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News Release

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Corps of Engineers announce completion of new Tolchester channel

Baltimore – Officials from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District, announced today that the dredging to straighten the Tolchester channel S-turn and maintenance dredging in the Craighill channel system was completed today.

The Norfolk Dredging Company, the contractor for the work, finished the main part of the \$28,142,600 contract more than a month ahead of schedule. Minor work, including the final channel surveys, will occur in February.

The Tolchester Channel is a southern approach channel to the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal, linking the Port of Baltimore to the Atlantic Ocean via a northern route. The Craighill channels are the southern approach from the Atlantic Ocean, up the Chesapeake Bay, to the Port of Baltimore. Dredging began at Tolchester Oct. 1, and on the Craighill channels in the middle of September.

The Tolchester S-turn is a series of four turns over a three nautical mile section of channel near Tolchester Beach, Md. Since 1981, three ships have run aground in the channel and three in the immediate vicinity of the channel. There also have been many near misses. The U.S. Coast Guard supported the straightening of the Tolchester S-turn.

"Straightening the Tolchester channel was about improving safety, and about preventing a grounding that could have been ecologically disastrous. In high winds, fog, ice and thunderstorms, the S-turn was a hazard to navigation and a threat to the environment," said Russell E. Marsh, Corps of Engineers operations manager.

The Maryland Port Administration, the non-federal sponsor of the project, and the Association of Maryland Pilots, requested the work. The Port of Baltimore generates nearly \$1.3 billion in economic benefits to the local economy. More than 126,000 jobs across the state are related in some way to the movement of cargo across the port's piers.

"New work and improvement projects keep our Port competitive and strategically positioned to pursue new opportunities in a highly competitive maritime industry," said John D. Porcari, Secretary, Maryland Department of Transportation. "They are essential for us to survive, and the speedy end to this important project is a testament to our partners at the Army Corps of Engineers."

Over 3 million cubic yards of material were dredged from the projects and placed at the Poplar Island Environmental Restoration Project in Talbot County, Md. By placing clean dredged material at Poplar Island, the Corps is restoring critical island habitat for shorebirds and creating much-needed wetlands in the Chesapeake Bay.