

PRESS RELEASE

April 4, 2011

For immediate release

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Delaware River Designated as National Great Water *Designation highlights the river's national significance*

TRENTON N.J. – The Delaware River has been designated a “Great Water,” joining 18 other waterways nationwide selected for that honor by a national coalition formed to protect waterways of high economic, social and environmental importance.

The America’s Great Waters Coalition, based in Washington, D.C., announced its 2011 selections last week. The coalition was formed in 2009 to advocate for the restoration and protection of lakes, bays, rivers and marshes that are rich in natural resources and have a significant impact on their surrounding regions.

The Delaware River is the longest un-dammed river east of the Mississippi, flowing for 330 miles from Hancock, N.Y. to the Delaware Bay, where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean. More than 15 million people in four states depend on the river’s water for drinking, agricultural and industrial use. The Delaware includes natural wonders -- three stretches along its course are included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers program – and important commercial assets.

“We welcome the news that the Delaware River has been recognized as a Great Water of national significance,” said **Kelly Mooij, Director of Government Relations for New Jersey Audubon**. “We look forward to working closely with our partners in the Delaware River Basin Commission and the coalition to find regional solutions to the challenges of protecting the river and its basin. One state acting alone can’t address the complex issues involved in managing the resources of a river vital to the interests of four states.”

Besides the Delaware, eight other Great Waters were named by the Coalition on March 22, World Water Day. They are: the New York/New Jersey Harbor, Albemarle Pamlico Sound, Colorado River, Galveston Bay, Missouri River, Narragansett Bay, Ohio River and the Rio Grande. Ten more waterways were honored last year. While the Great Waters vary in geographic location and physical characteristics, they are plagued by similar problems such as toxic pollution, altered water flows, habitat loss, and destructive invasive species.

The Delaware additionally faces new threats from hydraulic drilling for natural gas, a controversial process known as fracking.

“Hydrofracking in the Marcellus Shale formation is one of two imminent threats to the river system’s well-being,” said **Dan Plummer, board chairman of Friends of the Upper Delaware River and a member of the coalition**. “A second threat is the inadequate water releases from New York City-owned reservoirs, an issue that has plagued river residents, anglers and other visitors, and the habitat and fisheries in the Delaware system for decades.”

Other conservation advocates focused on the significance of the river to wildlife, including threatened and endangered species.

“The Delaware is vitally important to wildlife, too,” said **Mooij**. “The largest population of breeding horseshoe crabs in the world comes ashore in Delaware Bay, laying eggs that are an important food for as many as a million migratory birds, including the endangered red knot.”

Margaret O’Gorman, executive director of Conserve Wildlife, also noted the habitat value of the Delaware’s waters and shores.

“Of course the Delaware River is a ‘Great Water,’ sustaining an incredible diversity of wildlife, both common and rare, along its length,” she said. “The Delaware River has been key to the recovery of the bald eagle, which has seen statewide populations grow from one pair in the late 1980s over 80 pairs breeding in New Jersey today. The river also provides critical habitat to the Atlantic sturgeon and sustains shorebird populations whose continued decline is cause for alarm.”

The nation’s Great Waters are the backbone of America’s economy, impacting people, businesses, communities and wildlife but, the coalition warned, these waters are under attack. Landmark legislation and funding for restoration efforts that have protected our nation’s waterways for more than three decades are now at risk. Honoring specific waterways is one way to lend fresh impetus to conservation efforts.

“The ‘Great Water’ designation confirms the Delaware’s status as a national natural treasure,” said **Plummer**. “It further inspires us to oppose drilling practices that could sterilize miles of pristine water and to fight for a rational water-release plan that will preserve the Delaware River from its headwaters to the bay and beyond.”

Across the country, restoration efforts funded by the federal government are producing on-the-ground results. In the Delaware River, for example, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) made \$27.5 million available for restoration projects that compensated for a 2004 oil spill by a cargo ship. Projects included dam removals, wetlands upgrades and improvements along the shoreline. Part of another \$20.3 million award from the Oil Spill Liability Fund made last year will be used

to create 50 acres of oyster reefs off Cape May County. But the work is far from done, and critical decisions lie ahead, advocates said.

"The Delaware River has an irreplaceable role in this nation's past and present — whether it can have a healthy and contributing role in our future will be determined by the actions and decisions of today," said **Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper**. "Dangerous gas drilling, irresponsible dredging and increasing pollution are threatening the ability of the Delaware River to nourish and support our communities with healthy water, food and jobs. The Great Waters program could play an important role in helping us to protect the river for the benefit of all, now and into the future."

The Coalition calls for prompt action to ensure the health, safety, and livelihoods of the millions of Americans that depend on our Great Waters. These waterways benefit everyone not only because of their economic, social, and environmental importance, but because they are national treasures that support our nation's economy and provide rich resources for future generations.

"From the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, from the Puget Sound to the Everglades, Great Waters are the lifeblood of our nation, driving regional economies, preserving our national heritage, and shaping the daily lives of Americans," said **Theresa Pierno, co-chair for the America's Great Waters Coalition and executive vice president for the National Parks Conservation Association**. "We cannot afford not to protect our nation's Great Waters. Whether it is for drinking, fishing, transportation, recreation, trade, or energy, keeping the Delaware River clean and accessible is essential to our health, happiness, and financial well-being."

The Great Waters Coalition works to illustrate to the American public and decision-makers that our water resources must become a national priority for the security of our economy and way of life. Three main goals drive the Coalition's work: (1) making the restoration of our Great Waters a national priority, (2) securing sustainable dedicated funding for restoration, and (3) enacting and ensuring sound implementation of restoration. To learn more about the Great Waters Coalition, and to view a complete list of America's Great Waters, please visit: www.nwf.org/greatwaters

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