Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration Trust Fund

R.I.G.L.CHAPTER 46-23.1

Projects Approved for Funding
FY2008

Application and Approval Process

The Coastal and Estuary Habitat Restoration Program and Trust Fund legislation, which allocates $250,000 from the Oil Spill Prevention, Administration and Response Fund (OSPAR), established within the Coastal Resources Management Council a Rhode Island coastal and estuarine habitat restoration trust fund. Pursuant to the legislation, the "trust shall be available for disbursement by the council in accordance with the restrictions and purposes of this chapter and subject to an annual appropriation by the legislature." (RIGL §46-23.1-3).

The Rhode Island Habitat Restoration Team, an advisory technical committee as mandated by the Coastal and Estuary Habitat Restoration Program and Trust Fund, drafted and adopted the State Estuary and Coastal Habitat Restoration Strategy. This program describes the state's coastal and estuarine habitats, restoration goals, inventory of restoration projects, projected comprehensive budget and timeline to complete the goals, funding sources, outreach elements, and provisions for updating the plan and project inventory.

The Team met on January 9, 2008 to evaluate submitted project proposals and make funding recommendations to the Coastal Resources Management Council for FY2007. On January 22, 2008, the Council unanimously approved funding for nine coastal habitat restoration projects chosen by the Restoration Team. An open and competitive state-wide process was used to solicit applications for projects that seek to restore coastal and estuarine habitats including seagrass beds, salt marshes and river systems. The information requested from the applicants that was used to evaluate each project included: the type of restoration initiative to take place, the historical impact to the site, the natural resources benefited and impacted (target species), any physical, ecological, biological, cultural/historical, geological and survey data collected to date, a site map, any available aerial photography and photographs of the site, preliminary restoration drawings, maps and engineering plans, and proof of property owner permission for the restoration activity to take place. Projects were evaluated and ranked for funding based on these factors to be considered for the purposes of granting monies for estuary and coastal habitat restoration activities, as stated in the legislation:

> (1) consistency with the state estuary and coastal habitat restoration strategy, the Narragansett Bay comprehensive conservation and management plan, the state coastal nonpoint pollution control plan, the coastal resources management program, the department of environmental management regulations, and pertinent elements of the state guide plan;
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> (2) the ability of the applicant to provide adequate personnel funding, and authority to carry out and properly maintain the estuary and coastal habitat restoration activity;
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> (3) the proposed monitoring plan to ensure that short-term and long-term restoration goals are achieved;
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> (4) the effectiveness of any nonpoint source pollution management efforts upstream and the likelihood of re-impairment;
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> (5) whether the estuary and coastal habitat restoration activity can be shown to replace habitat losses that benefit fish and wildlife resources;
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> (6) potential water quality improvements;

(7) potential improvements to fish and wildlife habitats for species which are identified as rare or endangered by the Rhode Island Natural History Survey or the federal Endangered Species Act;

(8) the level and extent of collaboration by partners (e.g., municipality, nongovernmental organization, watershed council, federal agency, etc.); and

(9) potential direct economic benefit to a community or the state.

FY2008 Project Descriptions

Ten Mile River Fish Passage Restoration, East Providence
Award: $100,000

Turner Reservoir Dam

Omega Pond Dam

Hunts Mills Dam *(photos courtesy of RIDEM)*

Lead Organization: RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)
Partners: US Army Corps of Engineers, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

The goal of this project is to restore habitat for several species of diadromous fish on the Ten Mile River system in East Providence, Rhode Island. Large numbers of anadromous river herring (alewives and bluebacks), American shad and catadromous American eels migrate inland from coastal waters each year, but obstructions such as dams impede migrants in reaching appropriate upstream habitat. According to the Atlantic Marine States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), harvest pressure and habitat loss are listed as the primary causes of any possible historic and recent decline in abundance of fish populations.

The awarded funds will be used for labor and materials to construct Denil fishways and eel passages at Omega Pond Dam, Hunts Mill Dam, and Turner Reservoir Dam. The three new fishways will provide anadromous river herring and American shad access to valuable nursery and spawning habitat. The three new eel passages will connect the Ten Mile River with Narragansett Bay and provide prime fish habitat which was previously limited due to the obstructions.

Woonasquatucket River Paragon Dam Fish Passage Restoration, Providence
Award: $40,000

Photo courtesy of WRWC

Lead Organization: Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council (WRWC)
Partners: US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), USDA NRCS, RI Foundation

The proposed project is part of a larger restoration effort that will enhance depleted spawning populations of river herring and possibly shad. River herring have been observed below the first dam. Fish passage in the lower Woonasquatucket River, a federally designated "American Heritage River", is currently obstructed by five abandoned mill dams. Preliminary surveys by state and federal fisheries biologists have found suitable habitat and conditions for river herring (blueback herring and alewife) and possibly American shad in the lower river. Restoration of river herring to the Woonasquatucket River will provide ecological benefits to the river and upper Narragansett Bay by restoring historic anadromous fish spawning and rearing areas.

The Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council is currently partnering with federal, state, and local agencies and private developers to restore fish passage through the first five obstructions on the River. All five dam structures located in the lower 5 miles of the Woonasquatucket River are old mill dams comprised of either stone or concrete.

In September 2007, thanks in part to funding by the Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration Trust Fund, the first fish ladder was completed at Rising Sun Mills dam, the first dam on the Woonasquatucket. With passage at the first dam secured, the awarded funds will support a partial removal of the second dam, Paragon only .25 miles upstream from Rising Sun.

Blackstone River Fish Passage Restoration, Pawtucket
Award: $35,000

Slater Mill Dam

Main Street Dam *(Photos courtesy of BRWC)*

Lead Organization: Blackstone River Watershed Council (BRWC)
Project Partners: USDA NRCS, Pawtucket Hydro, Inc., Town of Lincoln, City of Pawtucket, Town of Central Falls, Town of Cumberland

The Blackstone River once supported large native spawning runs of Atlantic salmon, American shad, and two species of river herring (alewife and blueback herring). However, the Blackstone's anadromous fish runs were destroyed by dam construction in the 1700s.

The purpose of the restoration project is to restore anadromous fish passage across the first four dams on the lower Blackstone River. The goal is to restore the Blackstone anadromous fish runs that have been obstructed for nearly 200 years. This project will improve the riverine ecosystem, increase recreational opportunities for activities such as fishing, canoeing, kayaking, and historic tours, and provide economic benefits for four towns in the project area. The awarded funds will provide non-federal match for construction of fish passage facilities on the first two dams on the lower Blackstone, Main Street Dam and Slater Mill Dam, both in Pawtucket, R.I.

Pawcatuck River Lower Shannock Falls Fish Passage Restoration, Richmond
Award: $35,000


Photos courtesy of WPWA

Lead Organization: Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association (WPWA)
Project Partners: USFWS, NOAA, Trout Unlimited, Town of Richmond

The award for this project will fund the supplemental assessment, design, planning coordination, and permitting of the Lower Shannock Falls Dam removal (aka Shannock Mill Pond Dam), and abandonment of the adjacent mill race, as the next step to restoring fish passage at the final three dams on the upper Pawcatuck River.

The Shannock Fish Passage Feasibility Study and Cultural Resource Assessment were completed in the summer of 2007 with funding from RI Coastal and Estuary Habitat Restoration Trust, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) through the NOAA-American Rivers Partnership, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association (WPWA). These studies assessed fish passage alternatives at Lower Shannock Falls Dam, Horseshoe Falls Dam, and Kenyon Dam.

The primary goal in initiating the Feasibility Study is achieving passage at these dams and opening the Pawcatuck River system to nearly 1300 acres of upstream spawning and rearing habitat for diadromous fish. A secondary goal is to restore native riverine habitat and connectivity to benefit resident freshwater fish species.

Silver Creek Salt Marsh Restoration, Bristol
Award: $10,000

Photos courtesy of Town of Bristol

Lead Organization: Town of Bristol
Project Partners: USDA NRCS, RI DEM (Historic Parks Grant Program)

Silver Creek is a thirteen acre, tidal estuary on the eastern shore of Bristol Harbor. The creek is tidally restricted by a former railroad bridge (the East Bay bike path), the Route 114 bridge, and a town-owned foot bridge which have restricted tidal flow into the marsh. These restrictions have impounded freshwater, diminished connectivity with Narragansett Bay, and have allowed for the expansion of *Phragmites australis* in the salt marsh.

The goals of this restoration project are to improve the tidal flushing to the creek, reduce the amount of *Phragmites australis* in the upper marsh, restore the native salt marsh plant community, reduce the impounded water in the marsh, reduce mosquito breeding habitat and reestablish vegetation on mud flats in the lower marsh. The awarded state funds will be used to match NRCS Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) funds secured by the Town of Bristol to remove the existing foot bridge and fill and replace it with a new bridge and elevated boardwalk across the marsh and to create a perimeter creek, excavate existing creeks in the upper portion of the salt marsh and treat and mulch the *Phragmites australis*.

Restoring the tidal hydrology to this 13 acre marsh will result in reestablished characteristic high and low salt marsh plant communities, decreased density, height, and vigor of the invasive plant, *Phragmites australis*, and increased density and diversity of recreational and commercially important fish species.

DEM Mosquito Abatement Coordination Unit Equipment Request
Award: $5,000

Photo courtesy of DEM

Lead Organization: RIDEM Mosquito Abatement Coordination Unit
Project Partners: USDA NRCS, RIDEM

This award will match funds from RIDEM to purchase equipment for the Mosquito Abatement Coordination Unit's Low Ground Pressure Utility Vehicle, which is made available for salt marsh restoration projects throughout the state at little to no cost. The equipment allows operators to perform excavation on salt marshes for restoration purposes with minimal negative environmental impacts.