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Update on Yellow Bar Hassock Marsh Island Restoration Project in Jamaica Bay, N.Y.

NEW YORK – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District is leading an ambitious effort to restore the Yellow Bar Hassock Marsh Islands, in Jamaica Bay, N.Y. The project addresses the vanishing marsh islands by beneficially using clean sand from the New York-New Jersey Harbor deepening project to restore marsh habitat in the Bay. Approximately 375,000 cubic yards of clean sand from the Ambrose Channel deepening project is beneficially being used to restore 42 acres of marsh at the Yellow Bar Hassock marsh island.

The Marsh Islands Complex is an integral part of Jamaica Bay, targeted for restoration by the Army Corps, The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, National Park Service (Gateway), New York City Department of Environmental Protection, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, New York State National Resources Conservation Service, the New York/New Jersey Harbor Estuary Program and many other stakeholders.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection are contributing funds along with The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the non-federal sponsor for the project.

“The Army Corps has a strong commitment along with our partners and stakeholders to restore critical habitat within Jamaica Bay, complementing the needs of the environment with the economic benefits of deepening the Port of New York and New Jersey,” said Col. John R. Boulé II, the Army Corps’ New York District Commander.

Marshes and coastal wetlands help stabilize the shoreline, provide critical habitat and nursery grounds for hundreds of fish and wildlife species and provide an important food source and nesting ground for native and migratory birds. Wetlands also improve water and sediment quality by filtering chemicals and other nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphates.

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"When Gateway's salt marshes thrive, all of New York Harbor thrives. Jamaica Bay's salt marshes provide a nursery, a foraging habitat and shelter for a wide variety of marine life," said Linda Canzanelli, Superintendent of National Park Service, Gateway. "The National Park Service is grateful to work with such forward-looking agencies as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, New York City Department of Protection and the Port Authority of New York/New Jersey. The restoration of Yellow Bar will help Jamaica Bay remain a vibrant, vital marine habitat."

The restoration of the marsh islands and wetlands in Jamaica Bay is a critical component of the Comprehensive Restoration Plan for the Hudson Raritan Estuary, as well as the Department of the Interior, New York State and City of New York strategy to restore Jamaica Bay.

"Addressing marsh loss in Jamaica Bay has been a priority of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation for more than a decade, and restoration of marsh island habitats has been a key part of the strategy," said Venetia Lannon Regional Director, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Region 2. "Completing marsh island restoration at Yellow Bar Hassock will bring the total amount of habitat restored to over 122 acres. While this is a great accomplishment, there is much more to do to reverse the historic losses. We look forward to working with our regional partners to continue making even greater strides in the coming years."

It is estimated that approximately 1,400 acres of tidal salt marsh have been lost from the marsh islands since 1924, with the system wide rate of loss rapidly increasing in recent years.

"Until recently, the marsh islands in Jamaica Bay were disappearing. Today, these places are coming back to health," said Carter Strickland, Commissioner, New York City Department of Environmental Protection. "This work follows other major initiatives to improve the bay, and we are investing \$100 million to reduce the amount of nitrogen that is discharged into the bay plus an additional \$15 million to restore marsh islands in coordination with our partners at the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and other environmental stakeholders. This collaborative partnership is a model of what we can achieve when government at all levels and stakeholders work together to improve the environment."

During the restoration project, the Marine Parkway-Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge is being intermittently raised through early April 2012 to accommodate waterborne vessels with heavy loads of sand to transit the inlet to reach Jamaica Bay. Federal code requires that a lift bridge must be raised in order to allow for crossing marine traffic. The project will attempt to minimize impacts to commuters as much as possible; however, the exact timing of the bridge raisings is associated with the high tide cycle which will vary daily. Motorists are advised to use the Cross Bay Veterans Memorial Bridge as an alternate.

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"The Corps is committed to this work and will make every effort to minimize the inconvenience to the public from the bridge raisings," said Boule' "The overall project will have a significant positive effect on Jamaica Bay creating a more sustainable resource for all future generations to enjoy."

Following sand placement in March, marsh construction will continue through planting and seeding vegetation to complete the wetland construction of the 42 acres. Planting activities will not require the lifting of the bridge. There are additional plans to use Ambrose sand to continue the upward trend of restoring another 35 acres of disappearing marsh islands at Black Wall and Rulers Bar.

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