



Community Enhancements at Masonville

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The Maryland Port Administration's newest dredged material placement site in the Baltimore Harbor will not open until late 2010—but it has already met with enormous success.

Known as Masonville, the dredged material placement site is simultaneously meeting critical needs for the Port of Baltimore and delivering environmental and educational benefits for the surrounding communities.

Masonville is part of an old industrial area along the Patapsco River's Middle Branch, one mile downstream of the Hanover Street Bridge. Over the course of approximately 19 years, the site will provide capacity for 15.4 million cubic yards of sediment dredged from the Baltimore Harbor. It will then become a new marine terminal to accommodate automobiles, one of the Port's most valuable commodities.

Masonville operations will affect the Patapsco River where it is located because the dredged material placed at the site will transform 131 acres of open water into solid land. As a result, the project has triggered a set of activities called mitigation and community enhancements. The mitigation is integral to the Masonville project because it helps to balance the site's impact on the river.

Any project of this type would require mitigation to offset environmental losses. However, managers at the Maryland Port Administration also recognized the value of community support. They moved beyond



List of mitigation projects and community enhancements requested by the residents as part of the mitigation package for the Masonville dredged material containment facility.

traditional mitigation plans by inviting the neighboring communities to help shape them. The Port Administration consulted closely with community members and won support from regulators to direct some of the mitigation activities toward projects that the communities desired.

Because of the communities' strong support, a planning and permitting process that often takes ten years was completed in just four.

For the River

When the Port Administration began planning the Masonville placement site, the area was severely degraded by past industrial activity. Portions of the site once occupied by the Kurt Iron and Metal Company were polluted wastelands. Abandoned ships and piles of industrial waste created both an eyesore and a hostile shoreline environment.

The Port Administration has now addressed many of these problems, including the removal of:

- 25 derelict and sunken vessels
- An abandoned pier
- 60,000 tons of debris and waste material including old timbers, concrete, tires and trash

The next phase of the mitigation effort aims to heal the aquatic environment:

- Creating and restoring both tidal and nontidal wetlands
- Improving in-water fish habitat with substrate improvement and reef structures
- Restoring existing shoreline

For the Community

The centerpiece of the community enhancements is the new Masonville Cove Environmental Education Center. This “green” building provides children with education programs and a science lab, and offers community groups additional meeting space.



The Masonville Cove Environmental Education Center

The Port Administration is remediating the land adjacent to the Education Center in preparation for educational hiking trails and an observation tower. The refurbished site will offer spectacular views of the downtown skyline and a place of respite in a

community surrounded by industry and highways.

Both Living Classrooms and the National Aquarium are working with the Baybrook Community Association to develop programming for the Environmental Education Center. The Port Administration will also provide a new pier so that boats from Living Classrooms can offer educational programming to students from Brooklyn and Curtis Bay.

A Model for the Future

The Masonville project also involves mitigation work that is occurring offsite, in places that will benefit the environment of the Baltimore Harbor. Three types of activities are planned:

- Stream restoration in Western Run and Biddison Run, which are tributaries to the Harbor
- Fish passage and fish stocking in upstream reaches of the Patapsco River
- Trash interceptors at five Harbor tributary locations

The Masonville project offers an example of the achievements that take place when government works proactively with communities to design projects that meet their needs, as well as the natural environment. Such efforts serve the public, enhance the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers, and benefit neighbors who, in another era, may be been opponents rather than partners. ■



Planting activity at the Masonville Cove Environmental Education Center, conducted by the Living Classroom Foundation.