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MPA Dredging Operations Continue to Make Port Safer and Enhance Environment

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When the northwest wind howled this winter, weary residents started dreaming of a cruise to the islands. But that wind could have threatened to catch the side of large cruise ships as they turned, possibly blowing them against the side of the South Locust Point channel. So, with a bit of dredging, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) modified the channel, making the room needed to turn 1,000-foot ships in the wind and preserve the dreams of island vacations.

"It's over and done and the cruise ships are using that widened channel," said Frank Hamons, deputy director for Harbor Development. Hamons added that the MPA was able to pump the dredged material directly into the Masonville Cove containment site, a 141-acre tract on the south shore of the Patapsco River's Middle Branch. >>>

BY NANCY MENEFEE JACKSON





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The MPA also is working on capping the upland portion of Masonville Cove, which contains old contaminants, pioneering a method that preserves trees, vegetation and wildlife habitat.

"We've developed a system that saves the major trees," Hamons explained. "Normal procedure is to go in and cut down the trees. We've looked at various ways — you can't just fill up around a tree — but we've proposed several features that will provide the capping needed while preserving the trees. We knew the neighborhood didn't want to see us go in and cut down the trees because it is a wildlife habitat."

The site will be modified in three phases, and the MPA hopes to complete Phase I this fall. As part of the modifications, a pier will be constructed to accommodate groups such as the Living Classrooms Foundation, which uses natural and maritime resources to provide young people with hands-on education and job training.

Cox Creek, a 100-acre site just south of the Francis Scott Key Bridge on the Patapsco's western shore, has been renovated and is also receiving dredged materials. Some private contractors have deposited materials from smaller jobs there, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will

COX CREEK is a 100-acre dredged material containment site just south of the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

For the next 20 years, **MASONVILLE COVE** will receive 15 million cubic yards of sediment and eventually become home to a marine terminal.

start using it next year.

The Corps is also exploring reopening the Pearce Creek site in Cecil County. Built in the 1930s, the site received dredged materials from the approach channel to the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal until the mid-1990s. In recent years, the material had been deposited at Poole's Island, but that site closed in December.

"We're supporting their efforts to see what is necessary to reactivate the

site," Hamons said, noting that there are concerns about groundwater quality.

The MPA and the Corps of Engineers have developed a hugely successful project in Poplar Island, which not only provided a place to put the dredged materials necessary to keep the lower Bay ship channels open but re-created a historic island lost to erosion. It has become a critical habitat for wildlife as it was in the 1980s.

The MPA and the Corps hope to duplicate that success



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POPLAR ISLAND, located south of the Port, is being restored with dredged material from lower Chesapeake Bay shipping channels.

while dredging in Baltimore's Chesapeake Bay channels by restoring James Island at the mouth of the Little Choptank River. Another of the Bay islands lost to erosion, James has now dwindled to three tiny islands. The Mid-Bay Island Restoration Project would restore it to about 2,000 acres.

"We're looking again at going back to the historic footprint of the island," said Hamons. The project has been approved at every level except the U.S. Congress — such projects must be included in the Water Resources Development Act, which Congress is supposed to pass every two years. But it hasn't passed one since 2007.

"We have every step completed, it's now a matter of waiting for the next WRDA,"

Hamons said.

Since keeping the Baltimore Harbor open for business means dredging about one-and-a-half million cubic feet each year, another site needs to be developed for the harbor area.

The MPA had been negotiating with Severstal, which owned the old Bethlehem Steel property. But in March, the *Baltimore Sun* reported that the private equity firm Renco Group Inc. agreed to acquire the facility from Severstal, meaning new discussions will need to occur.

Even if a deal could be struck, "we would need to remediate the area, which has serious contamination issues," Hamons said, "and right now the EPA holds the owners responsible for contaminants,

and that's one of the things we would have to work out before there is any transfer of land."

Despite its problems, the site does have the space needed to ensure channels remain open for years to come.

"At this point in time, it's the next preferred option," Hamons said. 📍



HART-MILLER ISLAND received dredged material for 25 years until 2009. The project created 1,100 acres of wildlife habitat and recreational land.



The MPA's nationally renowned dredged material management program works closely with environmental scientists, communities and federal and state partners.



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