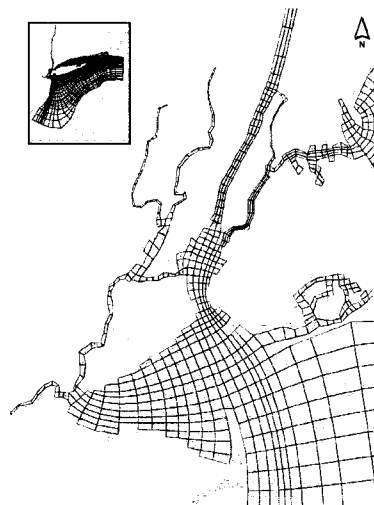


State of New Jersey  
Department of Environmental Protection

**Calibration Enhancement of the  
System-Wide Eutrophication Model (SWEM)  
in the New Jersey Tributaries**

**Final Technical Report  
April 23, 2001 through July 31, 2002**



**HydroQual, Inc.  
under agreement with the  
Passaic Valley Sewerage Commissioners**

**PVSC0020  
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## CONTENTS

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	ES-1
1 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	1-1
2 INTRODUCTION .....	2-1
3 TASK 1 - HYDRODYNAMIC SUB-MODEL CALIBRATION/VALIDATION ENHANCEMENT .....	3-1
3.1 REFINEMENTS IN MODEL GEOMETRY.....	3-1
3.2 ADJUSTMENTS IN BOTTOM FRICTION .....	3-1
3.3 SWEM HYDRODYNAMICS CALIBRATION/VALIDATION.....	3-6
4 TASK 2 - WATER QUALITY SUB-MODEL CALIBRATION/VALIDATION ENHANCEMENTS .....	4-1
4.1 REVIEW OF CALIBRATION AND VALIDATION LOADINGS .....	4-1
4.2 TRIBUTARY INPUT LOADING ADJUSTMENTS.....	4-1
4.3 CSO AND STORMWATER LOADING CORRECTIONS.....	4-8
4.4 HYDRODYNAMIC TRANSPORT REVISIONS AND ADJUSTMENTS .....	4-10
4.5 ADJUSTMENTS TO VERTICAL MIXING COEFFICIENTS .....	4-10
4.6 ADJUSTMENT OF MODEL INPUT PARAMETERS, CONSTANTS, AND COEFFICIENTS.....	4-11
4.7 SWEM WATER QUALITY SUB-MODEL CALIBRATION/VALIDATION RESULTS AND SENSITIVITIES.....	4-15
4.8 DISCUSSION OF WATER QUALITY CALIBRATION/VALIDATION ENHANCEMENTS .....	4-23
5 RECOMMENDED MONITORING PROGRAM.....	5-1
5.1 ONE YEAR MONITORING PROGRAM FOR SWEM VALIDATION IN THE NEW JERSEY TRIBUTARIES.....	5-1
5.2 ONE YEAR MONITORING PROGRAM FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR SWEM 1994-95 CALIBRATION.....	5-8
5.3 LONG-TERM MONITORING PROGRAM FOR NUTRIENT AND DISSOLVED OXYGEN MANAGEMENT.....	5-8
REFERENCES CITED .....	6-1
APPENDIX I - NEW JERSEY DEP COMMENTS AND HYDROQUAL RESPONSE	
APPENDIX II - SCOPE OF WORK FOR SILICA CALIBRATION UPGRADE	
APPENDIX III - MEASURED CARBON TO CHLOROPHYLL RATIOS	
APPENDIX IV - CALIBRATION/VALIDATION DIAGRAMS (Under Separate Cover)	

## FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
2-1 SWEM computational grid for full model domain.....	2-2
3-1 Orthogonal curvilinear grids of SWEM (a) refined grid .....	3-2
and (b) original grid.....	3-3
3-2 Bathymetric depths (m) of SWEM grid (a) refined grid, .....	3-4
(b) original grid .....	3-5
3-3 Location of field survey data stations in New Jersey tributary area .....	3-7
3-4 Model computed water levels compared against the observed data at Sandy Hook, Battery Park and Bergen Point.....	3-9
3-5 Model computed salinity profiles compared against observed data at various stations in New Jersey tributaries (a) Raritan River and Bay .....	3-10
(b) Hackensack River.....	3-11
(c) Passaic River.....	3-12
3-6 Model computed temperature profiles compared against observed data at various stations in New Jersey tributaries (a) Raritan River and Bay .....	3-13
(b) Hackensack River.....	3-14
(c) Passaic River.....	3-15
3-7 Model computed surface and bottom salinity compared against observed data collected during NJDEP Coastal Monitoring Survey Program in 1988-89 period. Bottom two panels illustrates the river flows and winds used to force the model..	3-17
3-8 Model computed surface and bottom salinity compared against observed data collected during NYCDEP Harbor Survey Program conducted in Kill van Kull and Arthur Kill in 1988-89 period. Bottom two panels illustrates the river flows and winds used to force the model.....	3-18
4-1 Concentrations assigned for Hackensack River headwater loadings in SWEM.....	4-3
4-2 Concentrations assigned for Passaic River/Saddle River headwater loadings in SWEM .....	4-4
4-3 Concentrations assigned for Raritan River/South River headwater loadings in SWEM.....	4-5
4-4 Dissolved oxygen concentrations assigned for New Jersey tributary headwater loadings in SWEM .....	4-6
4-5 Algal carbon concentrations assigned for New Jersey tributary headwater loadings in SWEM .....	4-7
4-6 Loadings assigned in SWEM: comparisons between loading types and loading sources .....	4-9
4-7 Benthic bivalve biomass as measured in the New Jersey tributaries during 1994-95 .....	4-13
4-8 SWEM sensitivity to vertical moving coefficient adjustments in the Raritan River, August 1995 .....	4-16
4-9 SWEM sensitivity to vertical mixing coefficient adjustments in the Raritan River, September 1995.....	4-17
4-10 SWEM sensitivity to vertical mixing coefficient adjustments in the Hackensack River, August 1995 .....	4-18
4-11 SWEM sensitivity to vertical mixing coefficient adjustments in the Hackensack River, September 1995.....	4-19
4-12 SWEM sensitivity to temperature dependence of nitrification rate, Hackensack River and Newark Bay, March 28 to April 8, 1995 .....	4-21

## FIGURES (Continued)

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
4-13 SWEM sensitivity to temperature dependence of nitrification rate, Raritan River and Raritan Bay, December 10 to 16, 1995 .....	4-22
4-14 SWEM sensitivity to temperature effects on algal growth rate.....	4-24
4-15 Demonstration of project benefits, Hackensack River and Newark Bay.....	4-25
4-16 Demonstration of project benefits, Passaic River.....	4-26
4-17 Demonstration of project benefits, Raritan River and Raritan Bay South.....	4-27
4-18 DIN Calibration temporal profiles at selected locations .....	4-29
4-19 POC calibration temporal profiles at selected locations .....	4-30
4-20 DO calibration temporal profiles at selected locations .....	4-31
4-21a Hackensack River and Newark Bay Calibration, August 1995 .....	4-34
4-21b Hackensack River and Newark Bay Calibration, August 1995 .....	4-35
4-22a Passaic River and Newark Bay Calibration, August 1995.....	4-37
4-22b Passaic River and Newark Bay Calibration, August 1995.....	4-38
4-23a Raritan River and Raritan Bay South Calibration, August 1995 .....	4-41
4-23b Raritan River and Raritan Bay South Calibration, August 1995 .....	4-42
4-24a Arthur Kill and Kill van Kull Calibration, August 1995 .....	4-43
4-24b Arthur Kill and Kill van Kull Calibration, August 1995 .....	4-44
5-1 Recommended station locations for a monitoring program to support further validation of SWEM in the New Jersey tributaries .....	5-7
5-2 Recommended station locations for monitoring program to support additional calibration of SWEM in the New Jersey tributaries under 1994-95 conditions .....	5-10

## TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
Table 3-1 Adjusted bottom friction used in SWEM.....	3-6
Table 4-1 Revised SWEM Loads .....	4-8
Table 4-2a SWEM Dissolved Silica Calibration Scorecard .....	4-46
Table 4-2b SWEM Biogenic Silica Calibration Scorecard.....	4-47
Table 5-1 Monitoring Program for the Validation of SWEM in the New Jersey Tributaries .....	5-2
Table 5-2 Monitoring Program for Additional Information for SWEM 1994-95 New Jersey Tributaries Calibration.....	5-9

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

SWEM was developed by HydroQual, Inc., for the City of New York Department of Environmental Protection (NYCDEP) for NYCDEP planning purposes. The NY/NJ Harbor Estuary Program (HEP) maintained a strong interest in and oversight over the development of SWEM. SWEM underwent extensive technical review by representatives of the States of NY, NJ, and CT, and by panels of experts convened by both HEP and the Long Island Sound Study (LISS). The technical review process, with the concurrence of HydroQual, identified that if SWEM is to be used by HEP, LISS, and the States for regional nutrient management, enhancements to the calibration of SWEM in New Jersey waters are warranted. Through its representation on HEP's System-wide Nutrient Workgroup (SOWNWG), the State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) agreed to sponsor the necessary enhancements to the calibration of SWEM in New Jersey waters. The necessary enhancements are being performed on behalf of the NJDEP by HydroQual under an agreement with the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commissioners (PVSC).

### Summary of Calibration Enhancements - Hydrodynamics

The areas of improvement identified for the enhancement of the SWEM hydrodynamic sub-model include refinements in model geometry (i.e., longitudinal resolution of the model grid segmentation and bathymetry) and adjustments in bottom friction. The Raritan River was re-segmented longitudinally and bathymetry adjustments were made in all three tributaries. Adjustments in bottom friction were made in the Hackensack River. These adjustments improved the calibration of the hydrodynamic sub-model to salinity and temperature as well as the calibration of the water quality sub-model to all of the state variables. A weakness of the calibration which remains is that the SWEM computational grid is restricted to only one lateral element wide in each of the three New Jersey tributaries. Lack of lateral resolution hampers the ability of a model to capture secondary currents and small-scale bathymetric features. Adjustments to bottom friction in SWEM serve as a compensating mechanism for limited lateral resolution.

### Summary of Calibration Enhancements - Water Quality

The areas of improvement identified for the enhancement of the SWEM water quality sub-model include loadings, vertical mixing coefficients, benthic filtration rates, nitrification rates, vertical light extinction coefficients, and temperature effects on algal growth. The enhancements both improved the overall level of calibration and/or made SWEM more defensible. In the absence of data, tributary headwater loading concentrations as well as ambient light extinction coefficients

were assigned using a more stringent protocol than was followed during the original calibration/validation. Adjustments to benthic filtration rates in the New Jersey tributaries were made in SWEM to make use of data that were not considered in the original SWEM calibration/validation. Adjustments to vertical mixing coefficients, temperature effects on algal growth, and nitrification rates improved the ability of SWEM to better represent measured ambient water quality data. The calibration enhancement effort has led to several conclusions and recommendations regarding the future application of SWEM.

Conclusions and recommendations regarding the future application of SWEM are presented in this report in Sections 1 and 5 and reflect both the professional judgment of HydroQual and feedback and guidance provided by NJDEP during its review of an earlier draft of this report. Section 1 highlights overall conclusions and recommendations. Section 5 presents detailed recommendations for future monitoring. The report appendix provides documentation of the NJDEP review.

## SECTION 1

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- SWEM is a suitable planning tool for addressing nutrient management and regulatory issues in the NY/NJ Harbor Estuary. Further, SWEM is technically defensible and is generally appropriate for TMDL/WLA/LA development in most of the estuary. Collection of additional data in the New Jersey tributaries and, potentially, further SWEM enhancement or additional model development is recommended for TMDL/WLA/LA development within these waters. It is judged, however, that the model is satisfactory at present for preliminary management planning in the New Jersey tributaries.
- As with any model, the application of SWEM for management decisions will require an understanding of model limitations and a judicious interpretation of results.
- Although SWEM is ready to be applied to answer nitrogen and carbon management questions, there still remains room for improvement. In particular, landside loadings (i.e., CSO and stormwater runoff) in SWEM are assigned based on the outputs of a hybrid of Storm Water Management Models (SWMM) and the Rainfall Runoff Modeling Program (RRMP). RRMP was developed and calibrated in the 1970's by HydroQual and has not been updated since. SWMM outputs represent the current best estimates of landside loadings. Unfortunately, SWMM outputs are available to HydroQual only for a limited portion of the SWEM drainage area, basically New York City. To the extent that SWMM outputs are available for New Jersey and other jurisdictions, these should be incorporated in SWEM. To put proper perspective on the significance of this weakness, it is important to remember that for nutrients, CSOs and storm water runoff are only a small percentage (i.e., less than 3% of the total nitrogen loading system wide excluding open ocean inputs) of the total loading. The urgency for inclusion in the model of all available SWMM outputs would apply more in the context of pathogens management rather than nutrient management.
- The synoptic field program conducted in 1994-95 in support of SWEM as well as supplemental monitoring funded by the New Jersey Harbor Dischargers Group (NJHDG) provides a spatially and temporally comprehensive database to fully support calibration and skill assessment of SWEM. The monitoring addressed all SWEM elements: hydrodynamics, loadings, detailed water column biology and chemistry, and sediment fluxes. While the calibration database is unprecedented in terms of its extent, several shortcomings are noted:

- Measurements of light extinction are missing in the New Jersey tributaries. This is due in part to the fact that monitoring was conducted around the clock and sampling events conducted at night do not include light extinction measurements. During other sampling events, there were photometer problems and valid readings were not obtained. Light extinction measurements can be made at a low cost using secchi disks. It is recommended that secchi disk depth be routinely monitored in the New Jersey tributaries as is done in other portions of the Harbor for which extant secchi disk depth measurements from 1994-95 were used to supplement the calibration database. In the New Jersey tributaries in general, there are more nutrients available than the phytoplankton can use and light plays a critical role in controlling or limiting algal growth. It is primarily through algal growth that nutrients are linked to the dissolved oxygen balance. For these reasons, it is important that light penetration be properly accounted for in SWEM.
  - The laboratory which conducted the monitoring program in support of SWEM chose to group tributary headwaters with the loading sampling rather than with ambient water sampling. As a result, no direct measurements were made of algal biomass at tributary headwaters and dissolved oxygen was not measured either. As a result, the tributary headwater concentrations for algal carbon and dissolved oxygen assigned in SWEM are estimated as opposed to based on direct measurements.
  - The monitoring program in support of SWEM was designed to include twelve ambient sampling events and sampling of loads over twelve months. Due to budgetary problems with the laboratory, the scope of the monitoring program was reduced to nine ambient sampling events and sampling of loads over eight months. The scope reduction of the sampling of loads is the reason why tributary headwater input concentrations are not available for the months October and July through September.
- The water year 1988-89 was selected as the SWEM validation year because there is a significant database available (although not as comprehensive as the 1994-95 database) from the Long Island Sound Study for the calibration of the LIS3.0 model, and it is the year upon which the Long Island Sound nitrogen TMDL is based. 1988-89 was also selected because it represents a markedly different condition than 1994-95, providing an opportunity to demonstrate SWEM robustness. Unfortunately, the 1988-89 database is lacking in the New Jersey tributaries. For this reason, it is appropriate to say that SWEM has been validated in Harbor and Sound waters, but not in the New Jersey tributaries. No other year or hybrid of years was identified as having enough data to serve as a validation condition for the New Jersey tributaries. Where possible, 1988-89 SWEM results in the New Jersey tributaries and



adjacent waters are compared to data from years between 1988 and 1995, providing a very cursory, gross scale skill assessment.

- The project to enhance the calibration of SWEM in the New Jersey tributaries was a fruitful effort which both improved the level of calibration of SWEM in the three tributary rivers and strengthened the technical basis of assumptions/judgments made in assigning SWEM input values in the absence of data.
- Calibration of SWEM in the Hackensack River was more difficult than originally anticipated at the outset of the project and is limited by a lack of lateral segmentation in the SWEM computational grid and a lack of detailed kinetics for marsh related phenomena.
- In most marine environments, and in the NY/NJ Harbor Estuary complex, nitrogen is the nutrient which is typically managed or controlled. In addition to nitrogen, phosphorus and silica are also important to algal growth and thus the dissolved oxygen balance and have been included in SWEM. In all waters, the SWEM silica calibration is deficient in comparison to nitrogen. This deficiency is being addressed by a study now commencing under funding from the New York City Department of Environmental Protection and could eventually lead to a correction throughout the SWEM domain. As silica may periodically be limiting to algal growth instead of nitrogen in certain Harbor locations, it is advantageous to perfect the silica calibration.
- Modeling now being conducted in the NY/NJ Harbor Estuary under the CARP program will necessitate that SWEM be run for four additional water years, covering 1998 through 2002. The SWEM effort under CARP is a significant opportunity in that it provides the opportunity to have available the necessary SWEM hydrodynamic and carbon inputs to test nutrient management actions in SWEM under a total of six different hydrodynamic, hydrological, and meteorological conditions. Further if nutrient data are available for the four additional years for which SWEM will be run under CARP, it would be possible to perform further skill assessment of SWEM. It is noted that it is unlikely that enough data exist from 1998 through 2002 to support a full SWEM validation in the New Jersey tributaries. At the very least, organic carbon measurements made for CARP can be used for a further skill assessment of SWEM.

## SECTION 2

# INTRODUCTION

This report presents the technical details of calibration/validation enhancements to the System-wide Eutrophication Model (SWEM) in the Hackensack, Passaic, and Raritan Rivers. The calibration/validation of SWEM for the full model domain, as shown in Figure 2-1, and the initial calibration/validation efforts in the Hackensack, Passaic, and Raritan Rivers have been previously presented by HydroQual in a series of technical reports and have been approved through a peer review process by representatives of the States of NY, NJ, and CT, and by panels of experts convened by both the Harbor Estuary Program (HEP) and the Long Island Sound Study (LISS). This report will not present a review of the initial calibration/validation, but will present enhancements to the calibration/validation of SWEM in New Jersey waters. It is assumed that this report will be used by individuals already familiar with SWEM and the physical features of the estuarine portions of the Hackensack, Passaic, and Raritan Rivers.

Model calibration involves the adjustment of model forcings, constants, coefficients, parameters, and formulations so that the model is able to reproduce the major trends in observed data and explain causality. Model validation involves applying the calibrated model under a different set of environmental conditions. In the validation procedure, the calibrated model is not changed. Enhancements to SWEM conducted under this project were applied to both the calibration and validation. The only allowable differences between calibration and validation are model inputs associated with the specification of the measured or observed conditions specific to calibration or validation conditions (i.e., temperature, precipitation, light extinction, etc., for a given year).

This report is broken down into two major sections or tasks which address the sub-models that comprise SWEM: hydrodynamics and water quality. Within each sub-model section, emphasis is placed on the calibration year 1994-95 since for this period a comprehensive database is available for calibration. An additional year, 1988-89, is also considered as it is the validation year for SWEM. The 1988-89 database is not as extensive as the 1994-95 database and is particularly lacking in the New Jersey tributaries. Although the 1988-89 database was sufficient for validation purposes in the Harbor and in Long Island Sound, it does not provide for a robust model skill assessment in the Hackensack, Passaic, and Raritan Rivers. Where possible, data from other years are included in comparisons to 1988-89 model results to supplement the 1988-89 database. Overall, there is not a sufficient database available to validate the calibration of SWEM in the Hackensack, Passaic, and Raritan Rivers.

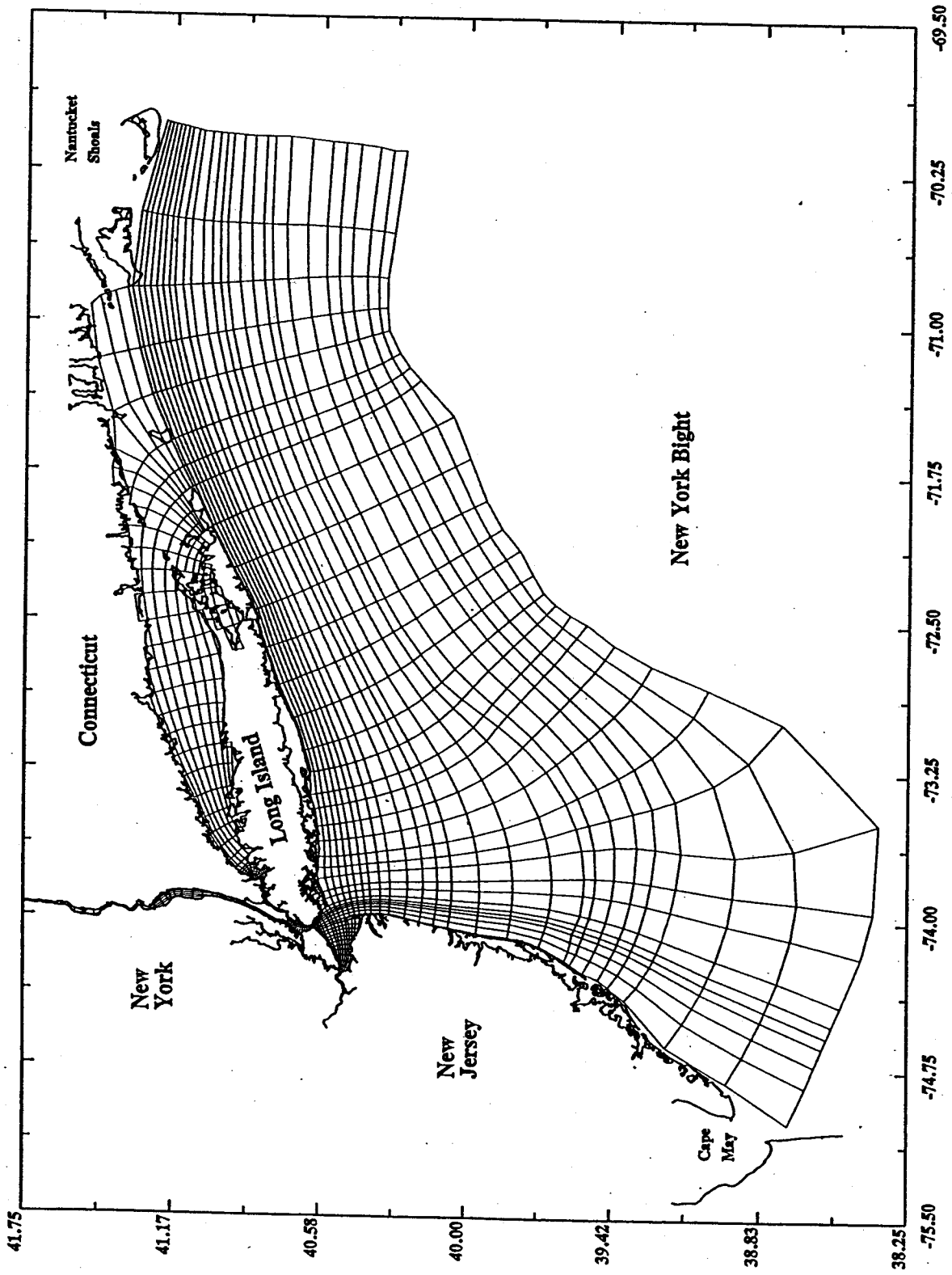


Figure 2-1 Model Grid for System Wide Eutrophication Model: Complete Model Domain

Efforts to obtain validation data collected from 1988-89 and other years between 1988-89 and 1994-95 included obtaining several databases:

Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. 1994. Data Collection Program in Support of the Harbor-Wide Eutrophication Model for the New York - New Jersey Harbor Estuary Program. Report No. 94-29D.

Connell, R., Jr. and L. Messler. 1990. New Jersey Ambient Monitoring Program Report on Coastal and Estuarine Water Quality 1989-1990. NJ Department of Environmental Protection and Energy. Division of Science and Research.

General Testing Corporation. 1990. Bergen County Utilities Authority Impact Analysis of Sewage Treatment Plant Discharges on the Water Quality of the Lower Hackensack River. Appendix B. Part 1: Analytical Data. Submitted to Clinton Bogert Associates.

Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission and United States Geologic Service. 1994. May - May 93-94 Water Quality Monitoring. Unpublished data available upon request from the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission.

Olsen, P.S., and R. Mulcahy. 1991. Red Tides in the Hudson-Raritan Estuary are Associated with Hypoxia and Consequent Fauna Kills. Presentation to Fifth International Conference on Toxic Marine Phytoplankton. Newport, R.I.

These databases, however, are not complete enough for model validation and data comparison purposes for the New Jersey tributaries for a number of reasons. In general, there are no data available for the Passaic and Raritan Rivers or Newark Bay and many of the relevant water quality parameters were not measured. Further, measurements were generally not taken between October 1988 and September 1989. More specifically, the Academy of Natural Sciences database was collected mainly for purposes of defining reactivity rates of different loadings to the SWEM domain and was not intended to provide a validation data set. Reactivity rates derived from Academy of Natural Sciences data collected in the early 1990's are applied in SWEM under both 1994-1995 and 1988-1989 conditions. Data collected by Connell and Messler and Olsen and Mulcahy during the summers of 1989 and 1990 emphasize dissolved oxygen and chlorophyll rather than nutrients and are focused on the waters of Raritan Bay and the New York Bight rather than the New Jersey tributaries. These data are included on the 1988-89 Raritan Bay validation transect plots included in the report appendix. The Bergen County Utilities Authority (BCUA) data, reported by General Testing Corporation are limited to the Hackensack River and were predominantly collected

in 1988 before the 1988-89 validation period which begins in October 1988. For reference, BCUA data collected in 1988 are shown in the report appendix model versus data comparisons with model results from the corresponding month in 1989. Although this is admittedly a mismatch of conditions, the 1988 measurements provide some level of guidance for 1989 calculations. Similar to the BCUA data, the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission (HMDC) Hackensack River data were not collected during 1988-89 and are shown in the report appendix model and data comparisons for the corresponding month in the validation year for guidance purposes.

The conclusion of obtaining these databases and plotting them against model results along spatial transects is that within the measured data, there are clearly features unique to a given year that a model calculation from a different year will certainly miss. However, the model does reasonably well in some cases at reproducing the features of a different year, suggesting, in some instances, that different years may share common biological and chemical behavior.

The purpose for performing enhancements to SWEM in the Hackensack, Passaic, and Raritan Rivers is to provide the regional managers (i.e., USEPA Region 2 and the States of New Jersey and New York) with a technically defensible management tool that could support nutrient TMDL development for the Harbor.

## SECTION 3

# TASK 1 - HYDRODYNAMIC SUB-MODEL CALIBRATION/VALIDATION ENHANCEMENT

This report section describes an assessment of the original SWEM hydrodynamic sub-model calibration in the New Jersey tributary system and the areas of necessary improvements which have been identified. The necessary improvements include model geometry and bottom friction. Further, this report section includes a skill assessment, or model and data comparisons, for the enhanced hydrodynamic sub-model calibration/validation.

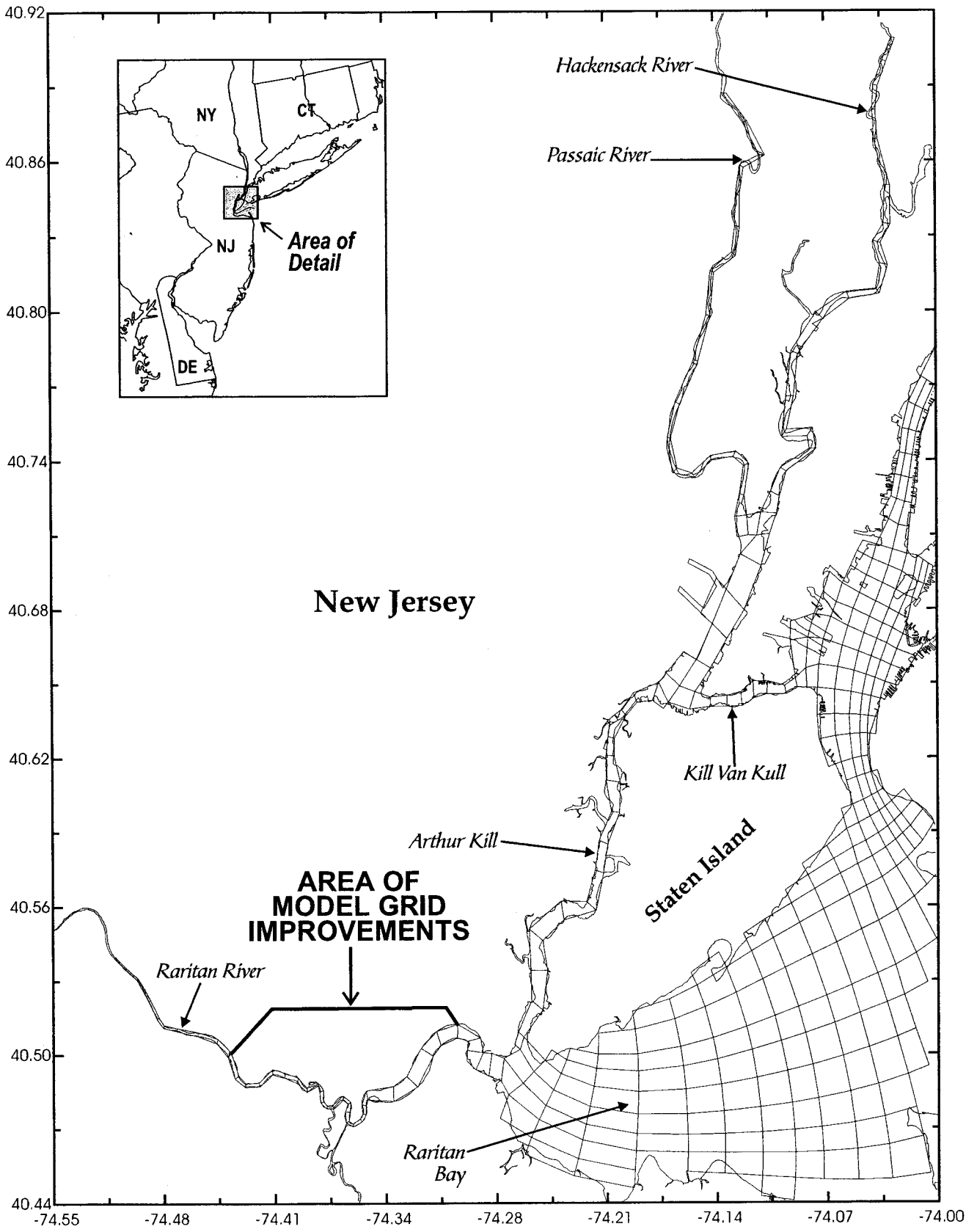
### 3.1 REFINEMENTS IN MODEL GEOMETRY

Accurate representation of the river geometry is important for modeling the hydrodynamics and water quality of the New Jersey tributary system. Comparison of the existing SWEM model geometry and the actual river bathymetry has been made using recent NOAA Charts (12327, 12332, and 12337). The original SWEM model grid was not fine enough to resolve the coastline features of the Raritan River. The Raritan River grid was redesigned (i.e., more longitudinal segments were added) to better resolve the bathymetric and shoreline features, especially near the meandering and narrow reaches of the river. The Passaic River coastline was resolved adequately and the Hackensack River was resolved fairly well in the previous effort by HydroQual. No changes in the grid resolution were made in Passaic and Hackensack Rivers. Figures 3-1a and 3-1b illustrate the comparison of the redesigned and the original SWEM grids in the New Jersey tributaries area.

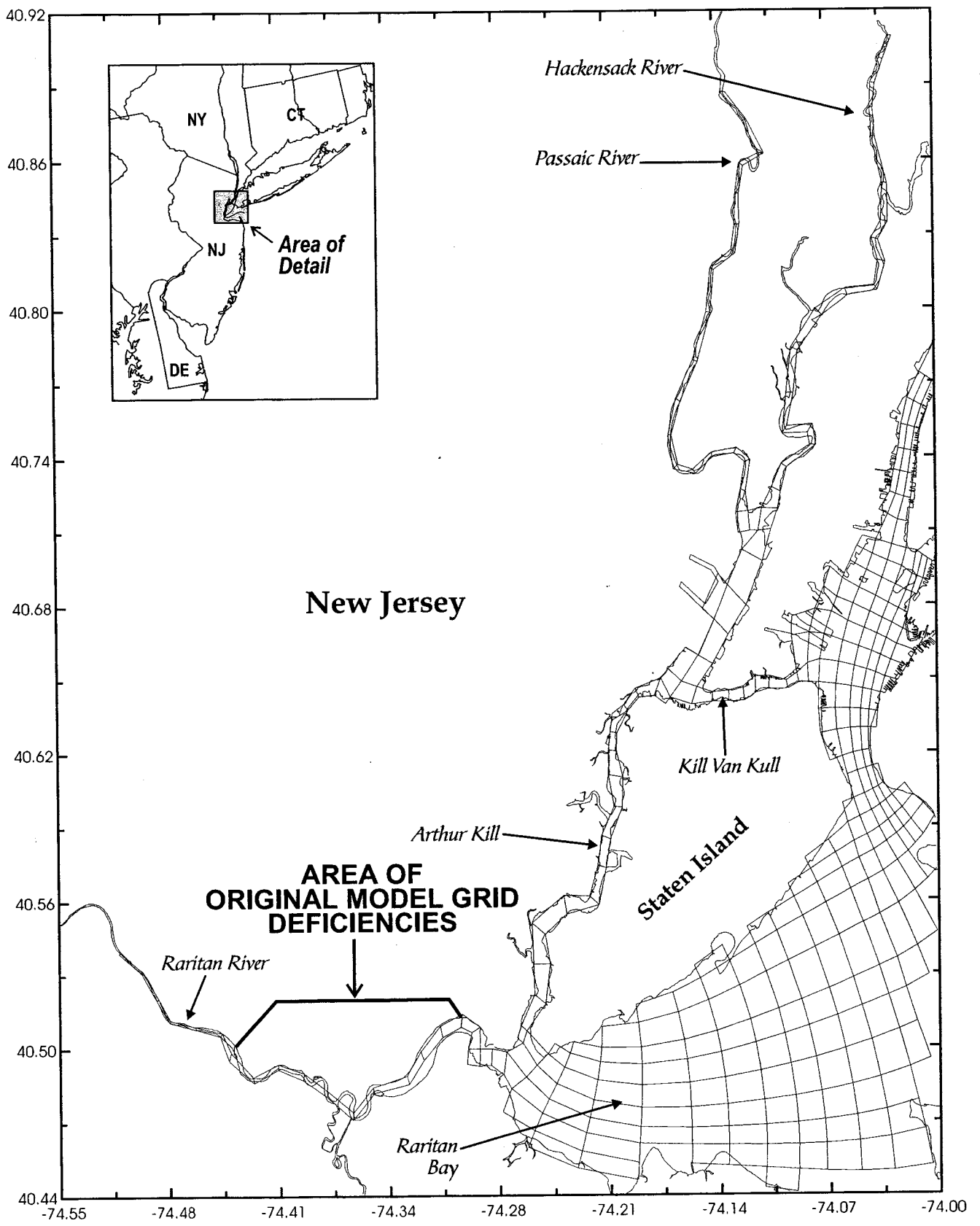
Significant improvements in river bathymetry have been made in order to accurately resolve the bathymetric features of all the rivers including the Raritan, the Passaic, and the Hackensack River. The NOAA hydrographic chart was used to gather coastline and bathymetric information for upgrading the river geometry. Accurate resolution in bathymetry is important in order to accurately model the transport physics, and salinity and temperature structure in the Rivers. Figures 3-2a and 3-2b illustrate the bathymetric features of the redesigned and original SWEM computational grids.

### 3.2 ADJUSTMENTS IN BOTTOM FRICTION

In addition to the improved coastline and bathymetric representation of the New Jersey tributaries, hydrodynamic calibration parameters have also been readjusted and reconfigured in SWEM. Hydrodynamic calibration parameters were adjusted to better parameterize small scale physics not resolved by the computational grid. For example, the model grid does not provide any

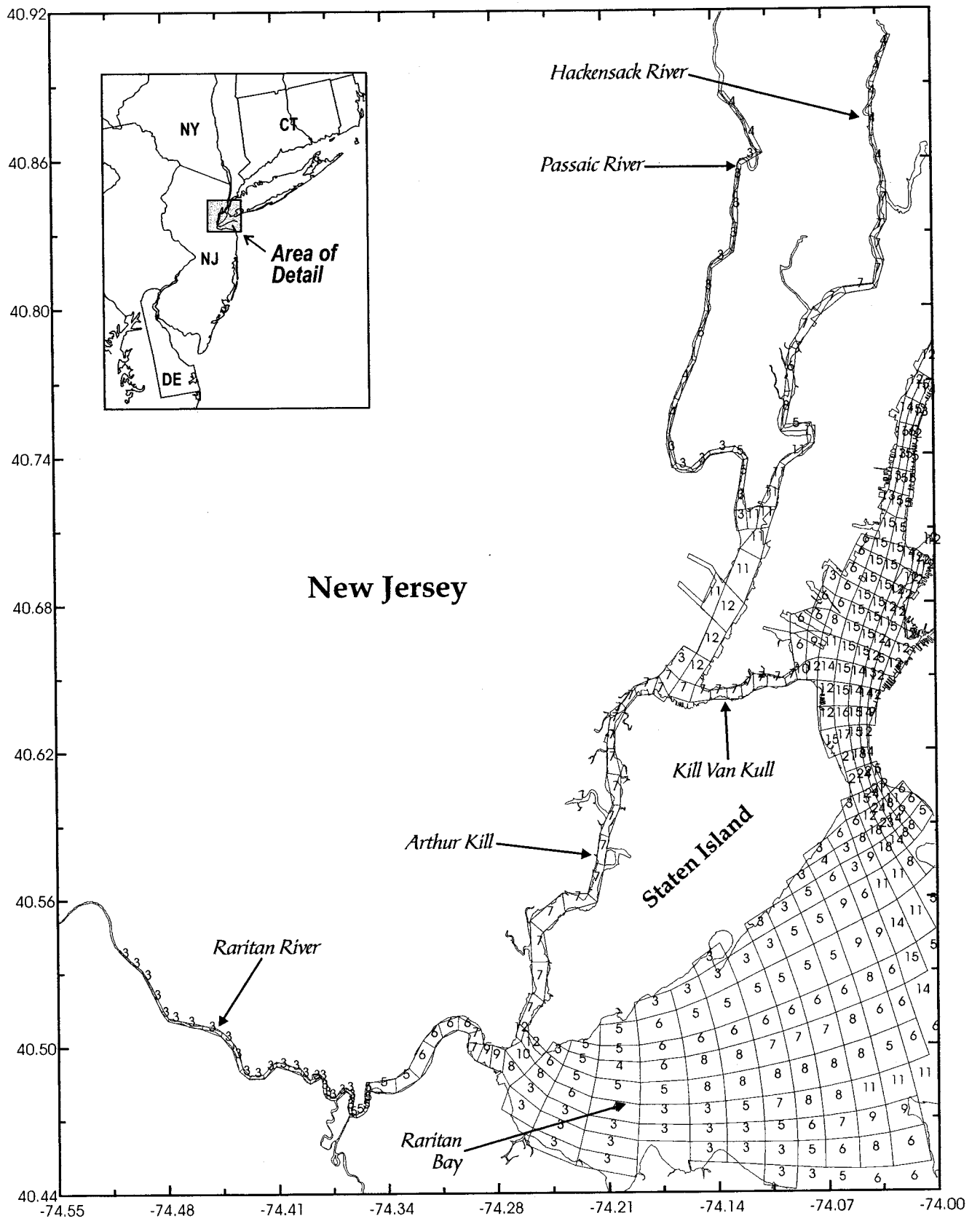


**Figure 3-1(a)**

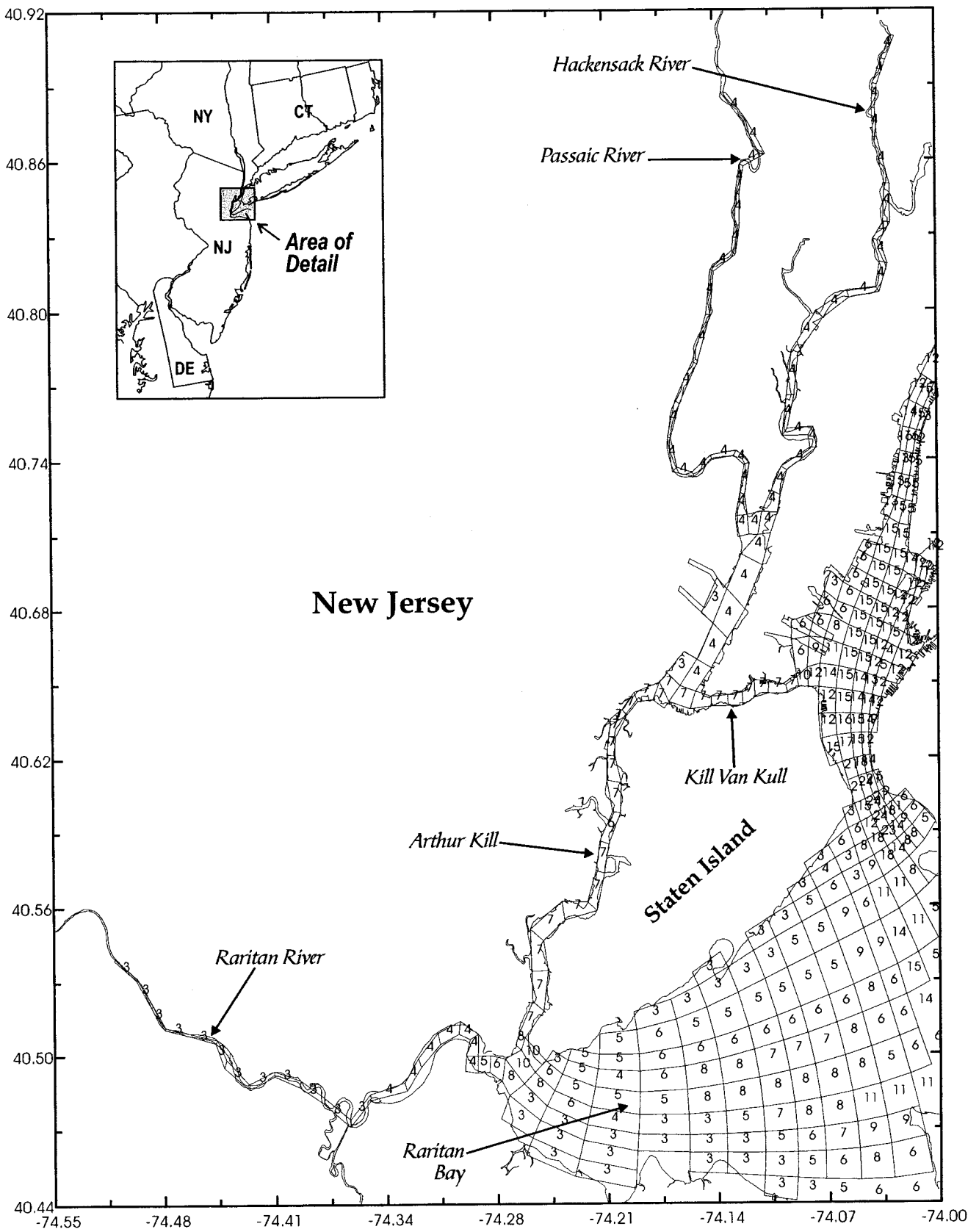


**Figure 3-1(b)**





**Figure 3-2(a)**



**Figure 3-2(b)**

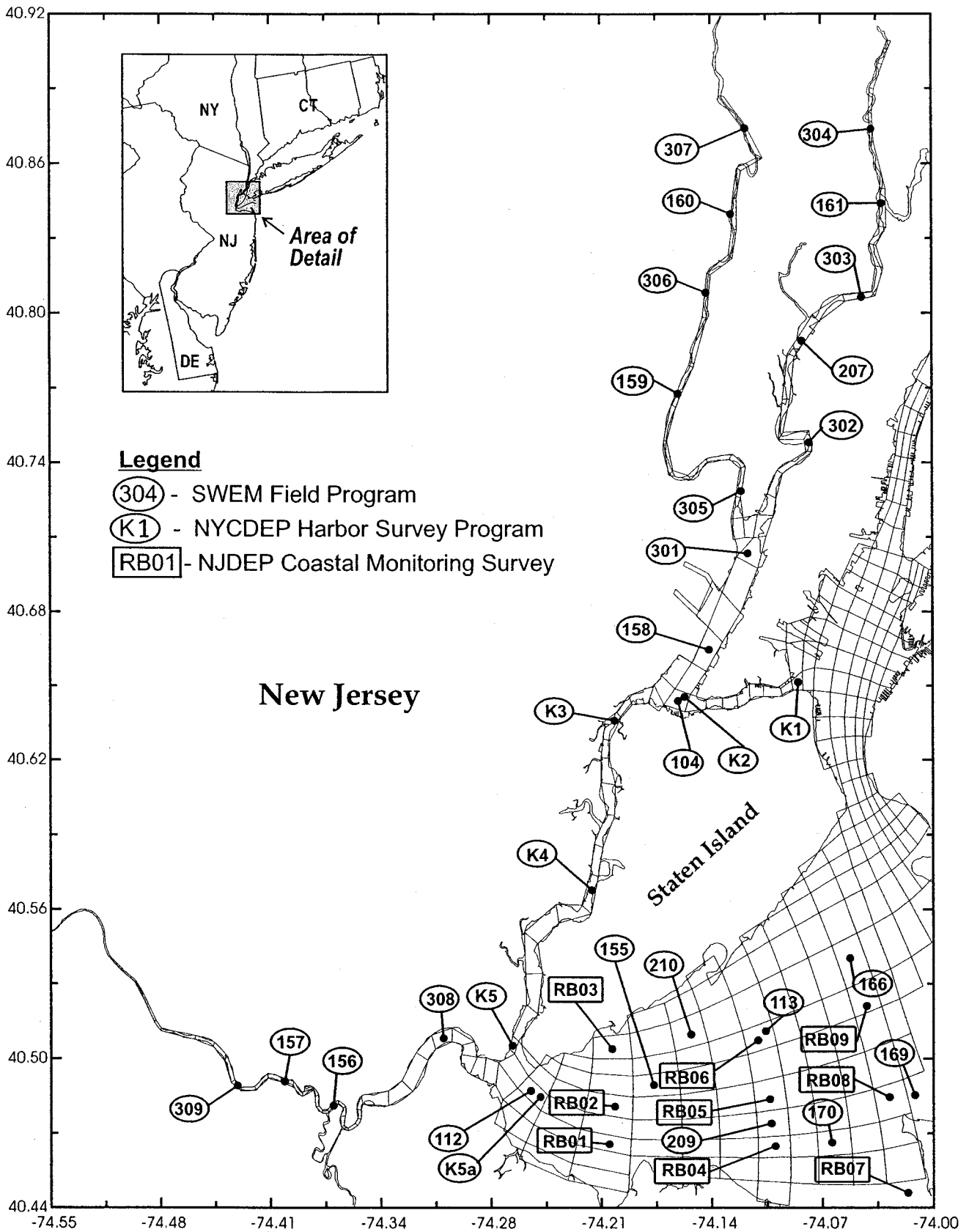
lateral resolution across the Raritan, the Passaic and the Hackensack Rivers. The potential consequence of lack of lateral resolution is that any secondary currents and horizontal velocity shear, that may have resulted from real world meandering geometries and crosswind, would not be resolved by the model grid. Thus, additional mixing resulting from the velocity shear and secondary currents would not necessarily be properly accounted for. Careful investigation of the bathymetry of the Hackensack and the Raritan Rivers suggests that small-scale bathymetric features exist, especially in the Hackensack River, which may not be properly resolved by the SWEM computational grid. Enhanced bottom friction coefficients (i.e., a scale factor is applied) were introduced in SWEM to generate additional mixing in the model to mimic the unresolved mixing likely to have been produced by the secondary currents and small scales bathymetric features in both the Hackensack and Raritan Rivers. Table 1 shows the enhanced bottom friction used in SWEM. The enhanced bottom friction was calibrated against observed salinity and temperature data.

**Table 3-1. Adjusted bottom friction used in SWEM**

<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>ORIGINAL CALIBRATION SCALE FACTOR</b>	<b>REVISED CALIBRATION SCALE FACTOR</b>
Raritan River	10	50
Passaic River	10	10
Hackensack River	1	50-600

### **3.3 SWEM HYDRODYNAMICS CALIBRATION/VALIDATION**

The SWEM model was originally calibrated and validated against a wide spectrum of hydrographic and water quality data across the model domain. An extensive hydrographic data set was collected in the New Jersey tributary system during a field program conducted in support of SWEM calibration in 1994 and 1995 (HydroQual, 2001). Vertical casts of temperature and salinity were measured during the surveys. Figure 3-3 illustrates the location of these data stations. Additional survey data, conducted during the New York City DEP Harbor survey program, are also available in Kill van Kull and Arthur Kill (Figure 3-3). Field survey data for the 1988 and 1989 validation period are very limited and only surface salinity data are measured near the Raritan Bay area. These data are supplemented by the NJDEP coastal Monitoring Survey data as shown in Figure 3-3. In the present study, the refined and upgraded SWEM model is calibrated and validated against these data.



**Figure 3-3**

