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NOAA AND PARTNERS COMPLETE OIL SPILL RESTORATION PROJECT ON STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK

NOAA officials joined local leaders in celebrating the completion of the Bridge Creek wetland restoration project today at a dedication on Staten Island. The restoration project is featured as part of numerous Earth Day celebrations going on throughout the country.

The Bridge Creek project has restored 18 acres of wetlands, creating habitat for nearshore and inshore finfish, crabs, ocean bottom invertebrates and various waterfowl. The wetland restoration is part of a larger rehabilitation effort aimed at restoring coastal habitat in the New York Harbor complex.

"NOAA is pleased to be here today to mark another small but significant step in the restoration of the wetlands impacted by the Exxon Bayway spill," said Timothy R.E. Keeney, deputy assistant secretary for oceans and atmosphere. "Two years ago, on Earth Day while visiting the NOAA's Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve in Maine, President Bush pledged to the nation to improve and protect three million acres of wetlands. The partnership of federal, state and local agencies and private groups working together is the type of cooperative conservation efforts are one of the many ways we are working toward that goal."

In January 1990, Exxon spilled approximately 567,000 gallons of fuel oil after a faulty pipeline ruptured beneath the Arthur Kill. Personnel from NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration (OR&R) were on site within hours assisting with the spill response. OR&R personnel worked with the U.S. Coast Guard identifying resources at risk, providing overflights, mapping and shoreline surveys, and recommending appropriate cleanup techniques.

NOAA's Damage Assessment Center (DAC) joined the response to address injuries to natural resources. As a result of the Exxon Valdez spill in 1989, NOAA created DAC to provide natural resource damage assessment services. This spill marked the first large-scale response effort by DAC since the center was established. Through this process, NOAA was able to determine the extent of injuries to natural resources, and provide recommendations for restoration.

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The restoration of Bridge Creek wetlands is just one in a myriad of projects totaling more than 80 acres of restored habitat and more than 120 acres of land preserved on Staten Island, NY, and in Middlesex County, NJ. NOAA staff worked closely with the project lead, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, through the design and contracting phases of the Bridge Creek restoration.

The Bride Creek restoration project will restore tidal flow by removing unnecessary soil and improving channels within the marsh. Activities are underway to remove the invasive reed, *Phragmites*, so that native marsh plants can repopulate the wetland. The project is expected to improve habitat for near shore and in-shore finfish, benthic invertebrates, marsh crabs, blue crabs, muskrat, shorebirds, wading birds and waterfowl.

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of the nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, 61 countries and the European Commission to develop a global network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA's National Ocean Service: <http://www.oceanservice.noaa.gov>

NOAA's National Fisheries Services: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

Damage Assessment and Restoration Program:

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration>