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Grant supports ecological restoration and climate resilience in the Berkshires

Funds will benefit partnerships and projects that improve and sustain healthy aquatic systems

On behalf of the Berkshire Clean, Cold and Connected (BCCC) Restoration Partnership, the Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) has entered into a three-year Cooperative Agreement with the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game (DFG) Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) to support healthy aquatic systems and address climate change in Berkshire County.

The Cooperative Agreement is expected to provide approximately \$350,000 in grant funding to support a new BCCC Restoration Partnership Coordinator position based in HVA's Stockbridge office, and further aquatic habitat enhancement projects like culvert replacement and stream restoration.

Funds were awarded by DER through its new Regional Restoration Partnerships Program, which is aimed at helping nonprofits and Regional Planning Agencies increase their capacity to collaborate and advance ecological restoration work.

“If we want to effectively conserve aquatic biodiversity in the Berkshires in a changing climate, we’ve got to build capacity within and collaboration between conservation practitioners already doing great work to right-size culverts, remove dams, and restore streams and wetlands. We also need to bring other partners in to make these projects successful in the long-term,” said Mike Jastremski, HVA’s Watershed Conservation Director. “These resources and relationships are absolutely critical for getting more of this important work done, and done well.”

The BCCC Restoration Partnership is a network of key stakeholders in Berkshire County—organizations, agencies, and communities—working to keep the Hoosic, Housatonic, and Farmington River watersheds healthy and thriving. BCCC Restoration Partnership organizations include Trout Unlimited (TU), Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), Hoosic River Watershed Association (HooRWA), Farmington River Watershed Association (FRWA), and Berkshire Environmental Action Team (BEAT).

“The natural environment and wild rivers are integral to the character of the Berkshires for residents and visitors alike. The Berkshire Clean, Cold, and Connected partnership is an excellent opportunity to support projects that enhance our natural assets holistically, regionally, and with all the partners at the table. This is invaluable as we look to address older infrastructure

in the face of climate change,” said Courtney Morehouse, BPRC’s Environmental & Energy Program Senior Planner.

Alison Dixon, HVA’s Berkshire Watershed Manager, expects that other organizations will be included in and benefit from the BCCC Restoration Partnership as it gains momentum. “The idea is to create a framework that organizations, agencies and communities with a variety of different missions and priorities can plug in to. Aquatic habitat restoration projects can accomplish multiple objectives- conserving the natural heritage of the Berkshires, yes, but also reducing flood risk, protecting water quality and creating better opportunities for outdoor recreation. Our main goal is to work with everyone that has a stake in aquatic habitat restoration to find common ground among all those objectives. This support for collaboration is exactly what we need to get more good projects in the ground. We are so grateful to DER for the opportunity to be a part of this critical work that not only restores aquatic connectivity in ecologically sensitive areas but increases climate resilience in the natural and built environments of the Berkshires.”

In the first year, the BCCC Restoration Partnership will identify, develop, and prioritize aquatic habitat restoration opportunities to create a Restoration Partnership Action Plan for the region, which includes the Housatonic, Hoosic and Farmington River watersheds within Berkshire County.

"As the new executive director of the Hoosic River Watershed Association (HooRWA), this collaborative project was a dream to walk into. And I am so grateful that, collectively, we will have a supported position to ensure our work gets accomplished effectively and efficiently,” said Arianna Aleksandra Collins.

The BCCC Restoration Partnership is one of three Regional Restoration Partnerships funded through this new DER program. Other funded Restoration Partnerships are associated with the Buzzards Bay watershed and the Merrimack River watershed.

Erin Rodgers, Project Coordinator for TU’s Northeast Coldwater Habitat Restoration Program said, “Trout Unlimited is excited to participate in the Berkshire Cold, Clean, and Connected Restoration Partnership with HVA. This collaboration is a fantastic opportunity to build the region’s capacity to become more flood resilient and improve our ecological and water quality. We look forward to working with the partnership on maintaining the health of our rivers and fisheries.”

About the BCCC Restoration Partnership:

The Berkshire Clean, Cold, and Connected Restoration Partnership is a collaboration between Berkshire County conservation practitioners, local and regional stakeholders and the Massachusetts Department of Ecological Restoration to build regional capacity to plan and

implement critical ecological restoration projects. The work of the BCCC Restoration Partnership is meant to restore degraded aquatic ecosystems and increase climate change resiliency across its 766 square mile Partnership Region in Berkshire County, including the Hoosic, Housatonic and Farmington River watersheds.

About HVA:

HVA is the watershed conservation organization whose mission is to protect the natural character and environmental health of the Housatonic River watershed for this and future generations. The Housatonic River watershed covers nearly 2,000 square miles across three states, from the Berkshires in Massachusetts and the Taconics in eastern New York through western Connecticut and south to Long Island Sound. HVA achieves its mission through three major program areas: 1) Land Protection, aimed at conserving our most vulnerable natural areas and special places; 2) Watershed Conservation, aimed at protecting rivers, streams and drinking water supplies; and 3) Community Engagement, aimed at bringing the benefits of clean water and access to open space to all watershed residents and visitors. Learn more about HVA at hvatoday.org.

About Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game

DFG is responsible for promoting the conservation and enjoyment of the Commonwealth's natural resources. DFG carries out this mission through land protection and wildlife habitat management, management of inland and marine fish and wildlife species, and ecological restoration of fresh water, salt water, and terrestrial habitats. DFG promotes enjoyment of the Massachusetts environment through outdoor skills workshops, fishing festivals and other educational programs, and by enhancing access to the Commonwealth's rivers, lakes, and coastal waters. The mission of the DFG Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) is to restore and protect the Commonwealth's rivers, wetlands, and watersheds for the benefit of people and the environment.

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