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News Release

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For more information:

Gail Mastrati, RI Department of Environmental Management, 401-222-4700 ext. 2402

Tim Dugan, US Army Corps of Engineers, New England District, 978-318-8264

DEM, ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS AND PARTNERS BREAK GROUND FOR TEN MILE RIVER ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROJECT

PROVIDENCE – The Department of Environmental Management and the US Army Corps of Engineers today joined Senator Jack Reed, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, East Providence Mayor Joseph Larisa, Jr., federal, state and local officials at a groundbreaking ceremony for the Ten Mile River Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Project. The project will restore anadromous fish populations to the lower portion of the Ten Mile River watershed.

The event took place at the Hunt's Mill Dam historic site in East Providence, one of the three dams where fish ladders will be constructed to allow the passage of herring and shad along the Ten Mile River. The 56 square-mile Ten Mile River watershed includes a five square-mile area located in Rhode Island and 51 square miles situated in southeastern Massachusetts.

For over 200 years, dams have blocked anadromous river herring and American shad from their historic spawning grounds in the Ten Mile River watershed. These anadromous fish live as adults in salt water, but must return to freshwater to spawn. The restoration project will include construction of denil fish passage facilities at the first three dams on the river: Omega Pond Dam, Hunts Mill Dam and Turner Reservoir Dam. These fish ladders will provide for upstream migration of adult Blueback Herring, Alewife, and American shad to historic spawning areas on the Ten Mile River and in Turner Reservoir.

The four-foot wide fish ladders will be concrete waterways with wooden baffles that would allow fish to swim to their natural spawning habitat. Migrant slots will also be cut into the existing spillways at Omega Pond and Turner Reservoir to facilitate downstream migration of juveniles, and a fish trap will be installed at Hunt's Mill Dam to relocate excess fish to other watersheds.

“This environmental restoration project would not be possible without the talents and dedication of every individual, agency and group who supported this effort,” said District Engineer Col. Philip T. Feir, of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District. “We

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look forward to working with all of you towards completion of what we expect will prove to be an important environmental success story here in East Providence and the state of Rhode Island.”

“The Department of Environmental Management is proud to be part of a partnership of organizations working to restore herring, alewife, and American shad to their historic spawning grounds on the Ten Mile River and in Turner Reservoir,” said DEM Director W. Michael Sullivan, PhD. “This project will improve the river environment for surrounding communities, the watershed, and Narragansett Bay.”

“There has been a real joint effort at the local, state, and federal levels to restore the health of the Ten Mile River watershed and ensure that fish can once again freely swim up and down the river. Other fish ladders throughout the state have been successful, and I am pleased to have secured \$1.51 million in federal funding to help restore the fish run to the lower Ten Mile River. This project isn’t just critical to the survival of the fish, but also to the economic survival of our state’s fishing industry and to the surrounding communities,” said Senator Jack Reed, a member of the Appropriations Committee.

“Coastal habitat restoration projects not only benefit fisheries and protect our coasts against the effects of climate change, but also provide much needed jobs,” said Senator Whitehouse. “This shovel-ready project is yet another example of the important work funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in Rhode Island.”

The project is being constructed in two phases. Construction of fish passages at Turner Reservoir and Hunt’s Mill Dams began last week, and plans and specifications for the fish ladder at Omega Pond Dam are being finalized and are expected to begin next spring. When completed the restoration project will provide anadromous alewives access to about 340 acres of spawning habitat, and approximately three miles of riverine spawning habitat for Blueback Herring and American shad. Based on the Department of Environmental Management’s projections, these habitat areas will support a fish run of more than 200,000 herring. The number of American shad that will return is unknown, but the fishways are capable of passing about 25,000 shad.

“Restoring this historic anadromous fish passage of the Ten Mile River has enormous environmental and economic benefits, as well as strong community support. We are extremely pleased that East Providence is host to this exciting project,” said East Providence Mayor Joseph Larisa, Jr.

The Ten Mile River project has brought together a diverse partnership that includes the Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Environment Management, Coastal Resources Management Council, City of East Providence, US Environmental Protection Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, US Fish & Wildlife Service, Ten Mile River Watershed Council, and Save The Bay.

Funding for the \$4.8 million project includes approximately \$4 million in federal funds and \$800,000 in state funds.