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NEWS RELEASE

PO BOX 004

CONTACT: Jayne O'Connor
Rita Malley
(609) 777-2600

TRENTON, NJ 08625

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Gov. Whitman, New York Gov. Pataki and EPA Sign Bi-State Plan to Restore New Jersey/New York Waterways

Gov. Christie Whitman, New York Gov. George E. Pataki and EPA Regional Administrator Jeanne M. Fox, signed a bi-state agreement today that outlines actions to protect and enhance the New York/New Jersey Harbor Estuary and ocean waters from Montauk, NY to Cape May, NJ, at a ceremony in Battery Park, New York.

"The action we are taking today may be the most important environmental legacy of this generation of New Jerseyans and New Yorkers," said Gov. Whitman. "Our estuary and ocean waters will be healthy because New Jersey, New York and the federal government are going to work together to build on the successes we have already achieved individually."

The plan, called the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP), includes both long-term and immediate actions that will be taken to restore and preserve habitat and living resources, control toxic contaminants and manage dredged material. Implementing the entire plan will take 20 years. The governors and the EPA have agreed to immediately implement 75 percent of the plan.

The CCMP also calls for the protection of the New York Bight, a 100-mile stretch of ocean water that extends from Montauk, N.Y. to Cape May, N.J. It includes 240 miles of beaches.

"This is a landmark document representing the culmination of 10 years of analysis and deliberation that will guide local, state and federal efforts to restore and protect our waterways and coastal habitats," said State Environmental Protection Commissioner Bob Shinn, who served on the Harbor Estuary Plan Policy Committee.

In approving the plan, Gov. Whitman reaffirms her commitment to protecting the environment. A year ago, she and Gov. Tom Ridge of Pennsylvania and Gov. Thomas Carper of Delaware, signed a similar management plan to protect the Delaware Estuary.

A key goal of the plan is to stop toxic chemicals which contaminate fish and shellfish from getting into the New Jersey / New York Harbor Estuary. These chemicals place restrictions on the consumption of the fish. They also contaminate the sediments that need to be dredged from the harbor to accommodate shipping needs.

"We have made enormous progress in the past 25 years in addressing the most egregious environmental threats to these waters. With this plan, we take the next step," said Gov. Whitman.

The plan puts forth both immediate and long-term solutions to cleaning the estuary and bight such as:

Identifying significant habitats and developing targeted plans to protect the habitats, such as the watersheds of the Arthur Kill in New York and New Jersey and Jamaica Bay in New York.

Tracking down and cleaning up discharges of toxic contaminants such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from municipal sewage treatment plants.

Controlling discharges from combined sewer overflows by implementing management practices consistent with the EPA's National CSO Control Policy.

Controlling nutrient loading, as necessary, to alleviate low dissolved oxygen conditions, for example, using low-cost nitrogen removal methods at municipal sewage treatment plants.

Developing non-point source management programs including control of sediment inputs in, for example, the Whippany River Basin in New Jersey.

Estuaries are special water bodies that are open connections to the sea. Because of the unique nature of estuaries, which comprise of saltwater and freshwater, they are ever changing and therefore are among the most productive of all ecosystems, with 80 percent of all fish and shellfish using them for primary habitats, spawning or nursing grounds.