WASHINGTON – Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) today announced that several water resource programs and projects important to the environmental and economic health of Maryland and the 5th Congressional District were authorized in the House-passed version of the Water Resources Development Act of 2005. Each of the following programs were included in the bill at Congressman Hoyer's request and will allow the Army Corps of Engineers to make progress on these projects or studies to improve Prince George's County water quality and surrounding environment.

The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) authorizes the Army Corps of Engineers to undertake a total of nearly 700 projects and studies related to navigation, flood control or environmental protections. Approximately $10 billion in projects are included in the bill. The Senate must now pass its version of the legislation and then differences between the two bills must be worked out in a Conference Committee before the bill can become law.

"This bill will provide the Army Corps the authority and resources necessary to continue the coordinated efforts to clean-up the Chesapeake Bay by investing in programs to restore the oyster population and the underwater bay grasses. The bill further authorizes the Corps to move forward on restoration of the Anacostia River Watershed and surrounding habitat," said Congressman Hoyer. "These projects are important not only to improve our region's water quality, but will also help to ensure that these waterways are operational for recreational and economic purposes as well."

The following projects were authorized in the Water Resources and Development passed by the House of Representatives today:

Chesapeake Bay Environment Restoration and Protection Program, $50 million

In October 2004, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Blue Ribbon Finance Panel concluded in its final report that "…restoring the Chesapeake Bay will require a large-scale national and regional approach, capitalized by federal and state governments and directed according to a watershedwide strategy." As the lead Federal agency in water resource management, the Corps has a vital role to play in this effort. At Congressman Hoyer's request, the authorized funding for the Chesapeake Bay Environmental Restoration and Protection Program was raised from the current level of $10 million to $50 million. This important program authorizes the Army Corps of Engineers to provide design and construction assistance to State and local authorities in the environmental restoration of the Chesapeake Bay.

Oyster Restoration, $30 million

Oysters are essential to the well being of the Chesapeake Bay. Oyster reefs not only provide critical habitat and feeding grounds for essential species but also serve as natural filters screening out algae, sediments, and pollutants. Unfortunately, due to disease, pollution, and over fishing, oyster populations are only about two percent of their levels just a century ago. In the last few years, a consensus has emerged in the scientific community that in order to restore the overall health of the Chesapeake Bay, oyster restoration must be undertaken on a much larger scale. At Congressman Hoyer's request, the cap on oyster reef construction funds was raised to $30 million. By restoring the physical oyster habitat, creating new oyster reefs and planting disease-free oysters on these reefs, this project holds great promise in increasing oyster populations and ultimately in helping to ensure the economic and environmental revival of the Bay.

Sub-merged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)

Underwater bay grasses contribute to the oxygenation of the water and prevent erosion and sedimentation. These grasses, also called submerged aquatic vegetation or SAV, once grew in abundance-covering an estimated 200,000 acres-along the shallows and shorelines of the Chesapeake Bay, providing protection and nursery habitat for a broad range of aquatic organisms. The 2000 Chesapeake Bay Agreement set several goals for SAV restoration, including the restoration of 114,000 acres of SAV and the implementation of a strategy to accelerate protection and restoration of SAV beds in areas of critical importance to the Bay's living resources. The bill authorizes the Chesapeake Bay Environmental Restoration and Protection Program to provide design and construction assistance for the restoration of submerged aquatic vegetation.

Anacostia River Development

The Anacostia River is one of the most degraded rivers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and in the Nation. It is a resource that has long been abused and neglected, but one that can be protected and restored. Through a cooperative and coordinated federal, state, local and private effort, progress has been made in the past ten years in restoring the watershed. The Army Corps of Engineers has played a key role in improving tidal water flow through the marsh, reducing the concentration of nitrogen and phosphorus, and restoring wetlands, but the job of restoring the Anacostia watershed is far from complete. The WRDA bill directs the Army Corps of Engineers, in coordination with the Mayor of Washington, D.C., the Governors of Maryland and Virginia and the County Executives from Prince George's and Montgomery counties with developing a 10-year comprehensive action plan for the restoration and protection of the ecological integrity of the Anacostia River and its tributaries.

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