



**US Army Corps
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Oyster EIS Team announces project status and timeline

ANNAPOLIS, MD - The team evaluating strategies to significantly increase the Chesapeake Bay's oyster population expects to release a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) in May 2008. The additional time needed to complete the draft EIS is necessary because of a delay in completing the native oyster demographic model, to enable time to ensure the results of the EIS are scientifically defensible through the peer review process and to allow time for input from the public and key stakeholder groups.

"The idea of the EIS is to provide multiple options," said Col. Dionysios Anninos, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Norfolk District Commander. "As the EIS nears completion, it's important for us, as a partnership, to focus and develop actionable and achievable objectives by site and by option that address a two-pronged approach to accomplish both oyster restoration as well as harvesting goals. They are two distinct, but equally important, efforts and should be treated as such. The options and sites chosen will be based on risk and probabilities of success. This action along with the resources must be synchronized towards achieving structured restoration and harvesting objectives."

The Executive Committee confirmed the new timeline at its July 13, 2007 meeting. The Committee also discussed the independent Oyster Advisory Panel's (OAP) preliminary peer review findings of the Native Oyster Demographic Modeling Study that provides a 10-year population projection for the following three native oyster restoration alternatives: 1) continuing current restoration efforts; 2) expanding restoration efforts; and 3) implementing a temporary harvest moratorium. These projections will be used to evaluate the ecological, economic and cultural risks and benefits of the strategies to significantly increase the Chesapeake Bay's oyster population. The panel's final peer review report will be available in August. The Committee also discussed the Ecological Risk Assessment and Relative Risk Model that will be used to look at ecological effects of the native and non-native alternatives on species interactions, habitat, food, predation and diseases.

"While I am anxious to see the efforts of years of scientific oyster research come to completion, as I have stated before, it is critical that the end product be scientifically grounded, comprehensive, and provide a useful tool to help us ascertain policy options for reviving the Bay's oyster population," states Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources L. Preston Bryant, Jr. "Virginia has recently completed our own Blue Ribbon Panel analysis of potential actions to rejuvenate the native oyster population throughout the Commonwealth's waters and the completion of the draft EIS next spring will dovetail perfectly - allowing for a comprehensive analysis of all the restoration options available to the Bay partners,"

The next Oyster Advisory Panel meeting is planned for April 2008. At that time the OAP will review the preliminary Draft EIS and advise the Executive Committee on its sufficiency and the degree of risk that would be involved with implementing each alternative based upon the available scientific information. This review will include an evaluation of any currently funded nonnative oyster research that is not yet complete. Upon this review, the Executive Committee will determine whether or not the Draft EIS is scientifically defensible and ready to be released for public review.

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"Critical to our success in increasing the Bay's oyster population will be ensuring our efforts are science based and action-oriented, and will not pose a threat to our fragile ecosystem." said Maryland Department of Natural Resources Secretary John R. Griffin. "The comprehensive data provided by the EIS will help us determine the best, most responsible strategies for moving forward collaboratively, with our partners across the watershed."

The next Oyster EIS Executive Committee meeting is planned for January 2008 at which time the Draft EIS schedule will be reviewed and the project's status announced to the public, as well as the presentation of results from current studies related to the EIS, including:

- Ecological Risk Assessment that analyzes the relative risks to natural resources as a result of implementing the various native and non-native oyster restoration strategies;
- Economic Assessment analyzing the economic impacts of implementing the various native and non-native oyster restoration strategies; and
- Cultural Assessment evaluating the cultural impacts for the communities involved with or affected by the implementation of the various native and non-native oyster restoration strategies.

Background on the EIS

The EIS evaluates alternatives for establishing an oyster population in the Chesapeake Bay that reaches levels comparable to those during the period 1920 to 1970. Specifically, the EIS evaluates the environmental consequences of continuing and expanding restoration efforts for the native Eastern oyster (*C. virginica*), implementation of a temporary oyster harvest moratorium, introducing the non-native Suminoe oyster (*C. ariakensis*), and establishing a large-scale native and/or non-native oyster aquaculture industry. Scientific findings of the EIS are expected to be the driver for determining the future direction of oyster management in the Chesapeake Bay. While timely issuance of a Draft EIS is important to all parties, of equal consideration is that the Draft EIS is scientifically defensible, complete and comprehensive. This has been challenging due to the complexity of the issues to be addressed and the irreversibility of some of the potential actions if implemented.

The EIS Executive Committee is comprised of Maryland Department of Natural Resources Secretary John R. Griffin; Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources L. Preston Bryant, Jr.; and United States Army Corps of Engineers Norfolk District Commander, Colonel Dionysios Anninos. Cooperating federal agencies include the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) are also partners in this effort.

Additional information and June 2007 Progress Report

In June (2007), the Executive Committee issued a Progress Report that provides additional background on the origin and focus of the EIS, a description of the proposed action and alternatives under evaluation, an overview of the major project components, the status of current efforts and more complete information on the milestones that still need to be achieved before a Draft EIS can be released for public review. It also provides a detailed review of several predictive tools that have been or are being developed to provide a sound scientific basis for comparing the consequences of the study's proposed action and the alternatives. That report is available at

www.DNR.Maryland.gov

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Additional links:

- Virginia Marine Resources Commission: <http://www.mrc.virginia.gov/>
- Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences: <http://www.vims.edu/abc/CA.html>
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Oyster EIS web page: www.nao.usace.army.mil/OysterEIS
- NOAA's Quarterly Non-native Oyster Research Review reports can be found online at <http://noaa.chesapeakebay.net/nonnativeoysterresearch.aspx>.