



US Army Corps of Engineers  
Baltimore District



Maryland Port Administration  
Maryland Department of Transportation

# Poplar Island Expansion Study

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## Expansion of Poplar Island to be investigated

A General Reevaluation Report (GRR) with an integrated Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) is being undertaken to investigate the potential to expand the current Poplar Island Environmental Restoration Project (PIERP). This GRR is sponsored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District, and the Maryland Department of Transportation under the auspices of the Maryland Port Administration.

### What is a General Reevaluation Report?

The GRR is a decision document that will comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) through supplemental documentation to the existing Poplar Island EIS. An integrated SEIS addressing raising the dikes above the authorized height of 23 feet and proposed footprint expansion alternatives will be prepared. If during the study period it is determined that an EIS is not needed to comply with NEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) would be prepared instead.

### Study Authorization

This GRR is being conducted under the existing PIERP authorization, section 537 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996 (WRDA96). Certain proposed project modifications may be able to

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## Poplar Island Environmental Restoration Project

The current Poplar Island Environmental Restoration Project (PIERP) was envisioned for construction during a 24-year period through the placement of up to 2 million cubic yards (mcy) of dredged material per year. The actual dredged material placement at Poplar Island has increased beyond planned levels due to the continued need to improve and to maintain the Chesapeake Bay approach channels to the Port of Baltimore and the restrictions of other placement options.



*Current Poplar Island Environmental Restoration Project*

Some of the specific habitat restoration objectives Include:

- Create nesting habitat for ground-nesting colonial water birds that nest on isolated bare or sparsely vegetated islands.

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be implemented without further Congressional authorization, subject to section 902 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996 (WRDA96), which limits cost increases in authorized projects to 20 percent. Other modifications would require Congressional authorization.

## **Public Involvement**

A Notice of Intent (NOI) to initiate the GRR and SEIS was published in the June 5, 2003, edition of the *Federal Register*, Volume 68, Number 108, page 33685. The NOI describes and explains what the GRR and SEIS will evaluate and investigate.

A public meeting is planned to be held in Talbot County, Maryland, to present details on the GRR and SEIS and to allow the public to comment on the investigation into possibly expanding the current PIERP. Notification of when this meeting is to be held will be mailed to individuals and agencies on the Corps' mailing list and advertised in local newspapers.

## **Areas to be Investigated in the GRR**

The Baltimore District proposes that the Poplar Island expansion GRR further investigate and fully evaluate solutions to increase the placement capacity and environmental benefits at Poplar Island by dike raising in the upland cells of the island and/or expanding the footprint with additional enhancements. Some of these include:

- Dike Raising –

The study will evaluate raising the upland cell dikes (Cell Nos. 2 and 6) above the authorized height of 23 feet mean lower low water at Poplar Island to an unspecified elevation to be determined during the study. This modification is not expected to change the beneficial use of the project. This alternative may increase placement capacity by 10 to 20 million cubic yards or more depending on the final elevation.

- Expansion of the Existing Footprint –

Expanding the footprint of the island to increase the placement capacity and to realize additional environmental benefits will be studied. Proposed alignments will consider potential expansion along the northeastern and southern sides of the island. All

alignments would increase dredged material capacity and add environmental habitat. The northeastern alignment may also provide increased protection from wave action to Poplar Harbor and Jefferson Island.

- Environmental Enhancements -

Poplar Harbor – To the east of the Poplar Island project is Poplar Harbor. This area is protected from the wave energy of the open Chesapeake Bay by the project to the west, Coaches Island to the south, and Jefferson Island to the north. One of the goals of the project is to facilitate the return of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) within the harbor by further protecting it to provide more quiescent shallow water habitat. Efforts should be made to maximize this restoration potential through further protection of the northern side of the harbor. Expansion of the footprint could be designed to accomplish this goal, but if that is not considered feasible, other structural means (breakwaters, jetty, etc.) will be considered.

- Terrapin habitat –

The diamondback terrapin is an important species in the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. It requires remote, sandy beaches to lay eggs. Such habitat is becoming increasingly scarce in the Chesapeake Bay due to human development and activities, sea-level rise and erosion. In the spring and summer of 2002, dozens of terrapins nested on the dikes at Poplar Island resulting in the tagging and release of over 500 hatched terrapins back into the Bay. This experience has proven that the island is well situated and isolated enough for terrapin habitat. As part of the GRR study, new features will be considered at the island to enhance terrapin habitat, such as creation of non-recreational sandy beaches.

## **Who to contact for more information**

Questions about the GRR and SEIS can be addressed to Ms. Gwen Meyer, Study Team Leader, Baltimore District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, ATTN: CENAB-PL-P, P.O. Box 1715, Baltimore, Maryland, 21203-1715, telephone (410) 962-9502. E-mail address: gwendolyn.c.meyer@usace.army.mil

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*Creation of nesting habitat for colonial birds preferring vegetated islands*

- Create nesting habitat for colonial water birds that nest on isolated vegetated islands.
- Create coastal wetlands to provide fish and wildlife habitat and to support the Chesapeake Bay food web.
- Increase quiescent water habitat in Poplar Harbor to promote submerged aquatic vegetation growth
- Create a diversity of habitat to support a wide range of plant and animal species.

### **Monitoring of habitat creation**

As part of the PIERP, a monitoring framework was developed to provide a long-term (20 years) effort to determine the success of habitat creation.

The framework was developed as a multi-disciplinary, collaborative effort to meet the regulatory agency, resource agency and construction compliance requirements of PIERP.

Annual reports are produced each year and meetings are held with a large working group to review conditions and findings and determine potential modifications to the project planning, implementation, and monitoring.

As needed, smaller focus groups also meet throughout the year to adjust to changing conditions that need immediate attention.

The PIERP framework was developed as an evolving plan, to be modified as needed to meet changing conditions and to respond to monitoring studies.

Due to successful terrapin nesting in 2002, an additional terrapin-monitoring element is to be added, along with more frequent bird monitoring due to nesting of least tern, common tern and colonial water birds and utilization by many other species, which began during construction.

In this manner, the framework is fulfilling its mission of adjusting to meet the needs of the project as the project changes over time.



*Terrapin hatchlings head for the water while being monitored*



*Creation of Spartina marsh at the Poplar Island*

- Please **add** my name to the study mailing list.
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E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments/Suggestions: \_\_\_\_\_  
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