



Congressman

Bill Pascrell, Jr.

N E W S R E L E A S E

8TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

NEW JERSEY

July 30, 2003
For Immediate Release

For Information Contact:
Marc La Vorgna (973) 523-5152

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY AND U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS NAME PASSAIC RIVER IN LATEST ROUND OF URBAN RIVER RESTORATION PILOT PROJECTS

Representatives Menendez, Frelinghuysen and Pascrell credited for their oversight and leadership

Washington, DC--In a joint announcement today at the National Association of Local Government Environmental Professionals (NALGEP), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) today announced the selection of New Jersey's Passaic River among the latest rivers to be pilot projects for the federal "Urban Rivers Restoration Initiative" (URRI) program. The new URRI program on the Passaic, termed the "Passaic River Restoration Initiative," will be led jointly by the USACE and the EPA, with assistance from the Department of the Interior, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, and New Jersey Office of Maritime Resources. It is aimed at determining comprehensive solutions to the complex problems facing the lower Passaic River between Newark Bay and the Dundee Dam.

The Passaic River is the birthplace of America's "Industrial Revolution". It has been compromised by more than 200 years of societal impacts by hundreds maybe thousands of polluters including municipal discharges and a history of contaminated sediments. New Jersey Representatives Robert Menendez (D-13), Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-11) and Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-8) have provided strong leadership and oversight for the creation of the overall URRI program and to have the Passaic listed among this round of pilot projects.

"The cleanup of the Passaic River has waited long enough. It is time to stop arguing and move on to restoration. Existing federal cleanup programs have proven ineffective in dealing with many waterway contamination problems like that of the Passaic," said Representative Pascrell, a member of the Water Resources and Environment a Subcommittee, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. "The Passaic, like many other urban rivers, has become contaminated over many years by hundreds of polluters, many of whom no longer exist. We need a new approach on the Passaic to avoid an endless litigious morass. The Passaic River Restoration Initiative is the way to do it."

-more-

"The Urban River Restoration Initiative designation is an important step in the restoration of the Passaic River, as it creates a partnership of agencies with varied expertise in solving water resource problems to address the complex clean-up needs of the Passaic River," said Rep. Bob Menendez, a member of the Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and leader of the effort to authorize the study. "The URRRI also maintains the polluter pay principle, ensuring that the corporate offenders are held accountable while moving forward with the restoration of the economic and environmental value of this great New Jersey river. I look forward to continuing to work with the agencies and organizations involved in the clean-up process, and to celebrating a return of the Passaic River to her original glory."

On April 11, 2000, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee approved a resolution authorizing the Corps to conduct the Passaic River Environmental Restoration reconnaissance study. Funding for the effort has been provided in the fiscal year 2001 - 2003 Energy and Water Development Appropriations bills and the study currently is underway by the Corps' New York District. Today, the Corps and EPA announce the selection of the Passaic River as pilot study area under the agencies' July 2, 2002 Memorandum of Understanding entitled "Restoration of Degraded Urban Rivers."

"According to a study by the National Research Council, we know that there are no simple solutions to rivers with contaminated sediment problems," said Representative Frelinghuysen, a member of the Energy and Water Development Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, who led the effort to obtain funding for the new program. "However, the comprehensive approach envisioned by our new effort will use state-of-the-art information from the New York/New Jersey Harbor Estuary Program, EPA's Contaminated Sediment Management Strategy, and other related efforts to achieve the best results in the shortest amount of time possible."

Among the more attractive aspect of the URRRI effort is that, while it is solution oriented, it also will ensure that polluters will pay their fair shares of restoration costs. The program will require that restoration activities be cost-shared at an appropriate level between the government and entities responsible for the current condition of the Passaic. In fact, we expect that, faced with the extremely expensive grasp of Superfund, responsible parties will be forced to fully meet their responsibilities under this initiative.

The PRRI program is evidence that bi-partisanship still exists in the U.S. Congress. New Jersey's delegation is working together to make something happen without waiting for the courts to tell us what to do on the Passaic.

###