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The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Announce Partnership to Improve Management of Northeast Waterways

Lake Champlain and Vermont's West River Prioritized in Regional Agreement

BURLINGTON, VT – The Nature Conservancy's Eastern Region and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers North Atlantic Division signed an agreement today which brings together the combined strength and expertise of the two organizations under the shared goal of improving sustainable management of water resources and riparian habitats in the northeastern United States.

Under the partnership, The Nature Conservancy and the Army Corps of Engineers will work together to implement new and innovative techniques and strategies, sharing scientific, conservation and engineering expertise to provide vital human services while protecting the rich and diverse ecosystems of the northeast.

“With the signing of this agreement, we are formalizing a partnership and anticipate working together to protect critical watersheds in the northeast, and to facilitate environmental protection and sustainable growth,” said Brig. Gen. William T. Grisoli, commander of the Corps' North Atlantic Division.

“By aligning The Nature Conservancy's ecological expertise and the Army Corps' engineering excellence under a shared ecological goal, we are creating a powerful force for watershed protection,” said Mike Andrews, chief conservation officer for The Nature Conservancy. “Our partnership has already achieved notable success. With the removal of the Cuddebackville Dam from the Neversink River, American shad and native brook trout can migrate upstream for the first time in 100 years.”

Vermont's Senators, Jim Jeffords, I-Vt and Patrick Leahy, D-Vt, commented on the importance of today's announcement.

“Working together, the Army Corps of Engineers and The Nature Conservancy will bring a wide range of expertise and resources to the type of water resource projects that will benefit Vermont. This is an exciting development that will go a long way in protecting our rivers and other critical watersheds,” said Jeffords, the ranking member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

“As one of our active federal partners in both the Lake Champlain and Connecticut River watersheds, the Corps of Engineers makes an important contribution to our overall conservation efforts in the Northeast region,” said Senator Patrick Leahy, (D-Vt). “Partnerships with The Nature Conservancy and other conservation organizations that have specific expertise strengthen the role the Corps plays in support of the Lake Champlain Basin Program and the Connecticut River Joint Commissions.”

Behind the scenes scientists, planners and strategists from across the nation are meeting in Stowe this week for a national four-day conference focused on collaborative partnering for sustainable watershed management. Through the evaluation of case studies, scientific exchange and strategy discussions, the partners are laying the ground work for innovative projects nationwide.

Vermont's West River, flowing 46 miles from the ridgelines of the Green Mountains to its confluence with the Connecticut River, has been selected as one of nine priority projects under the partners' Sustainable Rivers Initiative. The 300,000 acre forested watershed includes many high priority ecological targets for The Nature Conservancy, and two dams operated by the Army Corps of Engineers.

"The Corps and The Nature Conservancy are partnering to undertake studies to better understand flows on the West River and the effects of the Corps' flood control dams," said Army Corps New England District Commander, Col. Curtis Thalken.

“Human modifications to our rivers, such as dams and water withdrawals, have been identified as the leading cause of decline in freshwater life,” commented Rose Paul, director of science and stewardship for the Vermont chapter. “We are excited by the deep level of engagement we have with the Corps, and the opportunity to learn from each others expertise on the West River.”

To study the ecological effects of dam-controlled flow regimes The Nature Conservancy is sponsoring a one year research fellowship. By analyzing native plants and animals from migratory fish to floodplain forests, the study will answer the question not only of how low or high the river should run, but also when, how frequently and how fast the river level should change.

By combining the Corps' flow modeling expertise with the results of the Conservancy's ecological impact study, the partners plan to define flow 'prescriptions' for the West River by the end of 2006, which balance ecological, flood control and recreational needs.

Under the framework of the regional agreement the partners will also be evaluating opportunities to expand collaboration in the Lake Champlain basin. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is a proud partner of the Lake Champlain Basin Program, providing assistance with planning, design and implementation of projects to improve water quality, water supply and the ecosystem, while preserving and enhancing the economic and social character of local communities. Corps projects currently underway in Vermont and New York combine strategies for reducing phosphorus input with sustainable habitat restoration and bio-engineering. The Nature Conservancy has protected thousands of acres of wetlands and uplands in the Lake Champlain basin and plays a pivotal role in controlling the spread of water chestnut.

The Nature Conservancy is a leading international, nonprofit organization that preserves plants, animals and natural communities representing the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. To date, The Nature Conservancy and its approximately one million members have been responsible for the protection of more than 14 million acres in the United States and have helped preserve more than 83 million acres in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. The Vermont Chapter, chartered in 1960, has helped conserve over 167,000 acres of significant natural areas throughout the state, and maintains 42 nature preserves. Visit us on the Web at www.nature.org/vermont.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The North Atlantic Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is a Regional Business Center made up of about 3,800 team members in six Districts and a Division headquarters. It is a major subordinate command of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and one of eight Division offices nationwide. The New York District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (<http://www.nan.usace.army.mil/>) is responsible for all water resource activities within the Lake Champlain watershed areas of Vermont, the Hudson River, New York Harbor and Long Island. This includes tributary waters in eastern New York State, northeastern New Jersey, western Vermont and small portions of Massachusetts and Connecticut. New York District has regulatory jurisdiction in parts of New York and New Jersey as well as a large Military Construction program. The New England District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (<http://www.nae.usace.army.mil/>) is responsible for managing the Corps Civil Works responsibilities in the 66,000 square mile region encompassing the six New England States east of the Lake Champlain watershed.