



BREAKING NEWS

For Immediate Release

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Hopewell Mills Dam Removed, Fish Passage Restored

Mill River Dam Removal in 'Herring Town' Launches Regional River Restoration

TAUNTON, MA – For the first time in nearly 200 years, the Mill River winds its way through Taunton, providing natural habitat for fish and wildlife, and flood protection for local people.

Over the past two months, the Hopewell Mills dam has been completely removed, and habitat restoration work continues at the site.

“This is the first step in restoring an ecologically critical tributary to the Taunton River,” Mary Griffin, commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game.

Conservation and community leaders will gather at the riverside Friday, Oct. 19 to celebrate the successful dam removal and announce the next steps in the broader Mill River restoration effort, a partnership to remove three dams and construct a fish ladder and eel pass at a fourth.

WHERE On the banks of the Mill River, at the corner of Barton and Danforth streets in Taunton, MA. Tours of the project site will follow formal remarks.

WHEN Friday, Oct. 19, 2012, 11:00 am – 12:30 pm

WHO Speakers will include:

- US Congressman Barney Frank
- John Bullard, Northeast regional administrator of the NOAA Fisheries Service
- MA Reps. Patricia Haddad, Shaunna O’Connell and Keiko Orrall
- Mary Griffin, commissioner of the MA Department of Fish and Game
- Wayne Klockner, executive director of The Nature Conservancy in MA
- Christine Clarke, state conservationist at the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Mayor Thomas Hoye, City of Taunton

A partnership of nonprofit groups and state and federal agencies has brought about the Mill River Restoration, a project that will involve the removal or retrofit of several dams on this Taunton River tributary, allowing migratory species including river herring and American eel to reach an additional 30 miles of river habitat, as well as upstream lakes and ponds. Hopewell Mills Dam was first to be removed, as it was the first barrier to herring as they traveled upstream from the sea via the Taunton River.

“Here in New England, fish are unable to reach many miles of historic spawning grounds along our rivers because of dams like Hopewell Mills. We have the chance to improve our fisheries substantially through projects like this one,” said John K. Bullard, Northeast regional administrator for NOAA Fisheries Service. “Restoring habitat is one of the best investments we can make to strengthen our nation’s commercial and recreational fisheries.”

“Northeastern rivers average seven dams for every 100 miles of stream – some of the most fractured river systems in the country. By restoring the Mill River’s connection to the Taunton River watershed, we can bring this system back to life, allowing hundreds of thousands of river herring access to upstream areas they haven’t been able to reach in generations,” said Alison Bowden, director of freshwater conservation at The Nature Conservancy.

The Taunton River is one of the only free-flowing rivers in New England, and restoring fish passage to a major tributary like the Mill River has great significance for the river’s famed river herring run, one of the largest in the region. Many more fish will be able to return to Narragansett Bay, where they are important food for striped bass, summer flounder and groundfish that are so critical to New England’s commercial and recreational fishing industries and culture.

“The Mill River is an important tributary to the Taunton River, and the Taunton is a major source of fresh water to Narragansett Bay. The health of this extraordinarily productive estuary depends upon clean water and free flowing tributaries,” said Jonathan Stone, executive director of Save The Bay.

“This project is a milestone in restoring the Mill River to its natural state, reopening miles of critical habitat to migratory fish and promoting the recovery of Narragansett Bay’s once abundant native fisheries,” Stone said.

Local people, too, benefit from the Mill River Restoration. Hopewell Mills Dam was built in 1818, and like many of the more than 3,000 dams on Massachusetts rivers, it was constructed to power mills that no longer exist.

“The Hopewell Dam Removal project is the product of an outstanding local, regional, state and federal partnership,” said Bill Napolitano, environmental program director at the Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic Development District in Taunton.

All across the region, century-old dams are deteriorating, and if they were to fail, dangerous flooding could occur. In fact, Taunton’s Mill River received national attention in 2005 when the

threat of failure at Whittenton Pond Dam – located just upstream from Hopewell Mills – forced the evacuation of downtown.

The crisis prompted the formation of the Mill River Restoration partnership, as well as legislative efforts to make the removal and repair of aging dams easier for Massachusetts communities. Removal of the Whittenton Pond Dam will most likely occur in spring 2013 as the second phase of the Mill River Restoration.

“American Rivers commends the Commonwealth’s proactive approach to remove obsolete dams such as Hopewell Mills before they can become a problem,” said Bob Irvin, President of American Rivers. “Massachusetts continues to be a national leader at restoring rivers through dam removal, having removed 15 dams in the last five years to improve public safety, restore fisheries, and reconnect communities with their rivers.”

Over the next few years, the partnership plans to remove two more dams on the Mill River, and to install a fish ladder at a fourth to restore native alewives, blueback herring, American eel and other species to the Canoe River, Snake River, Lake Sabbatia and Winnecunnet Pond.

By spring, river herring will make their run upstream, and the Mill River will be able to ebb and flow, naturally moderating water levels and protecting nearby homes and businesses. The five-acre impoundment behind the Hopewell Mills Dam will be an open, meadow-like floodplain where such species as painted turtle, cedar waxwing and kingfisher will likely live. And perhaps, Taunton will, one day, again be known as “herring town.”

Fast Facts:

- Dams were first constructed on the Mill River in the late 1600s. Hopewell Mills Dam was built in 1818.
- Removing the dam and restoring the river will require moving 16,000 cubic yards of earth – more than 1,300 dump trucks full.
- The Mill River Restoration will make 30 miles of river habitat available for river herring and other species.
- The total cost of the Hopewell Mills project was about \$800,000, with a significant portion of funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Restoration Center.

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The Mill River Restoration Partnership includes dam owners, Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District, MA Division of Ecological Restoration, NOAA-Restoration Center, The Nature Conservancy, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Save the Bay, American Rivers, US Fish and Wildlife Service, MA Division of Marine Fisheries, MA Department of Transportation, Mass Audubon, Taunton River Watershed Alliance, and the Massachusetts Environmental Trust.