

Restoration of Patuxent River after 2000 oil spill outlined

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Officials gathered at Greenwell State Park in Hollywood on Thursday morning to announce that \$2.7 million in funding has been earmarked for the restoration of natural resources assets damaged in the April 2000 oil spill on the Patuxent River.

On April 7, 2000, about 140,000 gallons of fuel oil spilled into Swanson Creek from a ruptured pipe at the Chalk Point power plant before the damaged line was found and the flow stopped. The spilled oil, pushed by strong winds, flowed into the Patuxent River and fouled approximately 17 miles of river and tributary shoreline before it could be contained.

Potomac Electric Power Company, which at the time owned the Chalk Point plant, took responsibility for the spill and for paying for the river's cleanup and restoration. Pepco also paid about \$2 million in penalties associated with the spill. This week's announcement described some of programs that will be implemented with the money paid by Pepco.

The \$2.7 million will be used to create 5.6 acres of tidal marsh wetlands, add additional acreage to an existing shoreline beach, establish 4.7 acres as an oyster reef sanctuary, build a nesting habitat where the injured ruddy duck population can be restored and for build seven new recreational use sites along the river to compensate local residents for lost recreational opportunities resulting from the spill.

"I want to commend the

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, one of the trustee agencies overseeing the river restoration effort. "Our character will be measured by our response to accidents, and I think we're off to a great start today. This is the best of environmental governing."

Former State Sen. Bernie Fowler is the chairman of the governor's oil spill advisory panel. For decades Fowler, a native of Calvert County, has led a movement to rid the Patuxent River of pollutants.

"When I first learned of the oil spill," he said, "it was very disconcerting, almost devastating. But we've turned something bad into something good. We now have a system to better respond should something like this ever happen again. We now have safety measures in place and I am satisfied that an accident of this magnitude can never happen again.

"I know there are still people unhappy and dissatisfied with the results" of the cleanup effort, Fowler said, "but the board has closely monitored those activities. The trustees did an outstanding job and Pepco has certainly been cooperative with those of us who so dearly love this river.

"It will be cleaned up some day," Fowler told his audience. "It may still be a long way away, but it will happen. Hopefully, some day soon, Bernie Fowler and [Rep.] Steny Hoyer (D-Md., 5th) can walk into the river and see our feet." Fowler was referring to his annual "Bernie Fowler Day" activities, where he and local school children enter the river and check its level of pollution by seeing how far into the water they can wade and still see their feet.

the restoration, "and we didn't always agree. But in the interest of benefiting the river we worked closely to make it happen."

"Pepco could not have been any more forthcoming in taking responsibility," said Hoyer during his remarks. "An overwhelming percentage of what could be done has been done and the work continues today. Nature exacerbated the wound in the first 48 hours, but there has been much progress made in the last 2½ years."

Hoyer, who lives on the river near Charlotte Hall, said "Every morning I wake up to see the sun coming up over the river. I see the ducks and the geese and the other wildlife and I'm so thankful to see them there. This is the first step in making the river and its environs whole again."

Greenwell, which sits on the banks of the Patuxent River, was selected as the location for the announcement because included on the list of the approved projects is one specifically designed for Greenwell.

An Americans with Disabilities Act-approved boat launch to be built along the park's waterfront that will allow disabled individuals to make use of the river in small boats, canoes and kayaks. Other recreational improvements include two overnight paddle-in campsites to be built, one north of Golden Beach and the other at Millwood Landing; a trail to be built covering 670 acres of state land near the mouth of Swanson Creek that will be open to the public; an improved boat ramp at the end of Forest Landing Road in Hollywood for larger boats; construction of a boardwalk and a river education area