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GAO Agrees to Updated Review of Delaware Deepening

Washington, D.C.: In response to a request by Senator Frank Lautenberg (D, NJ) the Government Accountability Office has agreed to conduct an updated review of the Army Corps' proposed Delaware River Deepening project.

In a letter to Senator Lautenberg dated May 15, 2008 the GAO wrote "We received your recent letter requesting that the Government Accountability Office review the Army Corps of Engineers' most recent analysis of the benefits and costs of the Delaware River Deepening Project. GAO accepts your request as work that is within the scope of its authority." According to the letter, the review will begin in "about six months."

"The first time the GAO reviewed the project they found that the Army Corps had based its justification for the project on miscalculations, invalid assumptions, and outdated information" stated Maya van Rossum the Delaware Riverkeeper. "In our most recent economic review of the project we found that the Army Corps had continued using deceptive economic manipulations in order to justify this bad project. It is critical that this project be once again subject to honest and independent review. We praise Senator Lautenberg for once again ensuring that our public policy decisions are based on facts and are protective of our environment. " (copy of Delaware Riverkeeper Network and National Wildlife Federation report challenging Army Corps' most recent economic review can be found at www.delawareriverkeeper.org)

"There have been a lot of wild and unfounded claims about the Delaware Deepening project and its economics. This project has failed time and again to demonstrate net benefits for the region. Hopefully this study will inject some reality into the public debate" asserted David R. Conrad, Senior Water Resources Specialist with the National Wildlife Federation.

According to Sharon Finlayson, with the New Jersey Environmental Federation, "We welcome this critical and additional review. We need to be investing our limited resources in port projects that make sense and will truly make a difference – not in projects that fail to enhance the port while at the same time harm the rest of our River communities."

In February 1992, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recommended a plan to deepen the Delaware River main navigation channel from 40 to 45 feet. In 2007 local sponsorship for the project transferred from the Delaware River Port Authority to the Philadelphia Regional Port Authority.

In a June 2002 report documenting its first review of the proposed deepening project the GAO found:

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- “The Corps’ analysis of project benefits contained or was based on miscalculations, invalid assumptions, and outdated information.”

- “We determined that the net effect of the miscalculations, invalid assumptions, and outdated information ... was a reduction in the estimated annual project benefits to about \$13.3 million (in 1996 dollars).”

The Delaware River serves many purposes: it provides an entrance way to major east coast ports, it provides drinking water to over 17 million people, it supports recreation and ecotourism; and it provides food, water and habitat to fish, wildlife and plants throughout the region.

According to Maya K. van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper, “the Delaware River Deepening project brings with it environmental and community threats and harms that we simply cannot accept. The Delaware River deepening has become a political prize that brings with it no real winnings and in fact would make our river and region big losers.”