

For immediate release
June 17, 2011

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Massachusetts coastal project receives Obama's prestigious environmental award *Officials celebrate one of New England's most ambitious coastal projects*

PLYMOUTH--Government officials and environmental advocates celebrated the completion of a \$2-million coastal restoration project in Plymouth today, with a U.S. Department of Interior official presenting a national Coastal America Partnership Award to a project team that restored more than 60 acres of habitat for wildlife and public use.

Five years of work by federal, state and local partners on the Eel River area has resulted in the largest Atlantic white cedar swamp restoration in the state, including dramatic improvements to fish passage, water quality, wetland communities, bird migration corridors and recreational opportunities. The project area, now protected as the Eel River Preserve, is off Long Pond Road in Plymouth, and the spring-fed Eel River drains to the Plymouth Harbor.

"The Eel River Headwaters Restoration Partnership is a model for the type of collaboration President Obama has called for in the America's Great Outdoors Initiative," said Eileen Sobeck, Department of the Interior Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. "It is this type of grassroots partnership that will protect and restore sensitive coastal areas for wildlife and people to enjoy."

The award, given to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Massachusetts environmental agencies, the Town of Plymouth and local companies, recognizes outstanding collaborative, multi-agency and multi-stakeholder efforts that leverage and combine resources to accomplish coastal restoration, preservation, protection and education projects.

The Eel River Preserve exemplifies holistic restoration of an entire coastal headwaters area. Partners restored about 40 acres of retired cranberry bogs and removed the Sawmill Pond Dam downstream of the bogs. The removal or replacement of six culverts and the placement of hundreds of large wood pieces helped create habitat and passage for aquatic species, as well as reestablish natural water flow.

"The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service treasures opportunities to help fund and assist projects that link conservation areas across working landscapes," said Eric Derleth of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "The outstanding collaboration of this team has protected and restored important coastal stream and wetland habitat for the benefit of wildlife and future generations in Massachusetts."

More than 24,000 plants, including 17,000 Atlantic white cedar trees, have been planted to help restore rare wetland plant communities. The area supports one of few New England populations of the federally endangered northern red-bellied cooter turtles, as well as populations of eastern box turtles, bridle shiner fish, barrens buckmoth, adder's-tongue fern and swamp oats.

The area, now managed by the Town of Plymouth, was historically known as Finney's Meadow. A series of mills and dams were constructed in the early 1800s, and cranberry farming began in the second half of that century, continuing until 2002. The bogs were purchased in 2006 from the Phoenix Cranberry Corporation by Plymouth's Community Preservation Committee and were converted to public conservation land.

Major financial contributions were provided by the USFWS National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program, NRCS and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection Section 319 Grant Program.

Hear from our partners:

"Coastal ecosystems are among the Commonwealth's most precious resources and the Eel River project demonstrates how the cooperation and innovation of partners – both public and private – can not only restore but revitalize these critical habitats," said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Richard K. Sullivan Jr.

"The restoration of the headwaters of Eel River is one of the most ambitious coastal restoration projects completed to date in New England," said Mary Griffin, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game. "It is the largest Atlantic white cedar swamp restoration in the Commonwealth and includes a variety of restoration techniques in a single project area."

"The Town of Plymouth is appreciative of the wonderful partnership that was developed between local, state and federal agencies to complete the Eel River Headwaters Restoration Project and looks forward to maintaining this partnership in the future to restore other wetlands and aquatic habitats in Plymouth," said David Gould, environmental resources manager for the Town of Plymouth.

"This is the first large scale restoration of this rare wetland type in Massachusetts," said Tim Purinton, Director of DFG's Division of Ecological Restoration.

"From restoring fish passage to replacing the road crossings that help migrating frogs and salamanders, this project has reestablished the connections that make this region so important for conservation," said Wayne Klockner, Executive Director of The Nature Conservancy in Massachusetts. "Restoration efforts like the work at Eel River are critical to preserving habitat, protecting our drinking water and providing recreational opportunities for local people."

"Not only does the Eel River site have environmental importance, but it's also part of the rich history of the Town of Plymouth and the cranberry growing region of Southeastern Massachusetts," said Christine Clarke, Massachusetts State Conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. "We're pleased to have provided nearly \$600,000 in federal Farm Bill funding for conservation easements and a portion of the restoration costs for the Eel River Preserve through the Wetlands Reserve Program. NRCS works to achieve the

greatest wetland functions and optimum wildlife habitat on every acre enrolled in the WRP program.”

Project partners include: Town of Plymouth, Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game, Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program), U.S. Department of Agriculture (Natural Resources Conservation Service), American Rivers, The Nature Conservancy, Massachusetts Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership, Horsley Witten Group, Inter-fluve, Inc., Sumco Eco-Contracting, and the A.D. Makepeace Company.