



## The Delaware River Main Channel Deepening Project: Background

### Fact Sheet #1 — The Delaware River Main Channel Deepening Project: Background

The United States Army Corps of Engineers (the "Corps") and the Delaware River Port Authority (DRPA) are proposing to deepen the Delaware River's shipping channel from 40 to 45 feet for 102 miles from Philadelphia/Camden to the sea to accommodate larger container ships and tankers. The two-way channel is 1000 feet wide in the Bay and 400 ft. wide at Philadelphia/Camden.

#### The Rationale:

The Corps claims the project is needed to accommodate larger and more deeply loaded ships with deeper drafts and to keep Delaware River ports competitive with other East Coast ports. The proposal is based on the assumption that mega-container ships built in the future will use the ports of New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

But, the Corps reasoning is not supported by the facts:

- The mega-container ships being built for the future require a depth of at least 50 feet and so could not be accommodated by the Delaware regardless of the proposed deepening project.
- Delaware River ports are 100 miles, a great distance, from the Atlantic and therefore cannot compete with other Eastern Ports which are closer to the ocean and therefore are a less costly destination.

#### The Cost:

As proposed, the \$300 million deepening project requires \$200 million of federal funds and \$100 million to be provided by the local sponsor, the DRPA. At present the distribution of funding for the local share is as follows:

- \$15 million authorized (not appropriated) from the state of Pennsylvania;
- \$15 million authorized (not appropriated) from the State of New Jersey;
- \$ 2 million authorized (not appropriated) from the State of Delaware; and
- \$68 million from the DRPA.

The DRPA has proposed paying their portion by issuing bonds that would necessarily be backed by bridge tolls and PATCO high speed line fares.

#### The Benefits:

According to the Corps, over 80% of the benefit from the proposed deepening project accrue to six oil facilities. But most of the oil facilities are already operating at full capacity. In addition, in order for the oil facilities to

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accommodate the larger and more deeply loaded ships they would have to deepen the channels in their own private channels and berths. But the Corps does not have commitments from these oil facilities that they will actually invest the \$21 to \$50 million of private funds that will be required to do this work and take advantage of the deepened channel. In some instances, facilities have affirmatively indicated they will not be investing the monies necessary to deepen their channels and berths and take advantage of the deepened channel.

**The Impacts:**

The project would result in **22 million cubic yards of dredge spoils** to be disposed of on land. At present the Corps is proposing to dump these spoils in a combination of 8 existing Corps disposal sites and 4 new sites, all of which are located in the State of New Jersey. In some instances, dredge spoils will be piled 75 feet high and are being challenged by local communities as an eyesore. (An additional 10 million cubic yards will be used for beach nourishment and wetlands projects).

According to two recent independent studies the project will **reintroduce toxic sediments into the Delaware River system** at levels of concern:

1. In the fall, 1998 the State of Delaware reviewed the Corps' data and found that among the areas to be dredged (especially the bends to be widened) there are **toxic "hot spots"**. Toxics found in Delaware River sediments at levels indicating possible to probable impacts include: Antimony, Arsenic, Copper, Lead, Mercury and Zinc. And cadmium was found at levels of ecological significance. During the dredging process sediments and their associated toxins will be resuspended into the Delaware River system and therefore reintroduced into the food chain.
2. Also the Fall of 1998 the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) Toxics Advisory Committee presented findings that dredge spoil disposal facilities, like those to be used for the deepening project, can be a significant source of toxic pollution for the River. Among the toxics discharged to the River during the de-watering process at the sites studied are Cadmium, Lead, Copper, Zinc and total suspended solids. In some instances, the discharge concentration exceeds the DRBC's acute and/or chronic criteria.

The deepening project poses serious threats to **New Jersey's recovering oyster populations:**

1. The project will cause the salt line to move upriver and bring with it predators such as MSX and dermo;
2. The resuspension and settling of river bottom sediments will cover oyster seed beds and smother spat or cover the shell substrate preventing the setting of spat;
3. Course grain materials deposited on oyster reefs as a result of the project will smother viable oyster populations, primarily during the cold weather months.

Concerns remain that the project will move the salt line up far enough to threaten **New Jersey's drinking water supplies** with saltwater intrusion. In addition, there are concerns that the blasting which will have to occur at Marcus Hook to accommodate the deepening will threaten a drinking water aquifer that travels under the River at this point.

*An Alliance has been formed to oppose the project. Dump the Delaware Deepening is comprised of organizations and individuals throughout the region concerned about this project. If you want to get involved call us at 1-800-8-DELAWARE.*