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Bulldozers rev-up to bury Palmyra Cove Nature Park

Palmyra, NJ – In recent months yard signs around south Jersey have been popping up stating – SAVE PALMYRA COVE NATURE PARK.

This week park supporters learned the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) intends to begin clear-cutting 22 acres of the Palmyra Cove Nature Park, possibly as early as Monday, August 6 to allow for the disposal of dredge spoil disposal on site. The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will then begin dumping 30,000 cubic yards of river dredge spoils on the site – a right preserved by a 1998 agreement surrounding the use of Palmyra Cove.

“The area that will be filled with dredge spoils are some of the most ecologically diverse, tidal habitat in the park,” said Courtney McLaughlin, Palmyra Cove Nature Park volunteer. “The healthy wetlands and upland forests that will be destroyed are part of our education program, which has attracted hundreds of school children from throughout South Jersey,” added McLaughlin.

“Palmyra Cove has become an important link in the ecological health of the Delaware River. For three years the Army Corps has known that dredging in this reach of the river was imminent, that dredge spoil disposal would be necessary, and that the US Fish and Wildlife Service and others would have concerns about their use of Palmyra Cove for spoil disposal. Today the Army Corps is flexing its muscle to force the disposal of spoils on NJ communities and ecosystems, just as they have historically done with the Delaware Deepening and will undoubtedly do in the future.” asserts Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper.

“The Palmyra Cove Nature Park supports a significant number and diversity of bird species throughout spring and fall migration and the breeding season,” states Cristina Frank of New Jersey Audubon Society. “Based on its ability to provide essential habitat for many species of birds, the site has been recognized as an Important Bird Area by New Jersey Audubon Society’s Important Bird and Birding Areas Program.”

In June, Senator Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ) called upon the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to find another dumping location. “This park is an exceptional natural resource and I urge you to immediately withdraw all plans to deposit dredge material here,” Sen. Lautenberg wrote in a June 14, 2007 press release. “The Army Corps’ proposal to dump dredge spoils in this park would be devastating and the environmental impact of these spoils would be enormous.”

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has also requested the Corp consider other sites.

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“The Army Corp actions are outrageous!” stated Jeff Title, Director NJ Sierra Club. “All the Corp wants to do is dump on South Jersey and destroy our environmentally sensitive places.”

“Why isn’t the Army Corp of Engineers exploring alternative sites?” McLaughlin asks. “Most importantly - why has the NJDEP refused to hold a public hearing on the issue?” said McLaughlin.

According to Fred Stine, Citizen Action Coordinator for Delaware Riverkeeper Network, “South Jersey is united in protecting this hidden treasure of trees, trails, wildlife and environmental education.”