

Abstract

Natural Resource Trustee Partnering in the Urban River Restoration Initiative

Submitted to the U. S. Department of the Interior 2003 Conference on the Environment
"Partnering for Environmental Stewardship - Resource Conservation for the Future"

Many urban rivers in the United States contain severely contaminated sediments that adversely affect aquatic life and limit recreational and economic uses of the rivers. For example, EPA's 1997 National Sediment Quality Survey identified 96 watersheds containing 1.2 billion cubic yards of contaminated sediments. In response to this situation, a new cooperative effort to restore urban rivers that are affected by contaminated sediments is being undertaken by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in conjunction with other appropriate federal, state and local agencies.

On July 2, 2002, the Corps and EPA signed a Memorandum of Understanding entitled "Restoration of Degraded Urban Rivers" to coordinate remedial, water quality, and environmental restoration activities under the Clean Water Act, Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation Act, Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, and the Water Resources Development Acts. The MOU calls for the identification of eight pilot projects to be announced and undertaken within one year of the date of the MOU. EPA and the Corps expect the eight pilots to be announced prior to Interior's 2003 Conference on the Environment.

The principal natural resource trustee agencies (Interior and NOAA) are likely to be heavily involved with the Corps, EPA and state and local agencies in preparing comprehensive, watershed based plans for the eight pilot projects, and in undertaking such plans. A model for such partnering already is evolving in the Passaic River, New Jersey watershed, where a cooperative study currently is being planned for a project that is likely to be named as one of the eight pilots. The Passaic River, located in the heartland of the U.S. industrial revolution, is one of the most complex riverine restoration challenges in the Nation. The "Passaic River Restoration Initiative," as the project is called, involves a partnership among four Federal and two State agencies. These are Interior, NOAA, the Corps, EPA, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the New Jersey Office of Maritime Resources. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been designated as the administrative trustee for the effort.

This paper discusses this new interagency initiative, focusing on the roles of natural resource trustee agencies. It covers the genesis of the initiative, relationships with other Federal programs, agency coordinating mechanisms, and likely future directions of the effort. The Passaic River is used to illustrate concepts that may have applicability in other urban river systems in the United States.

Author: Jonathan P. Deason, Ph.D.
Lead Professor, Environmental and Energy Management Program
The George Washington University
1776 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20052
Phone: 202-994-4827; E-mail: jdeason@seas.gwu.edu

