

# Companies to pay for river repair

## Project seeks to restore Patuxent and wetlands after oil spill

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Associated Press

HOLLYWOOD — Habitats for ducks, terrapins, oysters and other aquatic life in the Patuxent River will be restored under a \$2.7 million plan released by state and federal officials on Thursday, two years after an oil spill fouled more than 70 acres of wetland.

The project will create new wetlands and nesting sites for birds, build oyster reefs and enable canoeing and other recreation at the southern Maryland spill site, the worst environmental disaster in Maryland's history.

Potomac Energy Power Company, also known as Pepco, and ST Services, the subcontractor who ran the pipeline for the energy compete, agreed to pay the entire cost of the restoration and an additional \$318,000 to cover the expense of assessing the spill.

"This is the beginning of the final chapter in the Patuxent River oil spill," said J. Charles Fox, secretary of the Maryland Department of the Environment.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, MDE and Pepco collaborated on the restoration plan.

About 10 acres of shoreline and 76 acres of Aquasco wetlands were oiled when a pipeline at Potomac Energy Power Co.'s Chalk Point plant broke open. More than 140,400 gallons of oil spilled into the surrounding area, killing hundreds of ducks, thousands of fish and shellfish, and damaging spawning grounds for diamondback terrapins.

Inspectors for the National Transportation Safety Board later concluded that an undetected pipe crack was to blame for the spill. The board said miscommunication between Pepco

and emergency response teams about the size of the spill allowed the oil to spread quickly.

Cleanup efforts cost about \$71 million, much of it paid for by Pepco and its insurers. The company also later paid \$2.25 million to settle a lawsuit by watermen and property owners, but is contesting a proposed \$674,000 federal fine. The plant was later sold to Mirant Corp., which fixed the 51.5-mile-long pipeline and put it back into use.

The plan calls for restoring close to six acres of tidal marsh wetlands on Washington Creek in St. Mary's County, prime habitat for muskrats. About an acre of shoreline will be built, as will five acres of oyster reefs.

To help replace migratory ruddy ducks that were killed, 750 hectares of the bird's prairie breeding grounds in the Midwest will also be bought for \$600,000.