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Tale of Two Shores: Report Shows How Development Binge Led To Water Quality Decline at The Shore *Advocates Call for Fertilizer Bill Passage & Bay Clean-Up Plan*

Trenton – As the debate on a state-wide fertilizer bill intensifies and as the state prepares to issue its recommendations for Barnegat Bay, Environment New Jersey released, “The Shore At Risk: The Threats Facing New Jersey’s Coastal Treasures, and What It Will Take To Address Them,” documenting the ecological and water quality decline at the Shore as directly connected to the growth in urbanized developed land in Shore counties.

“The Shore is raising a red flag that we cannot afford to ignore. This report documents the intractable link between the increase in development and decline in water quality,” said **Dena Mottola Jaborska, executive director for Environment New Jersey**. “We urge Gov. Christie and the Legislature in the coming weeks not to settle for half measures to protect the Shore. Legislative passage of a bill to reduce pollution from fertilizers and a Barnegat Bay clean-up plan from Gov. Christie that includes a comprehensive clean-up of nitrogen pollution is paramount.”

The report, using the latest Rutgers University land use data, documents how the explosive rate of growth over the last four decades. In 1972, development covered 18 percent of the Barnegat Bay-Little Egg Harbor watershed. Now, development covers more than 30 percent of the watershed, and over an 11-year period between 1995 and 2006, the watershed lost over 1,600 critical undeveloped acres along stream corridors.

“Barnegat Bay has, in a sense, been dying on account of elected officials not having the courage to say ‘no’ to powerful interests. We are hopeful that this is about to change,” said **William deCamp Jr., chairman of Save Barnegat Bay**. “And no package that ignores the impact of Oyster Creek Nuclear Generating Station can restore the health of the bay.”

Using updated nitrogen loading estimates, the report shows, using U.S. Geological Survey estimates, that the largest percentage – over a third – of the nitrogen pollution flowing into Barnegat Bay-Little Egg Harbor estuary comes from directly from the surface water discharge of the Metedeconk River and Toms River basins, which have seen some of the highest rates of development in recent years.

“We welcome this important report,” said **Cindy Zipf, Executive Director of Clean Ocean Action**. “It speaks to the heart of our daily work, highlights the evolving struggles that New Jersey faces and calls on our leaders to take aggressive and immediate action. The state is poised to pass meaningful legislation and announce real commitments for projects like Barnegat Bay. We encourage them to use this document as they move forward in their efforts to give all of New Jersey what it deserves: an ocean that is clean and free from industrialization and safe generations to come. It’s time for our legislators to be bold – we are all watching.”

The report outlines the increasing ecological markers of decline at the Shore. The Bay, which takes roughly three months to fully circulate its water, sees the most intense declines, but the trending ecological decline is not unique to the Bay. The report documents how hard clam

harvests in the Barnegat Bay declined by more than 99 percent between the early 1970s and 2000, and bay scallops—which sustained a busy fishery in the 1950s—are virtually absent from the bay today. Seagrasses such as eelgrass, which provide shelter and food for a variety of fish species in the bay, have experienced a similar steep decline, with aboveground eelgrass biomass in the bay having declined by 50 percent between 2004 and 2006. The report also analyzes the impact of the Oyster Creek Nuclear Generating Station on aquatic life, resulting from the daily intake of over 1.4 billion gallons from the Bay.

“We have changed the ecology of the Bay. The old saying that ‘the solution to pollution is dilution’ doesn’t apply anymore to the Bay. There’s less clams, less crabs, less fish,” said **Tom Fote, legislative chairman of Jersey Coast Anglers Association**. “The Bay is the economic engine that drives Ocean County and the Shore. Politicians forget that we’re only stewards for the next generation for treasures like the Bay – and we have to hold up our end of the bargain.”

The report also documents how Barnegat Bay-Little Egg Harbor is not the only estuary in trouble. New Jersey’s more southerly inland bays from Great Bay (at the mouth of the Mullica River) south to Cape May are documented by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to be highly eutrophic—meaning that they are susceptible to nutrient-fueled algae blooms that harm aquatic ecosystems and have the potential to deprive waterways of oxygen. Water quality conditions in Barnegat Bay- Little Egg Harbor have worsened over the past decade, while NOAA projects that nutrient related symptoms in the southern coastal bays are likely to worsen in the years to come. This is on top of the designation of the entire coastline by NJDEP as “impaired” for dissolved oxygen, a critical component for aquatic life.

“What’s important to save the bay is to get beyond local and parochial interest. The current system is broken. If we don’t change things the bay will die. This legislation is even more important now, given the Christie Administration’s attacks on the environment. We need to pass legislation with strong regulations to protect the Bay. Without strong fertilizer regulations we are just going to continue to be putting fertilizer into the Bay and killing the Bay. Weakening storm water protections, holding up water quality planning rules, allowing sewers to be put into environmentally sensitive areas – are all affecting Barnegat Bay,” said **Jeff Tittel, Director of New Jersey Sierra Club**.

While the report’s data focuses on ecological and water quality signs of decline at the Shore, there’re increasing signs that are in plain sight to Shore residents and tourists. From the explosion of stinging sea nettle jellyfish, attracted by nutrient pollution, to the rise in beach closures from 79 days in 2005 to 180 days in 2009, especially along bay beaches from both anticipated and detected bacterial contamination, the Shore – and the state’s – tourism economy is at risk.

“A healthy Shore is critical to our wildlife, our economy and our quality of life. Much needs to be done to protect this irreplaceable natural resource and the livelihoods that depend on its environmental quality,” said **Tim Dillingham, executive director of American Littoral Society**.

As the Legislature debates a state-wide fertilizer bill to reduce run-off pollution and as Gov. Christie prepares the release of a Barnegat Bay clean-up plan, the time of action is now.

“This report is a sobering call to our state leaders that all is not well at the Jersey Shore. If we are going to pass their special place onto future generations to enjoy, the time to stop the spiral of decline at the Shore is now. Most New Jerseyans would agree – the Jersey Shore is worth our best, most comprehensive effort,” **concluded Mottola Jaborska**.

The Shore At Risk Policy Recommendations

The report made the following recommendations for stemming the water quality decline in Barnegat Bay, and the surrounding Shore coastal waterways and estuaries, including:

- **Curbing nutrient pollution of Shore waters** by reducing the nutrient content of fertilizer; encouraging proper fertilizer application; establishing strong numerical standards for nitrogen pollution in waterways to accompany the state's narrative standards; requiring the use of best practices to limit pollution from new development; and moving forward with the establishment of enforceable limits on the amount of nitrogen allowed into Barnegat Bay-Little Egg Harbor and New Jersey's ocean waters.
- **Protecting coastal waterways from excessive runoff** by requiring new development to create no new net flow of stormwater into rivers, streams, and bays; establishing stormwater utilities to improve the management of stormwater near the Shore, including the upgrading of outdated pollution control basins; upgrading shore-bound waterways to Category 1 status, which requires the preservation of vegetated buffer zones alongside waterways to slow run-off and fertilizer pollution, and enforcing current designations ; and preserving existing stormwater and coastal protection rules.
- **Reducing the ecological threat from the Oyster Creek Nuclear Generating Station** by finalizing a new water discharge permit for the plant that requires the construction of cooling towers within the next three years—a step that will dramatically reduce fish kills and thermal pollution.
- **Increasing monitoring** and study of coastal pollution problems and their impacts by ramping up water monitoring efforts in New Jersey's near-shore ocean waters; assessing coastal waters for a full range of indicators of water quality and biological health; and moving toward daily, same-day testing for bacterial contamination at New Jersey's beaches.
- **Enforcing existing laws**, including requiring counties to finally complete wastewater management plans that lay out how they plan to address their future water and sewer needs and address environmental impacts from stormwater.
- **Curbing sprawl** by encouraging redevelopment in urban areas and ensuring that new development occurs in ways that use land efficiently and reduce the addition of impervious surfaces.
- **Protecting land** to preserve water quality, by developing a long-term funding source for New Jersey's popular and environmentally critical land preservation programs.