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\$1.5 million from General Electric settlement to fund six projects in Housatonic River watershed

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will use settlement funds from the General Electric/Housatonic River Natural Resource Damages Assessment and Restoration settlement to restore habitat, conserve and protect land, and provide environmental education in the watershed.

The projects are outlined in a restoration plan released today, which was finalized following public review in April 2019. About \$1.5 million will fund the following projects submitted by the public: a culvert replacement project designed to restore brook trout habitat in Churchill Brook in Pittsfield; an environmental education program focused on the Housatonic River watershed; a habitat restoration effort focused on ecologically significant calcareous wetlands in the Housatonic River watershed; and three land conservation projects. Due to the sensitive nature of real estate transactions, details about the locations and characteristics of the proposed land acquisition projects will be released once the parcels are purchased.

This is the fourth and final round of funding from a \$7.75 million natural resource damages settlement with General Electric in 2000 to fund restoration projects directed toward natural resources that were injured by the release of PCBs into the Housatonic River watershed in Massachusetts. MassDEP and the Service are the Massachusetts SubCouncil of the Housatonic River Natural Resource Trustees. The goal of natural resource damage assessment and restoration is to replace, restore or acquire the equivalent of the resources and recreational opportunities affected by contamination – at no cost to taxpayers. This process is distinct from cleanup activities overseen by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

“The Housatonic River is central to the Berkshires, supporting water, wildlife and outdoor opportunities throughout the region,” said Tom Chapman, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service New England Field Office supervisor. “Over the past decade, we've worked with communities across the watershed to invest more than \$8 million into supporting a healthy and enjoyable river, from restoring habitat and protecting land to boosting recreation and environmental education.”

“Restoration of the Housatonic River Watershed will benefit many habitat types and residents of affected communities,” said MassDEP Commissioner Martin Suuberg. “The variety and strength of the restoration projects will further the continued healthy revitalization of the watershed’s ecosystem.”

For more information, visit <http://www.ma-housatonicrestoration.org/library.htm> or contact Cathy Kiley, MassDEP, at 617-556-1012 or cathy.kiley@mass.gov.

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**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) (collectively, the MA SubCouncil of the Housatonic River Natural Resource Trustees) are working together to restore injured natural resources and resource services resulting from the release of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and other hazardous substances from General Electric's (GE's) facility in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. To achieve this purpose, the MA SubCouncil created a Massachusetts Housatonic River Watershed Restoration Program (Restoration Program) whereby local groups and citizens from the watershed can participate in planning and implementation of compensatory restoration. Compensatory restoration projects are projects that restore, rehabilitate, replace, and/or acquire the equivalent of injured natural resources and/or the services provided by those resources.

The Restoration Program is structured to achieve restoration through several funding rounds, three of which have been accomplished to-date. Ten restoration projects were funded as part of the Round 1 Restoration Plan / Supplemental Environmental Assessment (RP/SEA) released in October 2007; four habitat restoration projects were funded in the Round 2 RP/SEA released in June 2011; and six restoration projects were funded as part of the two sub-rounds of the Round 3 RP/SEA released in May 2013. Approximately \$1.5 million has been allocated to the six projects identified in the Round 4 Final RP/SEA.