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Coalition of Organizations Stand up for New Jersey's Waterways

Passage of River Program Allows New Jersey to Access Funding to Restore and Conserve

PORT MURRAY, NJ – The Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed, U.S. Senator Cory Booker's office, New Jersey Audubon, Trout Unlimited, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Youth Corps of Phillipsburg, North Jersey RC&D, and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) gathered for a press conference Tuesday to discuss the significance New Jersey plays within Delaware River Basin and new funding coming to the state. For the first time in history, dedicated federal funding to Delaware River states was secured through the Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations omnibus bill in the amount of \$5 million for the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program (DRBRP).

"Advocating for the passage of the Delaware River Basin Conservation Act has been a top priority for the Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed since our founding in 2012," stated **Sandra Meola, Director for the Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed**. "Now, with the successful establishment and movement of the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program, we are immensely grateful to Congressional champions who led on DRBRP funding for understanding the importance the Basin has on the environment and economy of the region. This year's funding and anticipated future funding directly translates into a protected watershed and healthier environment for New Jerseyans."

The DRBRP was created after the 2016 passage of the Delaware River Basin Conservation Act. The DRBRP is a non-regulatory effort that will be administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and will leverage private investment, regional partnerships, and local knowledge to protect and restore the resources of the basin. Funding from the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program will be available to nonprofits; state, Federal, Tribal and local governments; and educational institutions seeking to address pressing environmental issues within the Delaware River Basin.

"I was proud to join Senators from the Delaware Watershed in co-sponsoring The Delaware River Basin Conservation Act, which authorizes funding to invest in the conservation and restoration of the Delaware River," added **U.S. Senator Cory Booker**. "Millions of residents from across the region rely on a healthy and vibrant Delaware River as a source of drinking water. I am pleased to now celebrate the \$5 million funding of the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program for FY18. This funding will help protect the Delaware for future generations, and I will continue to fight for the program's funding in FY19 and years to come."

The Delaware River Basin encompasses portions of New Jersey, New York, Delaware, and Pennsylvania, and supplies over 5% of the U.S. population with drinking water, which is about 15 million people. The Delaware River is the only water source to provide drinking water for two major U.S. cities, Philadelphia and New York – as well as the cities of Camden and Trenton. In New Jersey, the Delaware River Basin is an economic engine that must be protected, as New Jersey jobs directly associated with the Delaware River Basin, such as fishing, recreation, tourism, water/sewer construction, water utilities, and ports, employs 62,349 people, earning \$1.3 billion in wages. The New Jersey portion of the Delaware River Basin covers 40% (2,961 square miles) of the land area and includes 22% of the state's population.



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"We are pleased to develop this important new grant program as the cornerstone for implementation of the Delaware River Basin Restoration Act," said **Dr. Deborah Rocque, Deputy Northeast Regional Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**. "The Act outlines a long-term vision for the environmental, economic, and social health of the Delaware River watershed. By getting these funds on the ground, we will strengthen the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program Partnership and move forward toward that long-term vision for the watershed."

The DRBRP funding will go toward on-the-ground land and water conservation and restoration projects aimed at addressing some of the state's environmental issues such as conserving and restore fish and wildlife habitat, improving and maintaining water quality, sustaining and enhancing water management and reducing flood damage, and improving recreational opportunities and public access in the Delaware River Basin.

"The work that's been done at Wattles Stewardship Center to restore and protect the Delaware River Basin couldn't have been completed without leveraging federal funds through a variety of programs. We celebrate Delaware River Basin Restoration Program funding because it will allow for more conservation projects to take place to improve the Basin," added **John Cecil, Vice President of Stewardship at New Jersey Audubon**.

One such example of improving the Delaware River Basin through leveraging federal funding can be seen at Wattles Stewardship Center, where partner organizations, with support from the USDA NRCS, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), and the William Penn Foundation, have implemented several land and water conservation initiatives. The Wattles Stewardship Center is a 51-acre wildlife sanctuary that is managed by New Jersey Audubon and is open for public visitation. The property borders the Musconetcong River and has an unnamed trout production stream running through it, both are classified by the NJDEP as a "C1" waterbody for their exceptional resource values and water quality. These two waterbodies are also tributaries of the Delaware River.

"USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service has had great success working with our conservation partners in the Delaware Watershed, and now with the funding of the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program, we look forward to collaborating on additional projects in the watershed. When we combine our resources for existing and new conservation projects, the health and reliability of New Jersey's waterways benefit," said **Dan Mull, District Conservationist for USDA NRCS**.

The Wattles Center also consists of agricultural fields adjacent to the unnamed stream, which are farmed in a way to better manage against potential impacts to the stream. For example, by planting cover crops and utilizing no-till planting practices, both soil health and water quality are improved by reducing soil erosion and increasing water infiltration. Stormwater runoff on another field was controlled by planting native warm-season grasses, that increase water infiltration through their deep roots systems and trap sediment at the surface from entering the adjacent unnamed stream. Additionally, vegetated buffers consisting of small and large native plants (trees, shrubs, grasses, and forbs) were planted near the stream's edge, which also lead to stream bank stabilization, improved stormwater runoff and sediment control, cooler water temperatures, and improved wildlife habitat. These types of projects at Wattles Stewardship Center is what got the property certified as a River-Friendly Farm from the North Jersey RC&D.

"The River-Friendly Farm Certification recognizes farms that have demonstrated a commitment to environmentally friendly practices and who are stewards of their land and surrounding water resources. Wattles Stewardship Center has used best practices to have a direct positive impact on the



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Musconetcong River and is a working conservation model farm for the Delaware River Basin" stated **Laura Tessieri, Associate Director for North Jersey RC&D.**

A showcase project at the property that was a collaboration between NJ Audubon and Trout Unlimited is the one-mile in-stream restoration of the Musconetcong River. Funding for the project was provided by USDA NRCS and involved the enhancement and stabilization of the river channel, with the intention of creating or improving existing fish habitat, as well as improving water quality. The project included excavating and deepening several pools to provide fish with optimal feeding, holding, and spawning habitat. Additionally, between each pool, areas were configured to improve water flow during low water periods which produced improved invertebrate habitat, sediment dispersal, and reduced water temperatures. Studies of fish populations since the restoration have indicated a wide range of fish species utilizing the area, including wild brook trout, brown trout, and American eel.

"Improving the Musconetcong River has been a priority for Trout Unlimited in New Jersey. Through projects at Wattles Stewardship Center and beyond, native and wild trout have gained miles of optimal habitat and cooler waters in the summer, with access to spawning grounds in the spring and fall. Not only does river restoration benefit trout, but nearly every other species that uses the Musconetcong, including macroinvertebrates and migrating species such as shad, striped bass, and American eel," said **Cole Baldino, NJ Upper Delaware River Home Rivers Initiative Manager for Trout Unlimited.**

One of the most recent projects on the site, that is an ongoing collaborative effort with New Jersey Audubon, New Jersey Youth Corps of Phillipsburg, and Trout Unlimited is improving the floodplain of the Musconetcong through the removal of non-native invasive vegetation and the planting of native vegetation. Though this collaborative effort, and with funding by NFWF, the next generation of conservationists are not only learning about the importance of the natural resource conservation and stewardship, they are getting hands on experience by helping to restore the floodplain in their community where the benefits extend far beyond the property boundaries.

"Our work with New Jersey Audubon in the Delaware River Basin has proven to be a perfect dovetailing with our NJ Youth Corps mission. The restoration work improves not just the quality of our environment, but the quality of the lives of our Corps members performing the service. While implementing streamside restoration measures might seem like trying to control the chaos of the natural order of things, we've demonstrated that by making substantive, small improvements, the ripple effect downstream – literally and figuratively – are exponential," added **Michael Muckle, Director at New Jersey Youth Corps of Phillipsburg.**

For fiscal year 2019, the House Appropriations Committee approved \$5 million in May 2018 for the DRBRP and the Senate Appropriations Committee approved \$4 million for the DRBRP in mid-June. These approvals mark the first major hurdles in the federal budgeting process to secure DRBRP funding for next year.

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The Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed is a network of 131 non-governmental organizations dedicated to protecting and restoring the natural resources of the Delaware River Basin.