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Plan Released Identifying Injured Natural Resources and Restoration Alternatives

Today, government officials are unveiling a plan that identifies natural resource injuries and includes a comprehensive list of proposed restoration projects for the April 2000 pipeline oil spill into the Patuxent River. The draft restoration plan is part of the natural resource damage assessment being conducted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Maryland Departments of Environment and Natural Resources. These agencies are seeking written comments on the proposed restoration projects and will answer questions at a public meeting on May 15 from 7-9 pm at the Calvert County Fairgrounds in Prince Frederick, MD.

On April 7, 2000, a pipeline owned by Pepco and operated by ST Services ruptured, spilling more than 126,000 gallons of oil at Pepco's Chalk Point Generating Facility in Aquasco, Maryland. Natural resource trustee agencies for this incident include the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Department of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Maryland Departments of Environment and Natural Resources.

The Trustees have conducted numerous studies and determined the spill caused the following estimated natural resource and human use injuries—

- q 76 acres of wetlands lightly, moderately, or heavily oiled
- q 10 acres of shoreline lightly, moderately or heavily oiled
- q 553 ruddy ducks dead
- q 143 other birds dead
- q 122 diamondback terrapins dead and 10% reduction in turtle hatchlings
- q 376 muskrats dead
- q 5,432 pounds of fish and shellfish lost
- q 4,974 pounds of benthic (bottom-dwelling) communities lost
- q 125,000 recreational trips on the river affected by the spill

After evaluating numerous alternatives, the Trustees are proposing the following restoration projects to address these injuries—

Creating tidal marsh and enhancing shoreline beach

Create five to six acres of intertidal marsh wetland adjacent to Washington Creek, a tributary of the Patuxent River, located south of Chalk Point. This wetland would be similar to those impacted by the spill and provide habitat for juvenile fish, shellfish, birds, and mammals; improve water quality by filtering sediments and other pollutants from the water column; and provide storm surge and flood protection. This project also includes creating roughly one acre of beach habitat to benefit diamondback terrapins and other organisms.

Acquiring and restoring ruddy duck nesting habitat

Restore ruddy duck nesting habitat and acquire perpetual protective easements in areas of the Prairie Pothole Region of the Midwest. Ruddy ducks breed in wetlands located in the Midwest and southern Canada and migrate to the Chesapeake Bay to spend the winter. Restoring and protecting their nesting habitats is the only identified project that would enhance ruddy duck populations in the bay.

Creating an oyster reef sanctuary

Create four to five acres of oyster reef sanctuary in the Patuxent River to address injuries to fish, shellfish, birds (excluding ruddy ducks), and benthic communities. Oyster reefs enhance benthic communities, increase aquatic food for fish, birds, and waterfowl, and improve water quality by filtering out sediments and pollutants from the water column.

Increasing recreational opportunities

Address the estimated 125,000 river trips that were affected by the spill—

- q Create two canoe/kayak paddle-in campsites on the Patuxent River, one north of Golden Beach and one at Milltown Landing
- q Establish a disabled-accessible kayak/canoe launch at Greenwell State Park
- q Improve recreational opportunities at Maxwell Hall Natural Resource Management Area
- q Improve the Forest Landing boat ramp
- q Rebuild the King's Landing boardwalk and provide canoes for a river education program
- q Build a fishing pier at Cedar Haven Park

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The goal of a natural resource damage assessment is to restore the natural resources and services injured by an oil release. Under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, federal and state agencies and Native American tribes determine the nature and extent of natural resource injuries, select appropriate restoration projects, and implement or oversee restoration.

The draft Restoration Plan is 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).
Written comments should be sent to—

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