

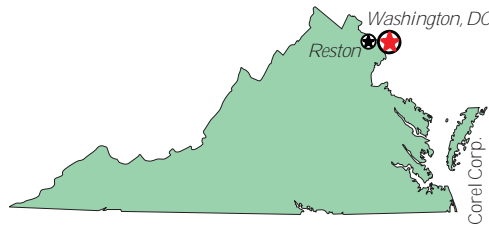


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Restoring Our Resources

Potomac River and Sugarland Run: The Colonial Pipeline Oil Spill of 1993

When harmful substances enter the environment, fish, wildlife and other natural resources are often injured. The Department of the Interior, along with State, Tribal, and other Federal partners, act as "trustees" for these public resources. Trustees seek to identify the natural resources injured and determine the extent of the injuries, recover damages from the polluters, and plan and carry out natural resource restoration activities. These efforts are possible under the Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program, whose goal is to restore natural resources injured by contamination. The Interior Department, along with other trustees, is accomplishing this goal on the Potomac River in Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C., bringing a cleaner, healthier environment to the people of the area.



Sugarland Run is located near Reston, Virginia, just outside of Washington, D.C..

The Potomac River and Sugarland Run

The Potomac River, officially designated as an American Heritage River, rivals the mighty Hudson and the Mississippi Rivers when it comes to importance in American history. The Potomac basin contains the first evidence of inhabited structures in North America, the homes of Paleo-Indians who inhabited the Shenandoah Valley some 12,000 years ago. In modern times, the basin has been a passage to the

west, a boundary between North and South during the Civil War, home of the Nation's capital, and a gathering place for all Americans.

In addition to its historical importance, the scenic river is rich in wildlife and recreational opportunities. Extensive park lands have been designated along the shores of the river, protecting the areas from development pressures and allowing the return of eastern bottomland hardwoods, which dominated the area before settlement. The Potomac River is fed by scores of small tributaries, often called "runs." One of these "runs" is the small, but environmentally important, Sugarland Run which rises near Reston, Virginia, located just outside of Washington, D.C., and converges with the Potomac River above the River's "Great Falls." This 20-square mile watershed contains typical forests and wetlands of



Booms used to control oil entering the Potomac at the mouth of Sugarland Run. National Park Service photo.

eastern streamside ecology, including vernal pool (seasonal) wetlands, riparian (located on the banks of a river or stream) forests, and forest wetlands. Sugarland Run provides a variety of aquatic habitat from riffles to still pools. Together, these riparian and aquatic habitats support a variety of wildlife including migratory birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals.

The extensive regional and national park lands lining Sugarland Run and the Potomac River provide opportunities for sightseeing, environmental education, hiking, fishing, bird watching, and a variety of other activities. In addition, the Potomac's parks encompass many of Washington, D.C.'s national monuments, making this area important not only for local communities, but national and international visitors as well.

The Problem

On March 28, 1993, a section of pipeline owned and operated by the Colonial Pipeline Company burst near the Sugarland Run in Reston, Virginia. Approximately 400,000 gallons of diesel fuel ran overland and discharged into Sugarland Run. While some of the oil was contained using "booms," a significant amount still found its way into the Potomac River; traces of diesel fuel could be found 50 miles downstream from the spill. In addition, floodwater from heavy spring rains carried the oil beyond the banks of the river, contaminating riparian woodlands. Strong petroleum fumes drove visitors and staff away from miles of riverside parks, including the famed Tidal Basin, site of the Jefferson Memorial. Fairfax County, Virginia, a highly populated area which includes the town of Reston, was temporarily forced to seek alternative drinking water supplies for over one million customers.

Restoring the Resources

The National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and other trustees, conducted a Natural Resource Damage Assessment to determine the spill's effects on fish, wildlife and the public's ability to use the land and its natural resources. The Colonial Pipeline Company worked cooperatively with the trustees to develop appropriate restoration projects to restore natural resources and to enhance certain recreational uses in the area. Partial funding was provided by the Colonial Pipeline Company to restore shad and other fish species' spawning habitat by creating a fish passage through Little Falls Dam. Other natural resource



View of the Great Falls of the Potomac from the proposed reconstructed viewing platform. National Park Service photo.

projects include several stream bank stabilization projects such as the planting a 50 foot-wide buffer zone of native trees and shrubs on both banks of the badly eroded Sugarland Run. To prevent or reduce erosion, stormwater management will be improved through a series of projects aimed at capturing and reducing runoff. Wetlands will be enhanced by planting native shrubs to increase the biological diversity and the natural water purifying effect of plant life.

Several wildlife habitat enhancement projects will be implemented to improve the quality of existing forests and open fields through reforestation, thinning of the forest canopy, creating snags for cavity nesting birds, removing invasive exotic species, and other similar techniques.

Several recreational projects were developed in coordination with the National Park Service for areas affected by the spill along the Potomac River. A viewing platform and trail will be made handicapped-accessible in Great Falls Park. Within the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historic Park, the historic Fletcher's boathouse and picnic area will be rehabilitated. In addition, landscape and beautification projects will help stabilize eroded slopes near the boat launch area. Opportunities for wildlife viewing and nature interpretation will be enhanced at Dyke Marsh in George Washington Memorial Parkway by constructing a raised wetland boardwalk, improving the access trail, installing interpretive signs and providing limited landscaping.

A Partnership for Success

Although the Colonial Pipeline oil spill caused considerable injury to the environment of Sugarland Run and disrupted recreational uses along the Potomac River, the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service, along with the Commonwealth of Virginia, Washington, D.C., and the Colonial Pipeline Company, are working together to restore the natural resources and recreational opportunities of the Potomac River and Sugarland Run.

Cooperative efforts such as this will continue as the agencies and organizations entrusted with the care of our natural resources seek similar successes at other sites in and around our Nation's capital.

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