

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 Southern Maryland’s 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 navigation projects at St. Jerome Creek, the Port Tobacco River and Goose Creek,” 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.

Authorization of a Navigation Study for the Harbor Protection Project at St. Jerome Creek

St. Jerome Creek provides the only safe harbor between Point Lookout and the Patuxent River for boats on the Chesapeake Bay seeking shelter from rapidly approaching storms. Many residents of the Creek depend on access to the Chesapeake Bay for income, including watermen, and Charter boat operators. Dozens of Charter boats are housed in St. Jerome Creek and leave daily during fishing season to go out into the Chesapeake Bay. In addition, the Creek is home to many homeowners and recreational boaters who must use the narrow mouth of this creek to access the Chesapeake Bay. Congressman Hoyer has been working to allow the Corps to proceed with dredging the waterway. Rep. Hoyer proactively requested that the Army Corps also be authorized to study the feasibility of constructing a jetty to prevent further infill into the Creek following the dredging to protect the Harbor and keep it open and operational.

Authorization of an Emergency Streambank Protection Study for the Piney Point Lighthouse

The project would protect a 200 linear-foot section of a public park that was lost during Hurricane Isabel in September 2003. The lighthouse is listed on the National Register of Historic Lighthouses and was activated in 1836. The bill authorizes the Army Corps to conduct a feasibility study and if the project is feasible, authorizes the Corps to proceed.

Authorization of a Navigation Study for the Port Tobacco River and Goose Creek

The project would include dredging of a channel to a depth of six feet by 60 feet wide for a length of 5,200 feet in Port Tobacco River. For Goose Creek, the proposed project is a channel six feet deep by 60 feet wide for a length of 2,500 feet. The bill authorizes the Army Corps to conduct a feasibility study and if the project is feasible, authorizes the Corps to proceed.

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