



MassDEP NEWS

Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection

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State and Federal Environmental Officials Propose an Additional \$500,000 for Land Protection and Habitat Conservation Projects in the Housatonic River Watershed

Public Invited to Public Meeting October 27 in Lenox Library

BOSTON – In the latest chapter of Massachusetts’ Housatonic River restoration funded by a \$15 million natural resource damage settlement with General Electric, federal and state environmental officials have proposed to fund the most recent round of land protection and habitat conservation projects with \$1.28 million.

The Massachusetts SubCouncil of the Housatonic River Natural Resource Trustees (MA SubCouncil) has proposed to allocate up to \$500,000 more in grant funds that will support the projects that are part of the Housatonic River Watershed Restoration Program.

The MA SubCouncil, comprised of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Executive Office of Energy and Environment Affairs (EEA), represented by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP), proposed the amendment to the Round 3 Restoration Plan/Supplemental Environmental Assessment for Land Protection and Habitat Conservation (Round 3 RP/SEA).

“The Commonwealth was pleased with the variety and strength of the proposals received for this round of funding under the Housatonic restoration program,” said **MassDEP Commissioner Martin Suuberg**. “We believe that increasing the amount of funding available will allow for the protection of hundreds of additional acres of a variety of habitat that will benefit the fish and wildlife population, as well as recreational users.”

“We would like to see these high-quality proposals receive funding,” said **Molly Spurduto, supervisor of the Service’s Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration program in New England**. “By getting these projects on the ground we, in partnership with local organizations, will be able to conserve hundreds of acres for the benefit of fish and wildlife and for the people that live in and visit the Housatonic River area.”

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The Round 3 RP/SEA was released in May 2013 and outlines the MA SubCouncil's Round 3 approach for the restoration program to restore, rehabilitate, replace or acquire the equivalent of injured natural resources or the services provided by those resources. This effort will disburse approximately \$2 million for the implementation of land protection and habitat conservation projects through two subrounds of funding as part of the General Electric/Housatonic River Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration case.

Under the first subround of Round 3 funding, the MA SubCouncil awarded a total of \$1,147,000 for three projects, resulting in conservation of more than 330 acres of wetland, stream, riparian and upland habitat within the Housatonic River Watershed in Massachusetts. After the first subround of funding, \$853,000 remains available for the second subround of Round 3 funding. Applications for the second subround of Round 3 funding were received on April 6, 2016, and are currently under review by the MA SubCouncil.

Following initial review of all proposals submitted for the second subround of Round 3 funding, the combined total cost of the proposed projects that the MA SubCouncil recommends for funding is \$1,287,000. This exceeds the remaining funds allocated for Round 3, and the proposed projects that are recommended by the MA SubCouncil will not be able to advance in the review process without approval of the proposed amendment to allocate an additional \$500,000 as part of Round 3.

The MA SubCouncil will host a public meeting to discuss the proposed amendment on Thursday, October 27, 2016, at 5:30 p.m. in the Lenox Library, 18 Main Street in Lenox. The meeting will include review of the proposed amendment and solicitation of comments in response to the proposed amendment.

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. Following completion of Round 3, a fourth and final round of funding is anticipated. If the proposed amendment is approved, approximately \$1.4 million will remain available for restoration projects in Massachusetts after the second subround of Round 3 projects are funded.

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

The Round 3 RP/SEA and the proposed amendment plan are available online at: www.ma-housatonicrestoration.org, and hard copies are available at the Lenox Library and other public libraries in the Housatonic River watershed in Massachusetts.

Information about the Housatonic River Watershed Restoration Program in Massachusetts is available online at: www.ma-housatonicrestoration.org.

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