



US Army Corps  
of Engineers  
Baltimore District

# News Release

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## **Federal-state team begins demonstration project to study marsh restoration at Blackwater Wildlife Refuge**

**Baltimore** – This month, a team of scientists with the Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Maryland Department of Natural Resources have begun a demonstration project aimed at studying ways to restore thousands of acres of marshlands at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in Dorchester County, Md.

Scientists will study and evaluate various marshland restoration techniques and components on a 20-acre site within Blackwater's 17,000 acres of wetlands, woodlands and croplands. At the center of this project is a relatively new approach to rebuilding degraded marshlands. Because the Blackwater system does not lend itself to traditional forms of dredged material placement, such as mechanical means or through a pipe system, scientists are spraying the dredged material in thin layers to recreate these lands.

Experts will measure the distance the material can be effectively sprayed, the amount of material settlement and the rate the material can be placed. They will also study other restoration components such as the preferred times of the year for planting vegetation, planting techniques and how differing marshland elevations perform.

“We plan to start with this small demonstration-type project and evaluate its results,” said Steven Kopecky, a Corps geographer who is managing the project. “If successful, we will likely attempt restoration on a larger scale. Ultimately, there is the opportunity to restore up to 7,000 acres of marshland habitats, making Blackwater potentially one of the largest marsh restoration projects on the East Coast.”

Blackwater, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is an important wildlife refuge on the Eastern Shore and plays a key part in the overall ecology of the Chesapeake Bay. The refuge provides critical habitat for a number of bird and animal species, and spawning habitat for aquatic life. It is estimated that Blackwater loses about 100 acres a year to saltwater intrusion, altered marsh hydrology, sea level rise and damage from invasive nutria.

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## **Blackwater Demonstration Project/2-2-2**

To preserve these important areas, a federal-state team, working closely with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Sierra Club, Audubon Society, Ducks Unlimited and other government agencies and non-profit organizations, began a comprehensive feasibility study last year to identify practical and cost effective ways to restore these areas. The Corps plans to complete this study in 2004. The demonstration project will be monitored over the next several years.

The feasibility study is being cost-shared between the Corps of Engineers and Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

**Editor's Note: A media day is scheduled for Monday, Sept. 23 at 10:30 a.m. at the Blackwater Wildlife Refuge Visitor's Center. Experts will demonstrate the spraying technique and address questions about the study. Any media planning to attend should contact Doug Garman, Army Corps of Engineers, Public Affairs Office, 410-962-2809.**

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