

Environmental groups, the military and government organizations have teamed to restore several parcels of shoreline in an effort to return the Potomac River to its natural state.

The Nature Conservancy, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Navy, among other groups, restored several parcels of shoreline last month.

During a recent celebration of a \$1.1 million shoreline restoration at Piscataway Park, House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.) highlighted achievements made along the Potomac, including upgrades to storm- and wastewater facilities and stopping harmful runoff.

"The Potomac is the victim of a lot of human irresponsibility," said Hoyer, who noted that the projects help reverse those problems and also teach future generations how to be better stewards of the river. The Potomac "is still not where it needs to be, and we have a long way to go," he said.

The [Alice Ferguson Foundation](#) received federal [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds from NOAA](#) to restore 2,800 feet of shoreline in Piscataway Park, directly across the Potomac from Mount Vernon.

The foundation donated the park to the National Park Service in 1968, but the group still uses parts of it for educational purposes.

"All the players in the entire watershed are really starting to work together," National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis said at the event.

The new living shoreline stops erosion and promotes spawning and nursery habitat for fish along the shores of the Park Service's Native American archaeological site. It also protects about 30 acres of freshwater wetlands. It mimics natural shoreline processes so that animals and plants have a chance of "not just surviving, but contributing," Jarvis said.

Nearly 10,000 tons of stone were used as a breakwater, or structural support to the eroding shoreline. Then areas behind the stone and openings in the stone wall were filled with soil, sea grasses and other plantings. During high tide, about two acres of the shoreline gets flooded, providing habitat, said Richard L. Takacs, NOAA habitat restoration coordinator.

A similar riparian shoreline is being reconstructed at Naval Support Facility Indian Head, said Gary Wagner, a spokesman for the facility, which is on 17 miles of Potomac River and Mattawoman Creek shoreline.

Structures and roads were being lost to shoreline erosion at a rate of 1 1/2 feet per year, he said. To stop it, the Navy worked with state and local groups to develop a four-phase plan to restore six miles of shore, at an estimated cost of \$20 million, Wagner said.

The first phase of the Navy project created 11 acres of intertidal area, including wetlands and flood plains, he said. It required grading steep cliffs and constructing drainage systems to protect bluffs from storm-water erosion.

The project's second phase, which placed breakwaters 55 to 70 feet offshore and added fill and plant life, is nearly completed, he said. Sills and a cobble beach also are being added along the 5,400 linear feet of the shoreline at the confluence of the Mattawoman Creek and Potomac River.

Design of the final two phases is in progress, and construction should begin late next year or in early 2012.

Farther up the river, about 100 volunteers worked with [the Nature Conservancy](#) to remove invasive plant species from the Potomac River Gorge over a few days last month. The conservancy has been working in the gorge for 50 years. The current project is funded through a \$100,000 grant from Crystal Light.

The gorge, a 15-mile section of the Potomac between Great Falls and Theodore Roosevelt Island, is one of the most "biologically rich places in the eastern United States," said Stephanie Flack, the Nature Conservancy's Potomac River project director. She said the area remains very natural, considering it is nestled in an urban environment.

The crew focused on removing bush honeysuckle from the shoreline. This type of honeysuckle blocks light from native plants, takes vital nutrients from soil and does not provide the most healthful food for migrating birds, according to the National Park Service.

Bush honeysuckle can overtake native species that work to control pollutants and slow rushing storm water and erosion while feeding the environment.

The conservancy is taking an "early-detection, rapid-response" approach in controlling invasive species such as wavy-leafed basket grass and linden viburnum, Flack said.

In addition to work days, the group hosts scientific workshops and educates the public on basic Potomac River literacy. A new interactive map will soon be featured on its Web site, <http://www.nature.org/potomacwatershed>

"People don't make the connection between their watershed, their drinking water and the water flushed in the toilet," Flack said. "It is all the same river."

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