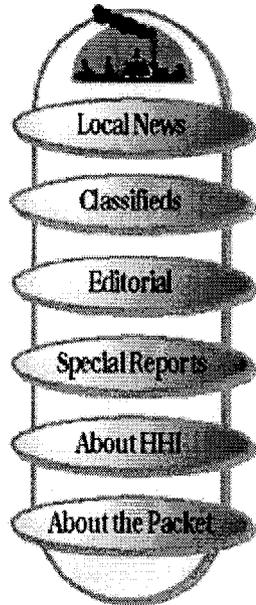


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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "MILLIONS NEEDED TO CORRECT DECADES OF POLLUTION ON  
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# Millions needed to correct decades of pollution on Parris Island

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BY FRANK SHELTON  
Packet staff writer

PARRIS ISLAND - Decades-old incinerator waste, broken glass and rusted scrap metal cover a wetland not far from where U.S. Marine Corps recruits train.

Nearby, construction debris and hazardous liquids lay buried next to a tidal inlet, and damaged underground storage tanks have leaked waste oil into the soil.

Those are just a few of the polluted sites that the federal government is now trying to assess and clean after years of environmental neglect on Parris Island.

"The island is a product of its times," said Russell Berry, the director of the state Department of Health and Environmental Control's Lowcountry office. "Most of the problems there were caused during a time when people didn't realize the environmental consequences of their actions."

Tim Harrington, an environmental scientist with Parris Island's Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs office, said addressing the problems will require years of work and millions of dollars in funding.

"But that is what we're committed to doing," he said. "Our charge is to study the problem areas and then determine the best ways to correct them. It's not an easy job but it has to be done."

## Cleanup begins

The environmental problems on Parris Island were documented in the mid-1980s when Congress passed the Resource, Conservation and Recovery Act, requiring the military branches to examine their installations.

A survey of the island uncovered 45 polluted sites, 19 of which the health department and the federal Environmental Protection Agency said needed some cleaning.

The first phase of the cleanup is set to begin this summer. Harrington said he and other scientists will do "remedial investigations" on the four most polluted sites.

"We still need to determine what exactly is there and how widespread (the pollution is)," Harrington said. "What we find this summer will determine what method we use to take care of it."

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### **The landfills**

The first site is an incinerator landfill located near the salt marsh surrounding Ribbon Creek. Between 1921 and 1965, the Marine Corps burned its solid waste and then dumped the rubble and ashes into this wetland. It also dumped liquids and solid wastes there.

"It was a different mentality back then," Harrington said. "The thinking was that you wanted to preserve as much of the dry land as you could, and by dumping your waste in wetlands, you actually created more dry land."

Mounds of waste still litter this wetland today. Fiddler crabs are forced to maneuver an obstacle course of broken bottles and charred debris on their way through the mud and sand.

Four wells have already been set up in this area to monitor the spread of pollutants. Harrington said lead and chloroforms have been detected.

This summer scientists will look at the health of several local plants and animals. If they are struggling to survive, it could mean that there is a threat to other organisms as well.

"This is one of the most troubling areas because of its proximity to the salt marsh and tidal waters," Harrington said.

Site two is a borrow pit landfill located near Archer's Creek and the Parris Island entrance. The pit was dug in the 1960s and the dirt was used to build a causeway.

After the hole was dug, the Marine Corps filled it with a mixture of common waste, construction debris and paints.

"Basically any kind of waste they had on the depot went in there," Harrington said.

He said one way to prevent pollution at this site from spreading would involve sealing the area around the landfill and digging wells to monitor leaks.

### **Causeway and chemicals**

The third site is the causeway that was built with dirt from the borrow pit. Between 1960 and 1972, the Marine Corps also used solid waste to build the road, some of which was dropped directly into a salt marsh.

"We also believe materials that today would be considered hazardous waste were dumped there," Harrington said. "The troubling part is that we don't know exactly where along the causeway all the waste is located."

The final site that scientists will focus on this summer is the only one that became polluted since the mid-1980s survey. In 1994, a chemical spill from a storage tank occurred at the island's dry-cleaning facility.

Harrington said the site could be decontaminated by pumping air into the ground, which would vaporize the chemicals

and allow them to be collected and removed.

"We have the equipment on-site that could take care of that and the tests that we've done so far have shown us that using that technique is the best way to go," he said.

### **Other trouble spots**

The investigative work this summer will cost about \$500,000 per site, Harrington said.

From there, the scientists will spend several months going over the data and determining the best ways to solve the problems, which will likely be multimillion-dollar projects.

Once those four sites are addressed, the scientists will begin work on the other 15 problem areas that exist on the 6,710-acre island.

Some of the other polluted sites include a dredge spoils pit, a paint-shop disposal area, stormwater outfall pipes, chemical spill areas and a pesticide disposal area.

Harrington said plans also are in the works to clean nearby Jericho Island, which the Marine Corps purchased in 1968 to increase the length of its rifle range.

The former owners of this island dumped incinerator ash and domestic waste into the island's wetlands from 1955 to 1968.

"That was basically the typical way of doing business here in Beaufort County back then," Harrington said.

### **Environmental mission**

Despite its environmental problems, Parris Island in recent years has received recognition for its efforts to protect the island's natural resources.

Maj. Rick Long, a Marine Corps spokesman, said the goal for Parris Island now involves not only cleaning the polluted sites but also making the island a place where nature can thrive.

For example, following Hurricane Hugo in 1989, the Marine Corps established nesting sites for ospreys that were forced out of the Charleston area. Now there are 16 pairs of ospreys living on the island.

The Marine Corps also has attempted to reduce its waste stream and its dependence on hazardous materials.

Along with recycling paper, aluminum, glass and plastic, the depot has a program for recycling grease from the mess hall, used tires, oil, paint, scrap metals, brass shell casings and grenade fuses.

Among the 15 environmental awards that Parris Island has received in recent years are the Closing the Circle Award for waste prevention presented by the White House this year and last year, the Natural Resources Conservation Award presented by the Secretary of the Navy in 1995, the Operations and Maintenance Excellence Award presented by the Environmental Protection Agency in 1995 and the Pollution Prevention Award presented by the Secretary of Defense in 1994.

Meanwhile, Long said the Marine Corps is looking for help from Beaufort County residents to solve environmental problems that exist on the island.

"We encourage public participation," he said. "We need feedback on how we're going about cleaning up these sites. We would appreciate any assistance we can get."

Long said protecting the island and its 2,894 acres of salt marsh, creeks and ponds is now part of the Parris Island mission.

"Environmental protection and enhancement are things that we all have to be concerned about these days, and we at Parris Island want to be a leader in that area," he said.

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