



# News Release

## EPA and Massachusetts Aquatic Habitat Restoration Partners Celebrate American Wetlands Month

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(Ipswich, Mass. - May 30, 2007) – EPA, along with senior Massachusetts environmental officials and other partners, today celebrated wetlands protection efforts in the Commonwealth. Gathering at The Trustees of Reservations Crane Estate in Ipswich, in the middle of the beautiful Great Marsh, EPA and state officials spoke to the many restoration successes achieved in recent years and highlighted future needs and opportunities for aquatic habitat restoration throughout Massachusetts.

Even as existing laws and programs protect and preserve natural resources and open space, there is an increasing role for government agencies, communities and other organizations to combine efforts and restore damaged wetlands, rivers, lakes and coastal-ocean habitats. Over one-third of all Massachusetts wetlands have been lost to historic development, and thousands of acres remain degraded by pollution, invasive species, and other impacts. Massachusetts rivers are blocked and fragmented by over 3,000 dams, and a growing number – including the Ipswich River – are highly stressed by low flows resulting from increased human demand on water resources. Marine fisheries and their habitats have suffered steep declines in recent decades and over 50% of existing fish passages are not functioning properly.

“EPA is proud to work with our state partners to protect New England wetlands,” said Stephen Perkins, Director of the Office of Ecosystem Protection at EPA New England. “These often overlooked ecosystems provide huge benefits to our communities, including flood control, natural water filtration, wildlife habitat and open space.”

“Massachusetts is a national leader in the field of aquatic habitat restoration – and for good reason,” Massachusetts Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian Bowles said. “Healthy aquatic habitats form a vital natural infrastructure that supports fisheries, improves water quality, preserves biodiversity, provides flood control, and encourages tourism. In other words, these habits contribute to an improved quality of life for Massachusetts residents.”

Healthy aquatic habitats support fisheries resources, improve water quality, maintain biodiversity, protect people and property from flooding, provide recreational opportunities, sustain drinking water supplies, encourage tourism, and enhance scenic quality and community character. A recent study commissioned by the Massachusetts Audubon Society concluded that the total annual value of ecosystem services provided by freshwater and saltwater wetlands and bays in Massachusetts is conservatively estimated at over \$2.5 billion per year. Together, they form a natural infrastructure for Massachusetts with significant contributions to our way of life and the well-being of our communities.

Fortunately, over the past decade, citizens and organizations across Massachusetts have developed remarkably effective partnerships to bring renewed life to some of these degraded environments. Aquatic restoration projects in Massachusetts are built upon a proven partnership model -- the Partnership to Restore Massachusetts Aquatic Habitats -- that draws support and participation from all sectors of our society:

government, corporate, non-profit, and individual citizen. From the coastal regions to the Berkshires, restoration partners have achieved exceptional results. Whether restoring inland rivers, wetlands, and lakes, or habitats throughout the coastal zone, all partners share a common mission: working together to bring back the ecological integrity of the Commonwealth's aquatic habitats.

As population, development, and resource consumption continue to increase, the need to maintain and restore the health of aquatic habitats for water supplies, flood protection, and water quality will continue to grow in importance. Despite the proven effectiveness of existing partnerships, there is a pressing need to increase the capacity, resources, and public support for restoration state-wide. The partners attending the event today are committed to advancing these goals and working with communities to achieve greater restoration results.

Other speakers from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management, and the City of Gloucester focused on restoration accomplishments within the 25,000-acre Great Marsh region on Massachusetts' North Shore. Potential restoration projects from the Great Marsh Restoration Plan, a blueprint that identifies more than 100 potential salt marsh restoration opportunities, were also highlighted.

More information:

EPA Wetlands in New England (<http://www.epa.gov/region1/topics/ecosystems/wetlands.html>)

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