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Federal and State Agencies Will Clean Up and Revitalize the Lower Passaic River

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New York, NY & Trenton, NJ -- A landmark regional partnership of state and federal agencies, consisting of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers New York District, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), announced today a joint study to cleanup and restore the Lower Passaic River.

The Lower Passaic River Restoration Project focuses on a study area that stretches 17 miles from the Dundee Dam south to the point where the Passaic River enters Newark Bay. This part of the Passaic River, referred to as the Lower Passaic River, is highly industrialized and commercialized and has a long history of degraded water quality, sediment contamination, loss of wetlands, and abandoned or underutilized properties along its shores.

Through its study, the Lower Passaic Restoration Project will take a comprehensive view of the Lower Passaic River and its tributaries. An interagency team will determine the sources and extent of contamination, assess the condition of plant and animal habitats, and calculate the risks to human health and the ecosystem. The partner agencies will then develop a comprehensive cleanup and restoration plan to address the problems posed by the sediment contamination and loss of habitat, in consultation with stakeholders and the public.

EPA will use its authority under Superfund to provide approximately \$10 million and the Corps and NJDOT are cost-sharing an additional estimated \$9 million of the multi-year study of the Lower Passaic River Restoration Project. The partners are also coordinating with the Federal and State Trustee agencies on issues relating to natural resource damage assessment.

"The Corps is very excited to work with all these agencies to determine a plan to restore the Lower Passaic River. We are committed to our environmental operating principles and this restoration project is one component of our overall commitment to build a world-class harbor estuary here in the Hudson-Raritan Estuary," said Col. John B. O'Dowd, New York District Engineer, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. "The Lower Passaic is one part of a significant body of water, so what we do to clean that portion directly affects areas like Newark and the New York bays."

"We are eager to build on our cleanup work at the Diamond Alkali site under EPA's Superfund program and enter into this unique partnership to address the Lower Passaic River as a watershed," said EPA Regional Administrator Jane M. Kenny. "Working with the Corps and the State of New Jersey, EPA will make sure that those who caused the contamination are held responsible, while keeping the project to restore the health of the river moving forward."

Under Superfund authority, the EPA plans to test the river sediment for contaminants, track down other sources, and determine the risks that the contaminants might pose to human health and the river's ecosystem. EPA's work will build on previous studies that showed that there are a number of contaminants in river sediment, including dioxin, DDT, PCBs, pesticides, mercury and heavy metals as a result of industrial and commercial operations along the river.

"The restoration of the Passaic River is vital to ensure the health and economic viability of the Port of NY/NJ and our maritime transportation network," said Transportation Commissioner Jack Lettiere. "Cleaning up the Passaic is a mandatory step towards reducing contaminant loading in the Harbor and saving hundreds of millions of dollars in navigational dredged material management costs. It is imperative for the ecological and economic revitalization of the region."

"Communities along the Lower Passaic River have waited too long for cleanup of this precious resource," said New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bradley M. Campbell. "New Jersey is joining this partnership to complement our efforts at the state level to accelerate renewal of this vital estuary."

Additional information can be obtained by visiting the project Web site at www.ourPassaic.org.