



Housatonic River Natural Resource Restoration – *DRAFT Restoration Project Selection Procedure*



Public Information Meeting
May 11, 2005
Lee Town Hall
Lee, Massachusetts



IEc
INDUSTRIAL ECONOMICS, INCORPORATED

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Overview of Presentation

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Restoration Goals of the MA SubCouncil

- To utilize Natural Resource Damage (NRD) funds to implement compensatory restoration projects that address natural resource injuries in the Housatonic watershed;
- To restore, enhance, protect, conserve, replace and/or acquire the equivalent of natural resources and services that were injured;
- To provide sustainable and measurable benefits;
- To avoid adverse impacts resulting from restoration projects;



Restoration Goals of the MA SubCouncil

- To integrate public participation in the restoration process;
- To implement a suite of projects that benefit each of the Restoration Priority Categories and employ a variety of Restoration Project Types;
- To conduct projects in a phased manner so that projects with a potential to interact with yet-to-be-determined remedial activities are not excluded from funding until those potential interactions can be determined.



Restoration Priority Categories

Restoration projects must address at least one of the following categories:

- **Aquatic Biological Resources and Habitat**
- **Wildlife Resources and Habitat**
- **Recreational Uses**
- **Environmental Education and Outreach**

Applicants will identify the Predominant Restoration Priority Category. Secondary Restoration Priority Categories should be indicated as well.

The Evaluation Criteria recognize and give credit to projects that clearly benefit more than one category.

Goal: To implement at least one project per category in each funding round.



Restoration Project Types

Projects will be further identified by their general approach:

- **Resource-based projects** focus on and directly modify natural resources
- **Access-based projects** help ensure the public can utilize natural resources
- **Maintenance-based projects** help ensure the public's use and the ecological integrity of the watershed will be protected in the future.

The MA SubCouncil finds value in funding a variety of restoration approaches. This reflects the goal of addressing a broad range of restoration needs. Project scores are not directly affected by Restoration Project Type.



Overview of Solicitation Process – Phased Approach

- Solicitation of projects will take place in several rounds over many years.
- At least three solicitation rounds will be held.
- The Round 1 solicitation posting will take place following the completion of the RPSP.

- **Round 1:** Scheduled posting in 2005. Allocation of \$3.5 – \$4 million.
- **Round 2:** Scheduled posting in 2007. Allocation of \$1.5 - \$2 million.
- **Round 3:** To be posted after finalization of ROD for Rest of River, estimated in 2009. Allocation of \$1.5 - \$2.5, or balance of NRD funds.



Overview of Solicitation Process - Eligibility

Eligible applicants:

All private entities; local, state, federal and tribal governments; academic institutions; non-profit and commercial organizations.

Eligible projects:

Any project that would directly benefit injured natural resources and/or services in the Housatonic River watershed in Massachusetts.

Eligible project locations:

Projects may be conducted at any location, but they must directly benefit the injured natural resources and/or services in the Massachusetts portion of the Housatonic River watershed.



Overview of Solicitation Process - Method

The Round I solicitation posting will be online via Comm-PASS – the Commonwealth’s procurement and solicitation system.

Hard copies of the solicitation will be made available at public libraries, but applicants are responsible for consulting the official version online via Comm-PASS.

Prospective applicants will have the choice of two application formats:

Project Proposal Form –

to request funding to conduct a project themselves

Project Idea Form –

to present an idea, but not requesting funding to conduct the project themselves.



Overview of Project Evaluation & Selection

A **three-stage approach** will be used to evaluate and select projects.

1. Apply Threshold Criteria
2. Apply Evaluation Criteria
3. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Compliance

Please refer to the provided flow chart for a detailed overview of the process.

The blue-shaded boxes represent Public Information Meetings.



Public Involvement

The MA SubCouncil is committed to conducting an open and transparent process for the evaluation and selection of restoration projects to the extent possible given legal constraints such as state and federal procurement requirements.

Evaluation of Proposed Project Applications

Applications will be provided online and in hard copy at local libraries. Public comments will be considered simultaneous with the comments of the review team assembled by the MA SubCouncil.

This is a *unique method* that allows the MA SubCouncil to:

1. Provide equal access for the evaluation of applications by all members of the public, and
2. Fully comply with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) while minimizing expenditure of NRD funds on administrative costs.



Public Involvement, continued

Selection of Proposed Alternatives – Public comment on Preliminary Determination of Proposed Alternatives, based on results of the evaluation process. Proposed Alternatives proceed to Stage Three: NEPA/MEPA compliance.

DRAFT Programmatic Environmental Assessment – Public review and comment on overall approach of the Housatonic River restoration activities, per NEPA and MEPA requirements.

Selection of Preferred Alternatives – Public review and comment on restoration projects that are selected for implementation (i.e., DRAFT Restoration Plan).



Integrated Approach to Restoration Planning

- Restoration planning must comply with NEPA and MEPA.
- The MA SubCouncil is conducting a coordinated and integrated approach achieved in part through a Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA):
 - To address a group of similar or related actions as a whole;
 - To provide a means for evaluating categories of restoration projects that share strong similarities;
 - To enhance the ability to regard the ecosystem in a holistic fashion; and
 - To enable efficiencies in the NEPA compliance process.
- Fall 2005: Public info meeting, review and comment period on DRAFT PEA.
- Individual projects will still undergo NEPA evaluation and have additional documentation, when necessary.



Stage One: Threshold Criteria

- The Trustee members of the MA SubCouncil are solely responsible for applying the Threshold Criteria.
- Consistency with the goals of the MA SubCouncil, federal regulations and other applicable federal, state and local regulations and laws.
- Threshold Criterion #6 recognizes that adequate consideration of some proposed projects may be affected by yet-to-be-determined remedial activities. Projects may be granted “pending” status. Funding would be placed in reserve for Pending Preferred Alternatives.
- Public info meeting: Following MA SubCouncil’s application of the Threshold Criteria.
- Projects that meet the six Threshold Criteria proceed to Stage Two.



Stage Two: Evaluation Criteria

- This stage identifies the most appropriate and deserving projects for funding and implementation.
- A Review Team will review and evaluate the Project Applications.
 - Reviewers are state and federal government agency staff possessing relevant technical knowledge and experience.
 - Applications will be assigned based upon the reviewers' area of expertise.
 - At least three reviewers will evaluate each application.
 - Reviewers will not evaluate applications for which they are the applicant or have submitted letters of support.



Stage Two: Evaluation Criteria, continued

There are **26 Evaluation Criteria**:

- Relevance and Applicability of Project – 7 criteria. Maximum points = 85
- Technical Merit – 6 criteria. Maximum points = 65
- Project Budget – 6 criteria. Maximum points = 60
- Socioeconomic Merit – 7 criteria. Maximum points = 75

Scoring for each is a scale of High, Medium, and Low.

Scores for criteria are weighted.



Stage Two: Evaluation Process

1. Review team members score their assigned Project Application on an independent basis.
2. Each Application's review team meets to discuss their independent reviews.
3. The review team comes to a consensus-based score for the Application.
4. The review team's rationale is documented in a project evaluation summary, that includes the individual scores, as well as the consensus-based score.
5. All project evaluation summaries are provided to MA SubCouncil.
6. Projects are ranked within the Restoration Priority Categories.
7. Public Information Meeting held to present results of review teams' evaluation, provide project evaluation summaries and accept public comment.

Important issues to note...



Stage Two: Evaluation Process, continued

Public comment at this point is critical to the process.

The goal is to enable:

- Comment that is focused on the Project Applications, rather than exclusively on the results of the review teams' evaluation.
- Consideration of public comment at the same time the MA SubCouncil considers the results of the review teams' evaluation.

Scores provided by the review team are not the only factor in the MA SubCouncil's decision process but the scores will be an important indication of a project's merits according to the Evaluation Criteria, and relative to other projects.



Stage Two: Selection of Proposed Alternatives

- After close of public comment period, the MA SubCouncil will consider review team results and public comment.
- MA SubCouncil will make a preliminary determination of projects to proceed to Stage Three. These projects are the “Proposed Alternatives.”
- A Public Information Meeting will be held to:
 - Discuss MA SubCouncil’s review of all comments
 - Present the Preliminary Determination of Proposed Alternatives
 - Accept public comment. A comment period will follow.
- After consideration of all comments, Proposed Alternatives will be determined.
- Proposed Alternatives proceed to Stage Three: NEPA and MEPA Compliance.



Stage Three: NEPA and MEPA Compliance

- All Proposed Alternatives will be evaluated with respect to their potential environmental and socioeconomic impacts.
- The MA SubCouncil will draw upon information provided in applications.
- After NEPA compliance evaluations, MA SubCouncil will select the projects to be implemented. These are the “Preferred Alternatives.”
- Preferred Alternatives may be selected out of rank order due to a number of factors.
- The DRAFT Restoration Plan will be released indicating the Preferred Alternatives. A public review and comment period will take place.
- All public comments will be considered. The Restoration Plan will be finalized, and funding will be disbursed for project implementation.



Appendix: DRAFT Application Format

Project Proposal sections:

- Cover sheet -- Project overview, contact information.
- Abstract -- Will be widely disseminated as submitted.
- Narrative -- Addresses the Evaluation Criteria, including criteria statements to enable a fair and thorough evaluation process.
- Environmental and Socioeconomic Impacts -- NEPA and MEPA compliance.
- Project Budget -- Summary forms and narrative.



Tentative Schedule – subject to change

2005

- June: Finalize Restoration Project Selection Procedure (RPSP)
- July: Post Round I Solicitation (90-day solicitation)
- Sept: Deadline for Receipt of Applications
- Oct: Apply Threshold Criteria
- Dec: Complete Evaluation of Applications

2006

- Jan: Preliminary Determination of Proposed Alternatives
Begin NEPA Compliance Evaluation
- Mar: Determine Preferred Alternatives
- Apr: Release DRAFT Restoration Plan (30-day review period)
- July: Finalize Restoration Plan
- Fall: Disburse Funding for Round I Restoration Projects



Public Comment Period on DRAFT RPSP

- A PDF is available at: www.ma-housatonicrestoration.org and at public libraries in Great Barrington, Lee, Lenox, Pittsfield, Sheffield, and Stockbridge.
- Written comments are **due Friday, May 27, 2005**. Send to:

DRAFT RPSP Comments
Attn.: Mr. Michael Chelminski
Woodlot Alternatives, Inc.
30 Park Drive
Topsham, ME 04086

Or, by email to: mchelminski@woodlotalt.com
(Subject: DRAFT RPSP Comments)

- Thank you. *Your Comments and Questions on the DRAFT RPSP...*