



US Army Corps  
of Engineers



# Poplar Island Newsletter

## Fall/Winter 2018-2019



# Construction Update

## Expansion



Drone Imagery of the Poplar Island Expansion



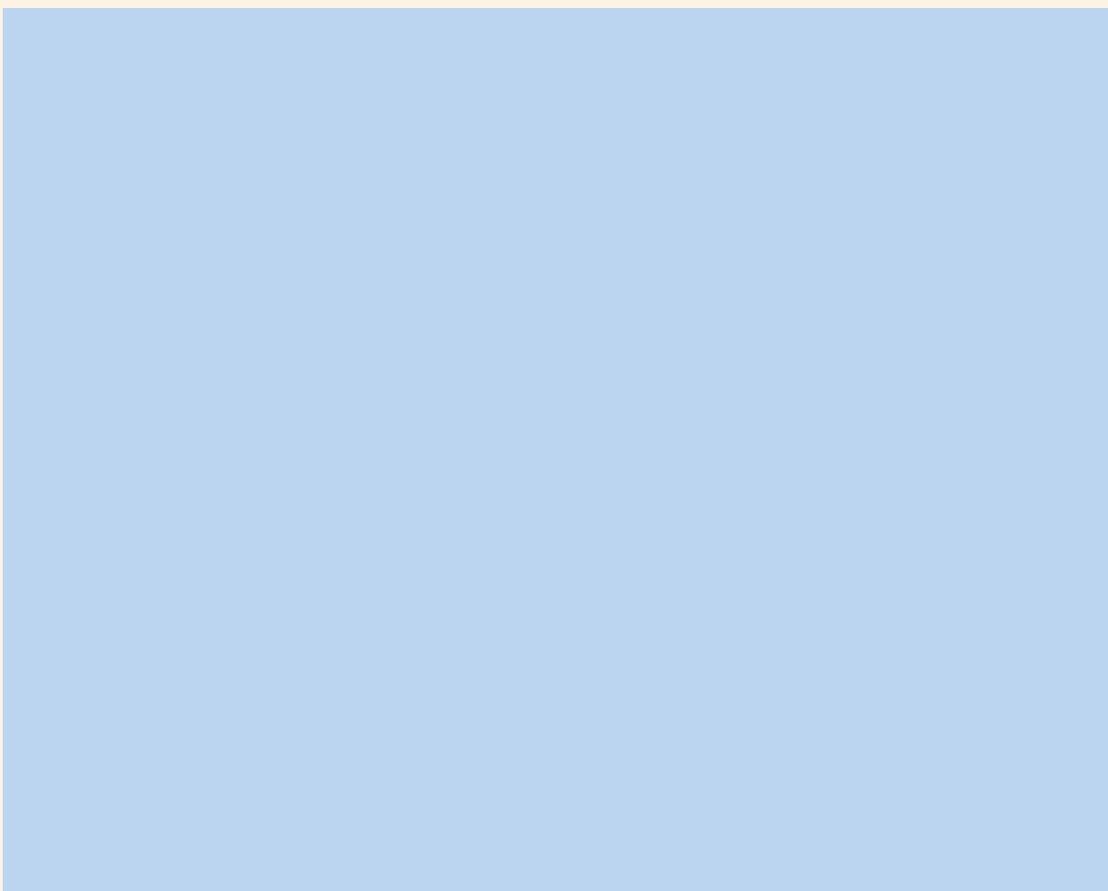
Inflow of sand into Cell 1D by Cottrell Contracting Corporation of Chesapeake used as construction material for the perimeter dikes and roadways.

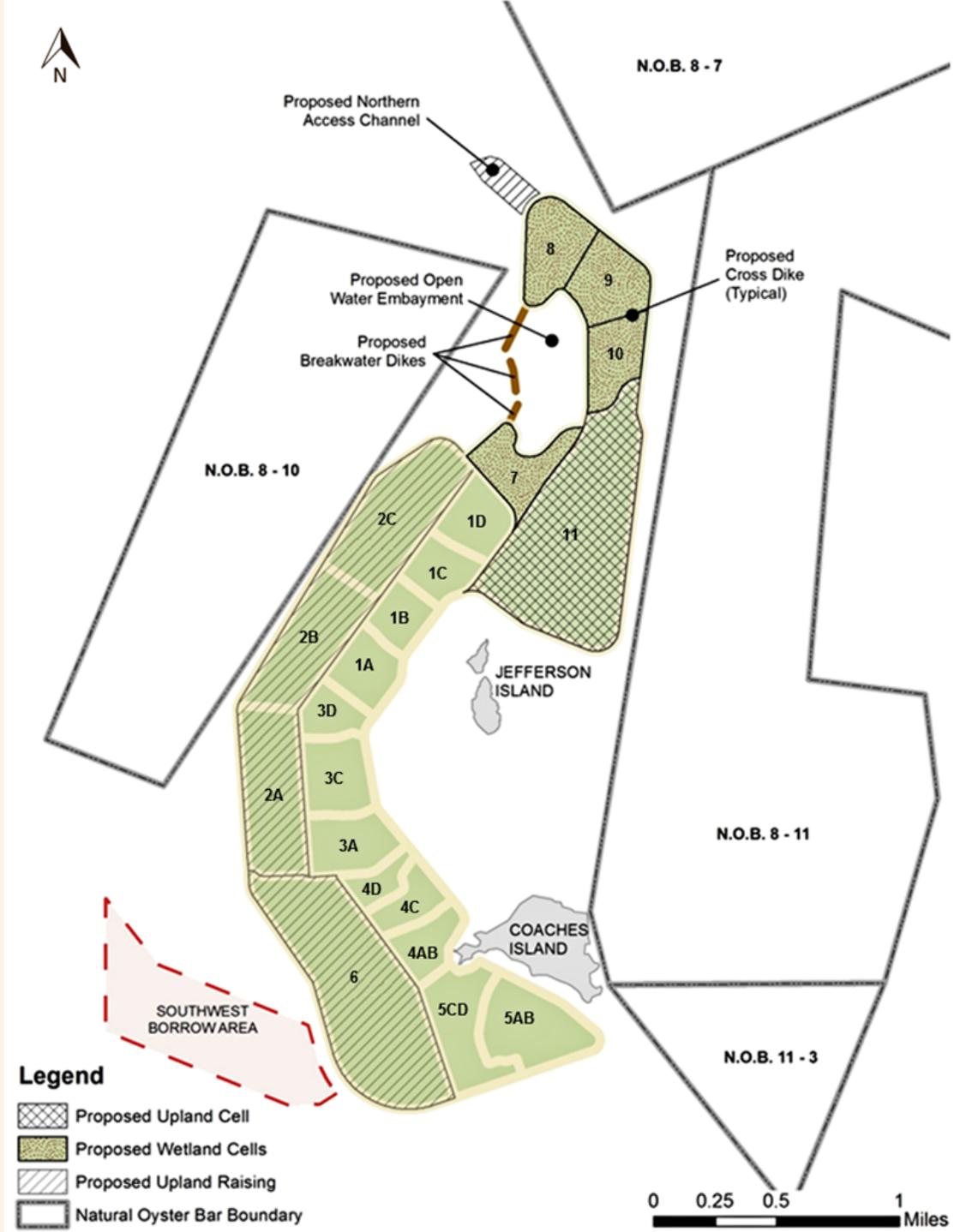
Construction on the lateral Poplar Island Expansion (PIE) is continuing to make progress since it began in 2017. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) contractor, The Wesson Group LLC, is continuing construction that includes building the perimeter dikes of Wetland Cells 8, 9, 10, and the open water embayment. They are projected to finish in summer 2019.



Placing armor stone to build up the perimeter dikes by The Wesson Group LLC.

The next construction phase for the PIE was awarded in September 2018 to H&L Contracting, LLC. This phase encompasses the construction of the Cell 11 perimeter dike and spillway. Cell 11 will be the only upland cell in the PIE and will be approximately 259 acres in size. This work is projected to be completed by July 2020.





Map of Poplar Island with future expansion blueprint.

One of the unique features of the PIE is the open-water embayment which will provide approximately 110 acres of essential fish habitat. The embayment will contain up to 14 rock reefs constructed out of armor stone removed from the exterior dike of Cells 1C and 1D and will serve as underwater habitat for fish and shellfish. This semi-protected fisheries habitat will provide a vital trophic link between open water and restored wetlands and the breakwater structures will protect the embayment and provide additional habitat for fish as well as bird nesting habitat on the breakwater's sandy crest.

The last construction phase for the PIE will cover the construction of

combination spillway/inlet structures that will allow water in and out of Cells 7 and 9 and will be awarded in 2019.

## Inflow



Water being added to the dredged material at the unloader this winter to create a slurry to be pumped onto Poplar Island.

Inflow pipe placed in an upland cell where inflow material will be placed.



The 2018/2019 inflow season placed approximately 2.7 mcy of dredged material on the island. This is 1mcy more than was initially estimated and shows the importance of the additional capacity the PIE will offer. With the expansion project, that capacity is increased to approximately 68 mcy. Prior to this season's inflow, Poplar Island had received approximately 31.6 mcy of dredged material in total, which is close to its total capacity.

The USACE contractor, Norfolk Dredging Company, began inflowing dredged material onto Poplar Island from the Baltimore Harbor approach channels on December 11. The material was placed in Cells 2A and 6. Cell 2A received approximately 1.2 mcy of material and Cell 6 received approximately 1.5 mcy, bringing the total amount of material inflowed this season to the 2.7 mcy total. The last of the dredged material was placed on site on March 5.

## Upland Development

On November 7, the Poplar Island Upland Development Team met for their second annual meeting to discuss the experimental upland test plot in Cell 2A. Much like the Cell 4D experimental wetland test plot, this upland plot will be used to test which techniques and plant species will work the best in the upland cells. An approximately 30-acre area was sectioned off on the south side of Cell 2A in order to create the new test plot, Cell 2AX.

It is projected that the cell will require 1 to 2 more inflows in order for the sediment to reach the height of 25 feet in elevation; anticipated to be completed by 2023. Planting of the test plot is tentatively scheduled for 2027 which will allow for the dredged material to be dewatered, and the soil graded. Planned upland habitats include forest, scrub/shrub and meadow.

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## Wildlife Update

### Birds



Snowy Owl seen on one of the newly constructed perimeter dikes in PIE Cell 7

Final numbers for the 2018 tern nesting season show that Poplar Island continues to offer highly successful nesting habitat for both Common and Least Terns. In total, 307 Common Tern and 330 Least Tern pairs were observed in the summer of 2018. The U.S. Geological Survey conducted a banding and

resighting program in order to better document tern fledging success. A total of 607 tern chicks were banded in the summer which is a significant increase over the 318 chicks banded in 2017, making Poplar Island the most successful tern nesting site for both species in Maryland portion of the bay.

It has been another great season for over-wintering birds on Poplar Island. Many of the waterfowl have returned to use the island as their winter home. Poplar Island was once again one of the first sites in Maryland to be visited by migrating Snowy Owls. A Snowy was first observed in late November and one was often seen on the newly constructed perimeter dikes in the PIE throughout the winter.

Keep an eye out this spring for *Birds of Maryland, Delaware, and the District of Columbia*, released on March 26. This field guide shows readers of all ages and experience levels the amazing natural history of our local birds. Poplar Island is mentioned in several places in the book and Maryland Environmental Service's Tim Carney, who conducts bimonthly bird surveys on Poplar Island provided information and some amazing pictures from his collection. Be sure to check it out!

## Monarch Tagging



Monarchs enjoying the abundant habitat on Poplar Island.

Although birds are often the focus during migration season, Poplar Island has

plenty of other animals that will stop over as the seasons change. One species of particular interest are Monarch butterflies. Monarch populations have been in serious decline the past two decades due to habitat loss, severe weather fluctuations, disease, and increased pesticide use. In 2014, it was petitioned to have the Monarchs added as a Threatened species to the Endangered Species List. Currently the status is under review, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) expected to make a decision sometime this year.

Monarch butterflies come to Poplar Island during the fall season on their migration pathway. To help them on their journey, Poplar Island has planted milkweed species as a part of the seed mixture that is placed on many of the embankments. The adult butterflies will lay their eggs on the milkweed plants and the butterflies that emerge will then make their migration south to various areas in Mexico and California.

In 2016, Poplar Island was registered as a Monarch Waystation. In order to be registered as a waystation a site has to show they are contributing to Monarch conservation by creating a Monarch habitat. The habitat should provide the resources needed for migrating monarchs to sustain themselves and provide areas for these monarchs to produce successive generations. Waystations also include home gardens, schools, businesses, non-profit organizations, and anywhere milkweed plants can grow. As of February, Monarch Watch reports that there have been 22,793 registered waystation habitats throughout North America. If you would like more information the criteria is outlined in the application from [MonarchWatch.org](http://MonarchWatch.org).



As part of the monarch conservation effort, Poplar Island participates in the Monarch Watch tagging program, a large scale citizen science program that aims to help understand the Monarch butterflies' fall migration through tagging and recapture. Butterflies are captured, and tagged on their wings with a small stickers printed with permanent ink. Each has a unique code of three letters and three numbers that help identify the butterfly if its recaptured. The tags are applied in a way that they do not interfere with flight or cause harm to the butterfly. The tag code, tag date, gender of the butterfly, and geographic location is recorded before the butterfly is released. Each year, Monarch Watch visits the overwintering sites where the recovered tags are purchased by Monarch Watch for approximately \$5 from the area's local guides. This fall the USFWS, Maryland Environmental Service (MES), and personnel from the Delaware Department of Transportation captured and tagged 408 monarchs onsite.

## Christmas Trees



USFWS unloading Christmas trees with help from a local fisherman

Poplar Island received a Christmas Valentine when approximately 150 recycled Christmas trees were brought by a small barge to the island early in the morning on February 14. The Christmas tree project, which started in 2005, aims to provide additional valuable habitat. Since the island is still under construction and only offers limited upland areas that are suitable for nesting,

the Christmas trees help by offering protected habitat for the island's sensitive species.

The Town of Easton Public Works Department collects the Christmas trees during January and stockpiles them on Tilghman Island where personnel from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the USACE, and the MES worked together to move the trees onto a boat, from the boat onto the island, and then distributed the trees within the site's developed wetland cells. This season, five new piles of Christmas trees were added in the newly planted wetland, Cell 5AB. Other piles were replenished with new trees in Cells 3A, 3C and 1A.

Since the project implementation, a variety of wildlife species have been observed using the Christmas trees as a perch, for nesting and nesting materials, and for shelter. The American Black Duck, one of the target species for Poplar Island's restoration efforts, especially benefit from the habitat since the trees are placed in a pyramid, providing ideal nocks for nesting.



## New Species



Cape May Warbler

Photo Credit: Tim Carney (MES)



Summer Tanager

Photo Credit: USFWS National Digital Library



Rusty Blackbird



American Bullfrog

Four new species have been added to our overall species list since the last update. Three of the new species are birds, a Cape May Warbler (top left), Summer Tanager (top right), and Rusty Blackbird (bottom left). A new amphibian was also added to the list, the American Bullfrog (bottom right). This brings the total bird species up to 227 and 19 amphibian species documented onsite.

## New Staff



Poplar Island is happy to welcome two new Inspectors, Jessica Price and Michael Rajacich Jr. Their jobs consist of testing water quality at the spillways during cell dewatering, running the crew boats to and from the island, and assisting with the many other jobs that make the project run smoothly. Both are excited to be a part of the Poplar Island project and we are happy to have them as part of the team!



Paul S. Sarbanes Ecosystem Restoration Project at Poplar Island is an environmental restoration project located in the Chesapeake Bay in Talbot County, Maryland. The beneficial use project relies on dredged material collected from the approach channels to the Baltimore Harbor to restore lost remote island habitat within the Chesapeake Bay. The project is funded by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Maryland Department of Transportation Maryland Port Administration. The MDOT MPA share of project funding is primarily provided through in-kind services conducted by the Maryland Environmental Service on behalf of MDOT MPA.

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