

RI Habitat Restoration Team Meeting Notes July 20, 2011 (10:00 am -12:00pm)

Introduction and Recap of Last Meeting:

At the December HRT meeting, a few new working groups were formed and other existing groups identified that are focusing on issues related to specific habitat types. In general they are addressing planning, project prioritization and legislative issues related to restoration of their specific habitats. Currently, there are shellfish and river restoration working groups, an eelgrass mapping taskforce, a RIDEM-based freshwater wetlands restoration strategy working group, as well as the RI Natural History Survey's Forest Health Works and Rhody Native initiatives. One of the purposes for convening the statewide Habitat Restoration Team is so that representatives of these groups can provide updates on their progress to the broader restoration community.

Housekeeping Items:

Since December, a new webpage has been created within the CRMC website specifically for Habitat Restoration Team information. The link is www.crmc.ri.gov/habrestteam.html

Features of the page:

- Calendar of events
- Funding opportunities
- Restoration planning efforts (links to working groups)
- Partners

We will be adding a Google Maps-based Maps section that will contain similar information to the Restoration Portal maps. HRT meeting notes will also be posted on this site. Look to this site and the RI-RESTORATION listserv for updates.

There was a request to try to schedule some meetings later for people who cannot attend during the work day. We will try to accommodate this request with both the Habitat Restoration Team meetings and the working group meetings.

Restoration Working Groups:

Rivers Restoration Group (update from Tom Ardito, NBEP)

The Rivers Restoration group, headed by Tom Ardito of the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program and Rachel Calabro from Save the Bay has met consistently since its formation in December. Their goal is to identify restoration needs and local priorities for each watershed. They have solicited information from watershed groups and are putting policy recommendations and restoration priorities together in a white paper (draft to be completed in September).

The last meeting's discussion included the need for a consistent source of river restoration funding, as well as statewide policy and legislative issues regarding dam ownership, sediment sampling, etc. There was also a presentation by Kathryn Zuromsky on the NRCS Stream Continuity Project. The project's funding will end in September. A

new sponsor for the project is needed, or possibly a network of volunteers to continue the work in other watersheds (e.g. possibly through watershed organizations or URI Watershed Watch?). Kathryn is willing to provide forms and along with Rachel Calabro could train volunteers to do the assessments.

Legislative news this session: Of three bills concerning dams / dam removal one has passed that allows municipalities to access funding through the Clean Water Finance Agency for the maintenance, repair and removal of impaired dams. Those bills not passed included the requirement that dam owners inspect their own dams (DEM will no longer conduct inspections after 2014). There is continued interest to try to pass this bill, (DEM is supportive). The other bill not passed would require that dam Notices of Violation be recorded to the property deed. A list of current NOV's has been issued by DEM. Mid-session, Miller and Marciella passed the removal of a clause in the 1915 act that created the Scituate Reservoir that stated that, "Providence shall maintain the Pawtuxet Falls Dam." This was removed to allow the Pawtuxet River Authority to continue with the removal of portions of the Pawtuxet Falls Dam.

Rhode Island Technical Shellfish Working Group (update from Bryan DeAngelis, NOAA Restoration Center)

This group had formed shortly before the December meeting of the Habitat Restoration Team. It includes representatives from CRMC, DEM, NOAA, URI, RWU, TNC, STB as well as the commercial sector. The goal of the group is to foster communication and provide technical assistance for restoration projects. Sub groups have been formed to address several issues, including site selection, water quality, monitoring metrics, community outreach, commercial regulations and permitting issues.

Through a direct appropriation from NOAA, funding has been provided to Roger Williams University for a state shellfish coordinator, Matt Griffin, who will help to coordinate restoration efforts throughout the state. Matt has developed a state monitoring and metrics plan for oysters. He has also performed a statewide preliminary assessment of restoration projects and natural shellfish beds. All restoration sites have been identified, and as part of Tier 1 Matt will be assessing population dynamics, disease testing, larval recruitment monitoring, larval production, etc. He will present his findings this winter. He is also working on other species, but on an individual project basis.

Eelgrass Mapping Taskforce (update from Marci Cole-Ekberg, Save the Bay)

The eelgrass mapping taskforce has recommended a 3 tiered monitoring effort:

Tier 1: STB planting

Tier 2: Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve monitoring

Tier 3: Mapping overflights

Flights should occur in the next few days, followed by ground-truthing in August.

A special thanks to all the groups that provided funding for this project.

Rhody Native: (update from Caitlin Chaffee on behalf of Hope Leeson, RINHS)

The Rhody Native initiative is a native plant propagation and marketing effort to supply local growers and restoration practitioners with plant stock that is native to Rhode Island. To date, they have produced about 7,000 plugs, some of which will be available through nurseries. Herbaceous plants will be available this fall, trees and shrubs in the coming years. The group is looking for feedback from restoration groups to identify demand for particular species. Contact Hope Leeson (hleeson@rinhs.org) or Vanessa Venturini (Vanessa@uri.edu) for information on what is currently available or to suggest species for future propagation efforts.

The program will be hosting 5 propagation training workshops for growers and other interested groups this fall and winter. As part of the training there will be a panel discussion sometime in January or February of 2012; they would like a representative from the restoration community to sit on the panel (contact Vanessa if interested). You can also track the group's progress on their Facebook page.

The Pawtuxet Project is trying to work with Rhody Native to get planting material for their project. Blackstone Forest Health is also looking to work with them. They are also working on mapping the old growth forested area.

Freshwater Wetlands Restoration Strategy Working Group: (Carol Murphy, RIDEM)

This working group has provided advice and guidance to RIDEM on the development of a statewide freshwater wetland restoration strategy. There was a delay in the strategy development after the final advisory group meeting in November 2010, due to an unexpected staffing disruption. Currently, RIDEM is working with a wetland policy intern to complete the database and fill in gaps on completed wetland (and related) restoration projects, and is working with a New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWPCC) consultant to write the draft strategy. The strategy outline is organized around the advisory meeting topics. The group met 5 times in 2010 (information is posted on the project website at www.dem.ri.gov/programs/benviron/water/wetlands/rsdev.htm). A review draft of the freshwater wetland restoration strategy will be made available to the working group and posted to the website likely in September 2011.

Individual Restoration Projects:

Oyster restoration in Ninigret Pond (update from Chris Littlefield, The Nature Conservancy)

Phase 1 of this project is to collect shell from various restaurants and processors throughout the state to recycle as substrate. This has been going well, and they are exceeding the original planned amount of 25 yards. Steven Brown has been hired to run monitoring efforts, as well as Dylan McNulty. They have had spat collectors out for a couple of weeks, and found that most recruitment and settlement occurs in the eastern basin of the pond. They have identified a few potential restoration sites, some of which are within the existing spawner sanctuary, some are outside. Currently pursuing

permits for Phase 2, which will include the installation of shell substrate. Hope to install in late May or June 2012.

Bryan DeAngelis added that Marta Gomez-Chiarri (URI) has been volunteering her time to test disease in oysters, and has been working to create a database to house disease sampling data as well as data on commercial shellfishing sites and restoration sites. She is working with Dr. DiPippio of Computer Sciences at URI to develop this database. It will be multi-dimensional to hold information across multiple years, sites, diseases, etc. The goal is to make this a state-wide database.

Wood-Pawcatuck (update from Chris Fox, Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association):

The dam at Lower Shannock falls was removed in summer 2010, and modifications to the three weirs that were installed need to be made. Two of the weirs will have stones added to raise their elevation and mitigate turbulence. Construction of the modifications will occur in summer 2011 and will be dictated by the river and accessibility.

Horseshoe Falls fish ladder construction is under way and will include an eelway ramp, designed with a floating (self regulated) exit that will not require solar panels for a pump. Installation will occur this fall (hopefully finalized by mid December.) Working on Kenyon Mill Dam, hope to make a decision on the restoration alternative by late September and begin construction in 2012. They are currently 5 spawning seasons ahead of the original goal to restore passage to Wordens Pond thanks to the infusion of NOAA ARRA funding in 2009. Those interested can visit the WPWA website to see weekly updates on the Horseshoe Falls Dam Restoration at <http://www.wpwa.org/shannock.htm> (creation of fish ladder, repair of raceways, and installation of eelway. Photos of the Lower Shannock Falls dam removal are posted there as well.

Ten Mile River (update from Caitlin Chaffee of CRMC, Wenley Ferguson of STB, Larry Oliver of USACE)

Construction is in progress at Hunts Mills, and Turner Reservoir. The Omega Pond project is currently out to bid. Sand bags have been removed at Hunts Mills and water is flowing through the structure. (Horseshoe Falls on the Pawcatuck currently offers a good opportunity to see this type of dam dewatered).

Pawtuxet Falls Dam Removal (update from Tom Ardito, NBEP)

A construction contract for the project has been awarded to SumCo Eco-Restoration. They are hoping to mobilize first week of August. Access agreements are currently being finalized. SumCo has a very innovative dewatering plan that includes installation of a steel plate behind the back side of the dam that will be used as a gate. Sandbags will be used to create sectional coffer dams. A hydraulic hammer will be used to remove the dam in small segments (permit calls for lowering water elevation no more than 6 inches per day). There will be a channel cut into the bedrock to ensure low flow passage. Dick Quinn will be working with SumCo to evaluate fish passage. Planting is a large component of this project. Planting will occur on both sides of the river upstream

of the dam to Rhodes-on-the-Pawtuxet. Construction will be staged at Hunte's Garage. SumCo will position a crane on the back lot. There are some concerns with the floodwall but the crane company is insured and they are convinced it will remain stable. Planting upstream will start in September, downstream (immediately adjacent to dam) will occur right after removal.

An old timber water control structure upstream a couple of miles below Pontiac Dam (downstream of Rt. 37) has been identified as a navigation hazard and deterrent to fish passage. The project team is working to wrap the removal of this structure into the Pawtuxet removal project through a permit modification (DEM is receptive to this idea). PRA is looking to make access to the dam area safer, possibly by creating a "maintenance pathway" down to the river's edge. This would also require a permit modification. Next steps on the Pawtuxet are to look upstream to Pontac Dam, Natic Dam, Bellafont Brook. The project team will be looking to submit a proposal to CRMC for a feasibility study.

Roger Williams Park Water Quality Improvement Project

This is a habitat project focusing on water quality, as well as a general aesthetic improvement of the Roger Williams Park ponds. Horsley-Whitten is the consulting firm working on the master plan. The project will also involve the USDA APHIS group to control Canada geese. The project has a lot of support, but it is moving slowly due to funding stream going through Providence. A recent site visit identified more than 27 restoration options for improving stormwater issues. The master plan will identify future restoration actions that will be feasible beyond the scope of this project, which will include 5 BMP pilot projects, geese abatement, and fish tissue sampling, as well as water and sediment sampling.

Shady Lea Dam Removal (update from Rachel Calabro, STB)

The mill pond at Shady Lea is a candidate for dam removal, and has potential as an alewife restoration project. Funding has been secured through the NRCS EQIP program for the actual removal to begin this fall. The ultimate goal is to restore fish access to Silver Lake.

Fish Passage in the Salt Ponds Region

There was a question from T. Ardito regarding the status of fish passage restoration in the Salt Pond region, specifically related to Factory and Cross Mills Ponds. A bypass channel has been installed at Factory Brook/Pond, however there are landowner issues at a dam downstream on Factory Brook. CRMC and RIDEM are working to pursue avenues for getting around the landowner issue. Cross Mills had originally been part of the South Coast USACE restoration project, but ran into landowner issues. W. Ferguson noted that there is a perched culvert at Teal Road that might be restrictive to fish passage. Phil Edwards from RIDEM noted that it is not restrictive, but should be on the list for future repairs as a culvert replacement.

Save the Bay Scallop Restoration and Salt Marsh Restoration (M. Cole-Ekberg and W. Ferguson)

The Save the Bay scallop restoration project has built upon North Cape shellfish restoration project, and has included seeding of scallops and the creation of caged spawner sanctuaries. Spat bag analysis continues in Ninigret, Point Judith, and Quonnie Ponds. See the Volunteer Opportunities page on the STB website if you are interested in volunteering.

Gooseneck cove also has volunteer work every other week (“dig days”), to clear out small areas within creeks to enhance drainage off the high marsh. The marsh is subsiding due to standing water and much work needs to be done. This condition of standing water, filamentous algae growth, *S. patens* die-off and subsidence can be seen in many marshes throughout the state, including Misquamicut marsh, along the Narrow River and in Wickford Cove. It can be easily identified by the signature bright green color of the algae growing in the shallow pools on spring aerial photos. The standing water is too hot and toxic for fish habitat, and therefore suitable breeding area for mosquitoes. This is likely the beginning of SLR problems, as well as the loss of sediment due to roads building up in areas blocking the overwash of sand. Subsiding high marsh areas may be a good place to put dredged material. The real need is fine and sandy sediments. There is an opportunity for studying the sediment types and where and how they can be moved to provide the best benefit. An initial recommendation would be to perform visual assessments of marshes every 3 to 5 years in addition to typical monitoring. Since it seems to be a widespread problem and a potential large-scale restoration initiative, this may be a good topic for a future meeting, or for a salt marsh working group to address.

Sachuest Marsh (M. Cole-Ekberg)

At Sachuest, the Maidford River outlet had closed. Newport has been drawing water for their reservoirs, exasperating the problem. Restoration occurred about 12 years ago, but the outlet has since filled in, causing drainage and mosquito problems. This is a big project that will be looking to the Habitat Restoration Trust Fund for funding this year. This is likely causing beach closure problems as well. Middletown is most impacted, but Newport plays a significant role.

Blackstone River Fish Passage

RIDEM is now managing the Blackstone fish passage projects. Elizabeth Webbing Dam is moving forward; currently property access issues are being addressed. All restoration options are still on the table Elizabeth Webbing. Not much additional detail available for the other Blackstone projects.

Funding Opportunities:

State Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration Trust Fund (C. Chaffee)

Preproposals for the Trust Fund will be due in November. The RFP will likely be issued in early September this year. Please touch base with Caitlin if you think you may

be applying. (Total available is \$225,000, typical \$50,000 per project.) **Caitlin will be on maternity leave from late September through December.**

RIDEM Office of Water Resources Funding (Carol Murphy. RIDEM)

As the restoration Bond funds are all obligated, no additional RFPs will be issued. It is possible that another RFP will be issued for 319 funding, but not certain at this time. There is financing available to public government entities, in the form of loans, through the State Revolving Fund including for dam removal projects, which may be considered water pollution control projects. There is a project prioritization process.

DEM will be undertaking a "Clean Watersheds" needs survey project which is EPA driven. DEM will be hiring a consultant, and public entities will be contacted via the survey to identify capital needs. Non-point source abatement and habitat restoration projects may be identified by survey participants. The current funding focus is on needs related to RIPDES and wastewater programs.