

CRMC funds 10 habitat restoration projects

March 22, 2010, WAKEFIELD The RI Coastal Resources Management Council has awarded funding for 10 habitat restoration projects through its RI Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration Trust Fund.

The Council approved the funding at the March 9 semi-monthly meeting in Providence. Projects approved for funding include two marsh restoration projects, five fish passage restoration projects, a shellfish restoration project and one upland restoration and invasive species management project. The remainder of the funding will be used to purchase low ground pressure equipment for the R.I. Department of Environmental Management (DEM), which will be made available for use in habitat restoration projects statewide.

The CRMC continues to see a variety of restoration project proposals come in annually, including a shellfish restoration project this year, said CRMC Chairman Michael M. Tikoian. In its seventh year of funding, it is a testament to the program that we now have such a competitive selection process. Rhode Island's coastal and estuarine habitats and all Rhode Islanders continue to reap the benefits of this program.

The Council awarded \$50,000 to the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association for the continuation of the Lower Shannock Falls Fish Passage Restoration project in Richmond and Charlestown. This project includes removal of the Lower Shannock Falls Dam, which was funded in FY 2008. Completion of the project will open the Pawcatuck River system to nearly 1,300 acres of upstream spawning and rearing habitat for diadromous fish.

The Council also awarded \$50,000 to the Blackstone River Watershed Council/Friends of the Blackstone for the Blackstone River Fish Passage Project, Main Street and Slater Mill Dam. The project will restore diadromous fish passage across the first four dams on the lower Blackstone River and re-establish historic fishing runs. It will improve the riverine ecosystem and improve recreational uses of the river. The funds will be used toward construction of the first two dams on the lower portion of the river, Main Street Dam and Slater Mill Dam, both in Pawtucket. This project received funding in FY 2008 from the Trust Fund.

The Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council received \$9,000 in funding for the Manton Pond Dam Fish Passage project in Johnston. The project will restore fish passage to the entire length of the lower Woonasquatucket River through Manton Pond, which is prime fish spawning habitat. Trust Fund monies will be combined with previous years' funds with the NRCS and USFWS match to plan a nature-like fishway at Manton Pond Dam. The fishway will allow diadromous and native freshwater species to move freely between the pond and the river.

The WRWC also received \$9,000 for the continued restoration of the Paragon Dam Fish Passage. The project, part of a larger restoration effort, will enhance depleted spawning populations of river herring and possibly shad. Woonasquatucket River is currently obstructed by five abandoned mill dams; all five are located in the lower five miles of the river: Rising Sun, Paragon, Atlantic Mills, Dyerville and Manton Pond dams. This larger dam removal project has received Trust Fund monies in past years and the goal is for removal of all five dams.

The Council also approved \$ 6,891 in funds toward the Allins Cove Invasives Control and Upland Restoration project in Barrington. The Barrington Land Conservation Trust will restore 3.5 acres of land abutting Allin s Cove by replacing invasive *Phragmites australis* and Japanese knotweed with native grasses, shrubs and trees in three locations adjacent to the cove. In 2005 the US Army Corps of Engineers conducted a salt marsh restoration project by removing historic fill highly populated by *Phragmites* and depositing it upland. This area, subsequently became populated with the invasive species. Japanese knotweed also became established in the area along Byway Road, the site of the new entrance to the cove. The plant has also grown along the inner marsh s bank as a result of the mechanical grading during the restoration project.

The Buckeye Brook Coalition was awarded \$1,450 in funds toward the Buckeye Brook Brackish Marsh Restoration project in Warwick. The project will restore a native marsh in the upper brook by treating *Phragmites australis* that has become established and in recent years has been expanding. The Coalition will use the funds to treat the area with herbicide over a three-year period, after which an assessment will be completed to determine success. Buckeye Brook is one of the few tributaries to Narragansett Bay that was not dammed historically, and it also supports one of the state s remaining natural herring runs.

The Trust Fund also provided \$2,000 to the DEM for the maintenance of low-ground-pressure equipment that will be used to excavate and transport soil from salt marsh water restoration projects.

The Narragansett Bay Estuary Program was awarded partial funding in the amount of \$41,659 toward the Lower Pawtuxet River Ecosystem Restoration project. This project will restore migratory fish passage and river ecosystem functions to 7.5 river miles and wetlands by breaching Pawtuxet Falls Dam. This award will specifically be aimed at management of river sediments related to dam removal.

The Council awarded \$40,000 in partial funding to The Nature Conservancy for the restoration of hard clams in Rhode Island s salt ponds. The project seeks to improve ecosystem function in Ninigret Pond by restoring a self-sustaining hard clam population within a RI Department of Environmental Management-designated shellfish spawner sanctuary. The project will improve water clarity, increase juvenile hard clam recruitment throughout the pond, and create important bottom structure and improved benthic habitat for many other species.

The Council provided partial funding in the amount of \$15,000 to the Jamestown Conservation Commission for its Round Marsh Salt Marsh Restoration project. The project will reduce the spread of *Phragmites* in the eastern portion of the marsh and restore conditions conducive for native salt marsh vegetation by maintaining existing marsh channels and creating a new channel to restore tidal flow to the easternmost portion of the marsh.

Habitat restoration projects are funded through the RI Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration Trust Fund and are selected from recommendations by the RI Habitat Restoration Team, established by CRMC, Save The Bay and the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program in 1998. Members of the team serve as a technical advisory committee for the CRMC as required by law. Funds for the program come from the state s Oil Spill Prevention Administration and Response Act (OSPAR), established by the legislature following the 1996 North Cape oil spill. Each year, the Trust Fund and CRMC receive \$225,000 from the OSPAR account to fund habitat restoration projects in the state.

To date and including this year, the Trust Fund has awarded \$1.65 million for 58 projects, which have leveraged more than \$16 million in matching funds. This year s funding leveraged more than \$4 million, at a leverage ratio of 18 to 1.

The full 2009-2010 Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration Trust Fund report will be available on CRMC s web site at <http://www.crmc.ri.gov/habitatrestoration.html>. *Photos of the projects are available upon request*

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