

**General Electric/Housatonic River Natural Resource Restoration
Round 1 Threshold Criteria Evaluation**

April 27, 2006

Prepared for: Massachusetts SubCouncil
Prepared by: Woodlot Alternatives, Inc.
Location: Lenox Library Association, Lenox, MA
Time: 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm

Public meeting began at 5:30 pm.

I. Opening Statement by John Lortie, Woodlot Alternatives, Inc., and Introductions

1. Introduction of voting members of Massachusetts SubCouncil (MA SubCouncil):
 - a. Dale Young, Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (State Trustee representative).
 - b. Veronica Varela, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Federal Trustee representative).
2. Introduction of Consultant Team:
John Lortie, Todd Chadwell, and Michael Chelminski, Woodlot Alternatives, Inc.

II. Slideshow Presentation Round 1 Threshold Criteria Evaluation Results by Todd Chadwell, Woodlot Alternatives, Inc.

(available at <http://www.ma-housatonicrestoration.org/library.htm>)

1. Summary of Proposals Received.
2. Description of Threshold Criteria.
3. Brief description of individual proposals and results of Threshold Criteria Evaluation.
4. Announcement that Public Comment on Results of Threshold Criteria would be received until May 5, 2006. *After meeting it was observed that the May 5, 2006, deadline would only allow one week for public comment. The new deadline for receiving public comment is May 12, 2006.

III. Questions and Comments from Public

1. A clarification was made regarding the role of the consultant team in the evaluation process. Members of the consultant team will participate in the individual and consensus based reviews and compile an Evaluation Summary Memorandum containing: a) A consensus-based score for each proposal; b) A brief description of the rationale and procedure for arriving at the consensus-based score; c) A table of the final individual scores; and d) The affiliation of each Review Team member (e.g., agency).
2. Public question on whether there would be a potential conflict of interest on the part of Review Team members reviewing proposals. Response that Review Team members will not be reviewing proposals that they or their agencies have submitted, nor will reviewers evaluate proposals for which they have submitted letters of support.
3. Public question on what the date of final determination of funding would be. Response that final determination of funding would coincide with the release of the Final Restoration Plan which is anticipated to occur in December 2006.

4. Public question, during discussion of Proposal #7, on whether results of the Threshold Criteria Evaluation presented were final. Response that Threshold Criteria Evaluation Results could be revised after the MA SubCouncil considers the public comments received.
5. Public question, during discussion of Proposal #9, on whether each component of a project must be identified in order to be funded. Response that all components must be identified and approved by MA SubCouncil prior to implementation.
6. Public question, during discussion of Proposal #9, on whether money would be reserved for implementation of components approved for implementation in Round 1. Response that money could be reserved for implementation of such projects.
7. Public question, during discussion of Proposal #18, on whether the State was already required by law to protect Threatened and Endangered species. Response that protection of Threatened and Endangered species is required, however providing sufficient funding to the Natural Heritage Program to locate and periodically update all occurrences of all rare species is not required by law. The Natural Heritage Program does not have sufficient funds; thus, the proposal. Under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act, it is the MA SubCouncil's understanding that only occurrences of rare species that are less than 25 years old receive regulatory protection. Some surveys are more than 25 years old.
8. Public question on whether guidance materials presented to the Review Team would be made public. Response that Review Team Guidance materials will be posted on the Restoration Website.
(Available at <http://www.ma-housatonicrestoration.org/library.htm>)
9. Public question on whether there is a mandate requiring the State to maintain roads, thus making Proposal #20 ineligible due to Threshold Criterion #3. Response that no law has been identified that clearly requires the actions planned in Proposal #20.
10. Public Question on how long the public would have to comment on the Threshold Criteria Evaluation. Response that public would have two weeks and comment must be received by May 5, 2006. *Please note that the deadline was changed to May 12, 2006, to allow for a full two weeks of comment.
11. Public Question on how long the public would have to comment on the scores provided by the Review Team members. Response that a public meeting would be held to announce the scores of the Review Team's evaluation results and public comment would be received for a period of two weeks after that meeting. It was emphasized that the MA SubCouncil was more interested in public comment on the proposals themselves rather than public comment on the Review Team's evaluations. The MA SubCouncil wishes to consider public comment on the proposals and the Review Team's evaluations in the same manner.
12. Comment from the public that the rejected Greenway component of Proposal #7 is more than fulfilling the minimum NPDES Phase II Small MS4 Stormwater permit requirements. Response that comments should be submitted in writing to clarify what is, and is not, required by the NPDES permit and therefore what components of the proposal are believed to be eligible for funding.
13. Public question on whether the MA SubCouncil looked at objectives in the Greenway component of Proposal #7 other than those fulfilling the minimum NPDES requirements. Response that the MA SubCouncil looked at other components of

the Greenway project but found it unclear as to what would remain after removing the tasks already required by law. If information is provided by the City of Pittsfield clearly explaining what objectives of the Greenway are not otherwise required by law, then the proposal will be reevaluated. This information must be provided before the end of the two-week public comment period.

14. Public Question on whether names of the Review Team members evaluating proposals would be released to the public. Response that affiliations of the 14 Review Team members will be released at a later date; however names of Review Team members will remain anonymous to help ensure objectivity during the current review process and facilitate obtaining skilled reviewers for future funding rounds.
15. Public question on whether it would be possible to ask Review Team members not to reveal to co-workers and others what proposals they had reviewed. Response that this option would be looked into.
16. Public Comment that Human Health Risk Assessment Reviewers are not anonymous. Response that the process outlined by the MA SubCouncil for awarding grants is extremely transparent. However, if reviewers names are released objectivity may be compromised and current and future reviewers may not wish to participate in the evaluation process. Anonymity ensures that qualified individuals with first-hand experience in the Housatonic watershed will be reviewing proposals. In previous meetings members of the public have indicated that they prefer that Review Team member identities remain anonymous. Furthermore, scores from Review Team members are advisory only. A combination of reviewer scores and public comment guide the MA SubCouncil in deciding which projects to fund.
17. Public comment that one audience member has previously had experience reviewing proposals for the State and believes anonymity is necessary. Commenter described that signed confidentiality statements from proposal reviewers sometimes helped. Response that confidentiality statements would be looked into.
18. Public comment from an applicant that he is comfortable with reviewers remaining anonymous.

Meeting adjourned at 6:40 pm.