FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
BRADFORD DAM REMOVAL PROJECT
WESTERLY AND HOPKINTON, RHODE ISLAND

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), in partnership with the Nature Conservancy and other partners, is proposing to complete the Bradford Dam Removal Project, which occurs on the town border of Westerly and Hopkinton, Rhode Island. The purpose of the proposed project is to restore fish passage to the Pawcatuck River and eliminate risks to life and property associated with the existing obsolete Bradford Dam (Dam).

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulation [CFR] 1500-1508), and the implementing regulation (36 CFR 800). The EA analyzes the impacts of two alternatives on the human environment, including the Proposed Action - Dam Removal with Installation of Rock Ramp and Grade Control Structure and a No Action Alternative. Additional alternatives were considered early on in the analysis and dismissed because of impacts to public infrastructure and several rare habitats.

The Proposed Action will have a net ecological benefit by reconnecting 31 miles of habitat for American shad (Alosa sapidissima), alewife (Alosa pseudoharengus), blueback herring (Alosa aestivalis), American eel (Anguilla rostrata), and other aquatic organisms within the watershed. The project complements the Service’s ongoing efforts to restore diadromous and resident fishery populations within the Pawcatuck River Watershed. The Project will also enhance public safety by reducing flooding upstream of the Dam, removing the potential of a catastrophic dam breach, and eliminating a boating hazard. Under the No Action Alternative, the Dam would be left in place and historical spawning and rearing habitat would continue to be inaccessible to migratory fishes.

The Proposed Action alternative proposes the removal and replacement of Bradford Dam and existing Denil fishway with a rock ramp system and new grade control structure designed to provide effective fish passage, while resulting in minimal impacts to upstream water levels and natural resource areas. The crest of the grade control structure is designed with notches to provide safe and effective fish passage and a top (crest) elevation slightly lower than that of the existing Dam to maintain existing baseflow conditions.

In-channel river work will extend from approximately 220 feet upstream of Bradford Dam to approximately 300 feet downstream. Work within this area will consist of removal of the dam structure and any associated remnant concrete, stones, and fill upstream and downstream of the Dam except for a 25-foot section attached to the existing mill building on river left. The remaining 25-foot section of the Dam will be left in place to provide support to the adjacent mill building foundation. In addition, a permanent earthen barrier at the upstream end of the millrace on river left will be constructed, along with the placement of fill and stone to protect the mill building and surrounding property. Following removal of the Dam, a permanent rock ramp fishway will be constructed above and below the location of the remnant dam structure. Areas of
the channel outside the limits of the rock ramp fishway disturbed during construction will be restored to existing conditions.

The Proposed Action will have negligible, and in some cases beneficial impacts on natural and cultural resources such as water and air quality, sediment chemistry, threatened and endangered species, fish and wildlife resources, wetlands, and public recreation and safety. Adverse effects to cultural resources, including National Register-eligible or -listed cultural resources, will be addressed, pursuant to section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, through a Memorandum of Agreement between the Service and Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (36 CFR Part 800).

Resource agencies, abutters, and other stakeholders have been involved throughout the feasibility and design planning stages of the project. The project has undergone local, State, and Federal permitting processes that require extensive environmental and planning agency circulation, as well as ample public notice and involvement. Multiple stakeholders from government agencies, non-profit groups, and local residents have been consulted, including the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Restoration Center, the Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Association, Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, the dam owner, the National Park Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Service, and the Nature Conservancy.

The Service finds there will be no significant impacts resulting from the proposed restoration activities of the project. The Proposed Action provides net benefits that far outweigh its potential impacts on the natural and human environment. Therefore, the Service concludes that a Finding of No Significant Impact be issued for the proposed project.

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10 MAR 2017

Date

Reference:
Environmental Assessment, dated March 10, 2017