



MassDEP NEWS

Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection

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State and Federal Environmental Officials Announce Further Funding Available for Land Acquisition Projects in the Housatonic River Watershed

Public Invited to Information Session September 17 in Lenox Library

BOSTON – Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Matthew A. Beaton today announced that his office and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – together comprising the Massachusetts SubCouncil of the Housatonic River Natural Resource Trustees (MA SubCouncil) – are soliciting a second set of proposals within the third round of funding to restore wildlife habitat in the Berkshires as part of the Massachusetts Housatonic River Watershed Restoration Program. Selected projects will be financed through a Natural Resource Damage (NRD) Assessment and Restoration settlement with General Electric (GE), with up to \$1.7 million available through this solicitation.

The final Round 3 Restoration Plan, released in May 2013, outlined the MA SubCouncil’s approach for the third round of the restoration program to restore, rehabilitate, replace or acquire the equivalent of injured natural resources or the services provided by those resources. In Round 3, the MA SubCouncil is seeking proposals for land acquisition and habitat conservation projects.

The MA SubCouncil expects to release a Grant Announcement and Application (GAA) for a second sub-round of Round 3 proposals later this year. The GAA will solicit proposals for projects providing compensatory restoration through land acquisition and/or land protection measures. To prepare for that solicitation, the MA SubCouncil will host an information session on Thursday, September 17, 2015, at 5:30 p.m. in the Lenox Library, 18 Main Street in Lenox. At this meeting, the MA SubCouncil will provide an overview of the anticipated timeline and the approach for soliciting, evaluating and selecting the second set of Round 3 land protection projects.

“The Commonwealth has a long history of land conservation efforts that ensure the protection of the wetlands and waterways that are so critical to our quality of life,” said EEA Secretary Beaton. “These NRD settlement funds will continue those efforts by protecting the Housatonic River watershed – an area well-known for its biodiversity, unique habitat and natural beauty.”

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“Protecting wildlife habitat within the Housatonic watershed will help compensate for impacts to migratory birds and fish injured from the GE site,” said Supervisor Tom Chapman of the New England Field Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “This funding will also enable our conservation partners to protect open space that will provide opportunities for the public to enjoy natural areas within the watershed for generations to come.”

The settlement, originally filed as a consent decree in 2000, provided more than \$15 million to compensate Massachusetts and Connecticut for natural resource damages caused by the release of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from GE’s Pittsfield plant. PCB pollution affected aquatic wildlife and habitats, as well as waterfowl and predators that consume contaminated organisms. Massachusetts was awarded \$7.75 million of the settlement total.

In Round 1 of the restoration program, the MA SubCouncil awarded \$4 million for projects ranging from invasive species control and restoring river flow to implementing an environmental literacy program. In Round 2, the SubCouncil awarded \$1.3 million to five projects addressing habitat continuity restoration, wildlife resource protection, riparian buffer and floodplain forest restoration, invasive species control and educational programming. The estimated total value of funding for Round 3 projects (involving both sub-rounds) is \$2 million.

The MA SubCouncil representatives who administer settlement funds for Massachusetts are MassDEP NRD Coordinator Karen Pelto and USFWS NRD/Environmental Contaminants Supervisor Molly Sperduto.

Information about the Housatonic River Watershed Restoration Program in Massachusetts is available online at: www.ma-housatonicrestoration.org. Additional information can be obtained by contacting Karen Pelto at 617-292-5785 or by e-mail at karen.pelto@state.ma.us.

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