see this restoration effort as an integral part of the overall vision for Jamaica Bay. That vision is one of sustainability that supports a biologically diverse ecosystem, and in turn a safe, healthy and aesthetically pleasing recreational opportunity for the millions of visitors that enjoy the park. We will continue to work toward this vision so that this important resource may be passed along to future generations in a condition of which we can all be proud,” added Sullivan.

## **RESTORATION PLAN**

In total, approximately 70 acres of marsh will be restored on Elders Point with a net increase of 61 acres. Originally one island comprised of approximately 132 acres, the loss of marsh in the center portion severed the two ends, resulting in two separate islands connected by mudflat. The restoration plan for Elders East and Elders West includes restoring the existing vegetated areas and the sheltered and exposed mudflats by placing fill material up to an elevation that is suitable for low marsh growth. To do so, the Corps is pumping more than 270,000 cubic yards of sand that was dredged from various channels in the harbor.

Additionally, there will be more than 700,000 plants will be hand planted on Elders East and some 200,000 replanted on Elders West. Plants include *Spartina alterniflora* (saltmarsh cordgrass), *Spartina patens* (salt hay), and *Distichis spicata* (spike grass).

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Through its Plant Materials Program (PMP), the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has overseen the collection and germination of the seeds, which began with seed collection in the fall of 2005. The PMP is conserving the genetic plant resources of the location by using seed collected near the restoration site. The plants were grown and transported from the Plant Materials Centers in Cape May, N.J., Beltsville, M.D. Alderson, W.V and East Lansing, M.I.

The Corps awarded the \$13 million contract for the Elders (East) to Galvin Brothers of Great Neck, N.Y. In addition, the restoration is being performed by the State of New York and the New York/New Jersey Harbor Estuary Program (HEP).

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