

Restoring Natural Resources After the Indian River Oil Spill

Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program



The Problem

In 2000, fuel oil was released into the Indian River Estuary by the Indian River Power Plant (IRPP) owned at that time by Delmarva Power & Light Company (DP&L). Over a 10 year period, 600,000 gallons of oil leaked underground impacting fringe marsh and shoreline habitat. The Natural Resource Trustees, Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (DNREC,) U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) worked cooperatively with DP&L and their contractor to assess the damages and develop a restoration plan.

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When hazardous substances enter the environment, fish, wildlife, and other natural resources can be injured. The Department of the Interior, along with State, Tribal and other Federal partners, acts as “trustee” for these resources. Trustees seek to identify the natural resources injured and determine the extent of the injuries. Trustees work with the responsible parties to carry out restoration activities, or recover funds from responsible parties to carry out the restoration activities. These efforts are possible under the Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program (NRDAR), the goal of which



Newly constructed channel

- Restored natural stream channels to 24 acres of saltmarsh that was previously ditched for mosquito control;
- Restored tidal pools and mudflats - important habitat for wading birds, fish, crabs and other invertebrates; and
- Installed a kiosk and interpretive signs.



Snowy Egret



Diamondback Terrapin

is to restore natural resources injured by oil spills or the release of hazardous substances.

Restoring the Resources

After several years of monitoring, evaluation, planning and design, the 24-acre salt marsh enhancement project at the Delaware Center for the Inland Bays' (CIB) is complete. Located in Ocean View, Delaware, the project is intended to return a more natural flow of water into the marsh by filling in mosquito control ditches and creating more natural meandering tidal creeks, mudflats and pools.

The James Farm project site was proposed by DP&L and accepted by the Trustees as compensation for the natural resources lost as a result of the spill. Conectiv Energy, an affiliate of DP&L, which was created as a competitive energy generation provider with the deregulation of the utility industry in Delaware, provided expertise and assistance to DP&L in satisfying the obligation to clean up the spill and provide appropriate compensation.

Accomplishments

In 2007, the fringing salt marsh impacted by the release was restored, leading the way to the James Farm project. This project site was selected for several reasons including the continuing opportunity for Conectiv Energy to work with CIB, the project's positive impact on the environment and community, and because this marsh and surrounding area would benefit from this kind of work.

Restoring Natural Stream Channels
Dramatic steps were taken to restore the 24 acres of a saltmarsh that was ditched for mosquito control purposes back in the late-1930s. Where uniform-width, straight-line ditches once crossed the saltmarsh, shallow tidal pools and sinuous channels meander through the stands of saltmarsh cordgrass.

Providing Wildlife Habitat

This work will benefit the wide variety of birds, fish and other wildlife species that inhabit Delaware's Inland Bays. Linear ditches were replaced with a network of meandering tidal creeks, pools and tidal mudflats, which are typical of interior portions of undisturbed coastal

salt marsh. The pools and channels will provide feeding areas for wading birds, like herons and egrets, and habitat for fish, crabs and other invertebrates.

Educating the Community

Beyond the physical enhancements to the marshland, the project also includes educational components for the public such as signage that describes the restoration efforts and how this project will benefit the environment. Information and updates will be posted on the kiosk at the James Farm parking lot and on the CIB Web site. This project will serve the community for generations to come.



DE Department of Natural Resources

James Farm marsh restoration



Center for the Inland Bays

Environmental education program

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