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Grant supports ecological restoration and climate resilience in the Berkshires

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

Stockbridge, MA – The Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) recently received a grant to support healthy aquatic systems and address climate change in the Berkshires.

Funds were awarded by the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game's Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) through its Regional Restoration Partnerships Program, which helps nonprofits and Regional Planning Agencies build capacity and advance ecological and aquatic restoration work.

The nearly \$200,000 grant will further support the Berkshire Clean, Cold, and Connected (BCCC) Restoration Partnership, a network of key stakeholders in Berkshire County working to keep the Hoosic, Housatonic, and Farmington River watersheds healthy and thriving. The BCCC Restoration Partnership is one of only three Partnership regions in the state to receive this funding, which is a testament to the outstanding natural heritage of Berkshire County.

"Strong partnerships between the Commonwealth, regional organizations, municipalities, and non-profit organizations are critical for helping people and nature adapt to climate change. The Berkshire Clean, Cold, Connected Partnership catalyzes and supports river and wetland restoration projects throughout the region. We are thrilled to support BCCC's work and can't wait to see what comes next," said DER Director Beth Lambert.

Funding supports a full-time HVA Restoration Coordinator solely focused on facilitating collaboration between partners by helping them increase capacity to complete stream and wetland restoration work, which builds resilience for species and habitats as well as infrastructure and property threatened by climate change.

BCCC core partners include the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, the Berkshire Environmental Action Team, the Hoosic River Watershed Association, the Farmington River Watershed Association, and Trout Unlimited.

Through these local and regional partnerships, HVA leads projects focused on habitat connectivity and green infrastructure by restoring degraded aquatic ecosystems that help reduce the adverse impacts of climate change. This includes dam removal, streamside buffer plantings, in-stream habitat enhancement, floodplain reconnection, polluted stormwater capture, and road-stream crossing replacements, or areas where a road crosses a stream. While bridges and culverts make it possible for people to get from one side of the stream to the other, some are outdated, restricting waterflow and threatening wildlife migration.

“We are so grateful to DER for providing this transformational investment in the aquatic natural heritage of the Berkshires. The Restoration Partnerships Program is unique in recognizing what conservation practitioners like HVA and our BCCC partners need to make meaningful change on the ground. Our warming climate threatens both built and natural environments, and we’ve worked hard to find cost-effective projects that help ecosystems and communities adapt to this “new normal,” which is impossible to ignore this year,” said Mike Jastremski, HVA’s Watershed Conservation Director. “DER Partnerships Program funding will help move those important projects forward, identify others for the future, and is the capacity-building glue needed to align the excellent work BCCC partners already do towards our shared vision of healthy streams and wetlands in Berkshire County.”

HVA also completed Road-Stream Crossing Management plans for the towns of Egremont, Richmond, and Great Barrington, and played a key role in helping all three receive DER Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance (CRMA) Grant Program funds totaling nearly \$160,000. The CRMA program provides financial and technical assistance for municipalities to fix culverts that are flood risks and barriers to fish and wildlife movement. CMRA-funded projects were identified as high priorities in each community’s Road-Stream Crossing Management Plan.

Overall, DER awarded \$6.4 million in grants to help communities prepare for large storms, strengthen climate-ready infrastructure, restore flood storage capacities, and protect fisheries, wildlife, and river habitat.

About Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game

The mission of the Division of Ecological Restoration is to restore and protect the Commonwealth’s rivers, wetlands, and watersheds for the benefit of people and the environment. Additionally, the 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.

About HVA

As the conservation organization dedicated to the entire 2,000 square-mile tristate Housatonic Watershed, HVA acts to protect the natural character and environmental health of the valley from the Berkshires to Long Island Sound for this and future generations. HVA works in three ways to establish climate-ready conditions across the region by 2040: Follow the Forest to conserve a 50,000-acre woodland and wildlife climate corridor for wildlife habitat, clean water, and carbon and temperature moderation; Clean, Cold and Connected to restore and protect 500 miles of rivers and streams and drinking water sources; and Education and Equitable Representation to engage the watershed’s diverse people and communities in equitable participation in and access to a clean, healthy, and climate-ready Housatonic Watershed. Learn more at www.hvatoday.org.

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