



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers®**



For Immediate Release  
June 21, 2007

CONTACTS: Maryland DNR - Tom O'Connell, 410-693-8075  
Virginia DNR - Jack Travelstead, 757-247-2247  
Corps of Engineers - Mark Mansfield, 757-201-7764

**Draft EIS delayed**

## **Oyster EIS Team releases Progress Report**

NORFOLK, VA... The team evaluating alternatives to significantly increase the population of oysters throughout the Chesapeake Bay has released a comprehensive Progress Report. The report is published in lieu of the anticipated May/June 2007 release of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), the completion of which has been delayed by challenges in developing a native oyster demographic computer model, an important tool for evaluating the environmental consequences of the various restoration alternatives under consideration. Following a mid-July meeting, the Oyster EIS Executive Committee expects to announce a new target date for release of the Draft EIS.

The Progress Report provides general background on the origin and focus of the EIS, a description of the proposed action and alternatives under evaluation, an overview of the major project components, the status of current efforts, and milestones that still need to be achieved before a Draft EIS can be released for public review. It also provides a detailed review of several predictive tools that have been or are being developed to provide a sound scientific basis for comparing the consequences of the study's proposed action and the alternatives.

### **The EIS's Goal**

The scientific findings of the EIS are expected to be the driver for determining the future direction for oyster management in the Chesapeake Bay, selected from a range of options, including native oyster restoration, non-native introduction or combined solutions. As such, it will enable federal, state and private organizations to focus their resources in a common, comprehensive and coherent manner. The specific goal of the EIS is to evaluate alternatives for establishing an oyster population in the Chesapeake Bay that reaches levels comparable to those during the period 1920 to 1970. The objective is to restore the ecological role of oysters in the Bay as well as the socioeconomic benefits of a commercial oyster fishery. The EIS is evaluating the environmental consequences of continuing and expanding restoration efforts for the native Eastern oyster (*C. virginica*), implementation of a temporary oyster harvest moratorium, introducing the non-native Suminoe oyster (*C. ariakensis*), and establishing a large-scale native and/or non-native oyster aquaculture industry.

### **Developing native oyster model is key to scientific basis of EIS**

Last January, the Oyster EIS Executive Committee, in coordination with the cooperating federal agencies and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, announced a May/June 2007 target date for publishing a Draft EIS. While significant progress has been made on all of the critical elements of the EIS since January, the release of the Draft EIS has been delayed by the need to finalize development of several predictive tools. These tools are important to provide a sound scientific basis for comparing the consequences of the EIS's proposed action and the alternatives. A key component to the EIS is developing a native oyster demographic model that predicts changes in the Bay's native oyster population for a range of restoration alternatives. The challenge in organizing and analyzing the available native oyster data to develop this model is the primary reason for this delay.

Timely issuance of a Draft EIS is of critical importance to all parties. Even more important, however, is that the draft EIS is scientifically defensible, complete and comprehensive. This has been challenging due to the complexity

-more-

## Progress Report on Oyster EIS

2-2-2-2-2

of the issues to be addressed and the irreversibility of some of the potential actions if implemented. Taking particular care in completing the scientific studies and modeling is critical. The careful preparation of the EIS has required the participation of a large number of stakeholders, the integration of findings and contributions from many sources, complete documentation of all data and information to be incorporated, and rigorous quality control and peer review.

### Major milestones to complete the Draft Oyster EIS

Several significant steps remain to complete the Draft EIS. These include:

- Independent Oyster Advisory Panel peer review of the native and nonnative oyster demographic model documentation. The panel is comprised of seven-members representing a broad range of non-partisan, scientific expertise and philosophies about marine resources.
- Completion of peer reviews for all individual EIS components, including research, modeling and assessments.
- Integration and completion of the ecological, economic and cultural analyses, that are dependent upon the demographic model output, to assess the consequences of the proposed action and alternatives.
- Independent Oyster Advisory Panel peer review of the entire Draft EIS to advise the lead agencies on the sufficiency of the EIS and the degree of risk that would be involved with implementing each alternative based upon the available scientific information. This review will include an evaluation of any currently funded nonnative oyster research that is not yet complete.

### Upcoming Events:

**Independent Oyster Advisory Panel meeting:** The independent Oyster Advisory Panel will meet in an open working session in mid-July to review the native oyster demographic model and will, subsequently, present their assessment to the Oyster EIS Executive Committee. For additional information on the meeting, contact Tom O'Connell at 410-260-8295.

**Oyster EIS Executive Committee meeting:** In mid-July, the Executive Committee will meet with the cooperating federal agencies, Potomac River Fisheries Commission and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The committee will review the EIS's status and associated research, and assess the Oyster Advisory Panel's observations and recommendations in setting a course and timeline for the Draft EIS's future release.

The EIS Executive Committee is comprised of Maryland Department of Natural Resources Secretary John R. Griffin; Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources L. Preston Bryant, Jr.; and United States Army Corps of Engineers Norfolk District Commander, Colonel Dionysios Anninos. The cooperating federal agencies consist of the Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) are also partners in this effort.

**For a copy of the Progress Report and additional information** on the progress of the EIS, accomplishments to date, available scientific findings and upcoming meetings go to the EIS website at <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/dnrnews/infocus/oysters.asp>.

###

Additional links:

NOAA's Quarterly Non-native Oyster Research Review reports can be found online at <http://noaa.chesapeakebay.net/nonnativeoysterresearch.aspx>.