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Reports on bird injuries from the April 2000 Oil Spill in Southern Maryland

Four reports identifying bird injuries from the April 2000 pipeline oil spill into the Patuxent River will be released today by the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Maryland Departments of Environment and Natural Resources.

The four reports examine injury to ospreys, great blue herons, bald eagles, and waterfowl and were completed as part of a natural resource damage assessment to identify and restore natural resources injured from the oil spill. The studies conclude that roughly 500 birds died as a result of the oil spill at Pepco's Chalk Point Generating Facility near Benedict, Md.

Surveys indicated that over 1,000 birds were located in the impacted areas when the spill occurred, including ruddy ducks, grebes, buffleheads, cormorants, osprey, great blue herons, and bald eagles. Roughly 109 oiled birds were recovered, treated, and released back into the wild after the spill. Many more oiled birds were observed but could not be retrieved. Oiling of bird feathers can lead to hypothermia, stress, starvation, and death.

Observations of waterfowl, the spilled oil, and dead birds recovered immediately after the spill led the trustees to estimate that 500 birds died, most of which were ruddy ducks. In addition, approximately 400 ruddy ducks were estimated to have been lost through subsequent effects on future populations.

Three studies evaluated reproductive injury to eagles, ospreys, and great blue herons that were nesting in the area at the time of the spill. Oiled adults can contaminate incubating eggs, resulting in the death of developing embryos. Results indicated effects on these nesting birds were minimal.

NOAA Ocean Service (NOS) is dedicated to exploring, understanding, conserving, and restoring the nation's coasts and oceans. NOS balances environmental protection with economic prosperity in fulfilling its mission of promoting safe navigation, supporting coastal communities, sustaining coastal habitats and mitigating coastal hazards. To learn more about NOS, please visit <http://www.nos.noaa.gov>.

Background

These reports are part of the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) being conducted cooperatively by the trustee agencies and the responsible parties. Under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, passed after the Exxon *Valdez* spill, federal and state agencies determine the nature and extent of natural resource injuries, select appropriate restoration projects and implement or oversee restoration. The goal of a NRDA is to restore natural resources and services injured by the release of oil. Data from the bird reports will aid in identifying restoration projects for ruddy ducks and other waterfowl. Other studies are underway to identify the scope of injuries to wetlands, wildlife (including terrapins and muskrats), and aquatic resources (fish, shellfish, and benthic organisms). The full reports from the studies are available at www.darp.noaa.gov/neregion/chalkpt.htm and at Pepco's Community Center, 30383 Three Notch Road, Charlotte Hall, Md. (800-685-1266).