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Terrapins hatchlings emerge at Poplar Island

A media opportunity featuring the terrapin hatchlings emerging from their nests, being collected and tagged and then released into the Chesapeake Bay, is tentatively scheduled for August 13, a date when a large number of hatchlings are expected to emerge.

The first hatchlings from an estimated 100 diamondback terrapin nests emerged over the weekend at Poplar Island, an environmental restoration project in the upper middle Chesapeake Bay in Talbot County, Md.

“Shoreline development is threatening the terrapin’s nesting habitat,” said Phil Allman, biologist, who is part of an Ohio University group led by Dr. Willem Roosenburg that is monitoring the terrapin nests. “It’s great that the Army Corps of Engineers and the Maryland Port Administration are restoring this important habitat with this project.”

The nests, which started appearing in early June, contain 10-15 eggs each and have an average gestation period of about 60 days.

Poplar Island, which had eroded to less than 4 acres in 1999, is now a dredged material beneficial-use placement site. It provides critical nesting and nursery habitat for many endangered, threatened, and important native wildlife species by the placement of clean dredged material taken from the approach channels to the Port of Baltimore.

“We weren’t expecting the wildlife to return to the island so soon, since we are still years away from completing the upland and wetland habitat,” said Scott Johnson, Corps project manager for Poplar Island. “But as with the bald eagles, osprey, herons, egrets, pelicans and terns, we are glad to have the terrapins here and are doing whatever we can to encourage them to stay while we finish rebuilding the island.”

Poplar Island is a partnership of the Army Corps of Engineers, the Maryland Port Administration and numerous other state and federal agencies. The largest project of its kind, Poplar is being watched as a potential model solution to the national problem of dredged material placement.

For more information or to RSVP for the media opportunity, call Marshall Hudson at 410-962-7536 or e-mail marshall.hudson@usace.army.mil.

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