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New England District**

News release

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Public comments on plan due by July 16

Corps proposes Muddy River flood control plan, environmental dredging in Boston, Brookline

CONCORD, Mass. – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has conducted a Muddy River Flood Control and Ecosystem Restoration Study in Boston and Brookline, Mass., and has developed a recommended plan that consists of a combination of a 20-year flood control plan and extensive environmental dredging within Boston and Brookline’s historic Emerald Necklace park system.

“The project involves dredging and other measures to reduce flood damages and restore approximately 40 acres of aquatic and wetland habitat in the Muddy River,” said Study Manager Richard Heidebrecht, of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District, Engineering/Planning Division.

Two public information meetings have been scheduled to discuss the recommended plan. The first will be held on Thursday, June 26, 2003 at 7 p.m. in the Brookline Town Hall Selectmen’s Chambers at 333 Washington Street in Brookline. The second meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 8, 2003 at 6:30 p.m. in the Boston Public Library Mezzanine Conference Room at 700 Boylston Street in Boston.

The Corps has issued a 30-day public notice and the public has until July 16, 2003 to submit their comments on the proposed plan to the Corps.

The Muddy River is a small waterway located in the Boston metropolitan area. Most of the 5.6 square mile watershed is located in the city of Boston and the town of Brookline, with a small portion located in the city of Newton. The 3.5 mile long Muddy River flows through the heart of Frederick Law Olmsted’s famed “Emerald Necklace,” one of the most carefully crafted park systems in America and the oldest remaining linear urban park system in the United States.

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“Although the park is an exceptional recreational resource and provides important wildlife habitat in a highly urbanized setting, its values are compromised by flooding, poor water quality which affects the aquatic habitat, sedimentation and poor sediment quality, elevated contaminant levels in fish, proliferation of Phragmites and other invasive species, and deterioration of historic resources,” Heidebrecht said. “Flooding, degraded riverine habitats, poor water quality, and other related water resource problems have been noted in several prior studies of the river.”

Flooding from the storm of October 1996 caused extensive damage to an underground Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority rail station and significant damages to institutions, residences and businesses along the river. Unprecedented flooding also occurred in several tributary areas, particularly along Stony Brook and Tannery Brook where numerous universities and institutions experienced serious damage. Other flooding in September 1996 and June 1998 contributed to the need for the study.

As a result of these floods, Boston’s Parks and Recreation Department, working with the Boston Water and Sewer Commission, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the town of Brookline, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and non-profit community groups such as the Emerald Necklace Conservancy and Fenway Alliance developed a comprehensive master plan to identify and address issues affecting the Muddy River.

This comprehensive basin wide plan has undergone considerable refinement and the current proposal is described in a final Environmental Impact Report submitted by Boston and Brookline to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs in February 2003. Concurrent with actions by the local communities, the Corps of Engineers was authorized to study the Muddy River by a series of legislative acts. The Water Resources Development Act of 1999 authorized the Corps to evaluate the city of Boston’s 1999 Master Plan to determine whether these flood damage reduction and environmental restoration improvements were in the Federal interest. The Corps’ Draft Evaluation Report, dated June 2000, determined that the City’s Master Plan met some of the requirements of a Federally-implementable plan. However, continued Corps involvement would require preparation of a decision document that evaluated

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Corps proposes Muddy River project/3-3-3-3

alternatives, identified the plan that maximized net National Economic Development benefits, and satisfied the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Continued participation by the Corps was directed by Section 522 of the Water Resources Development Act of 2000. This Act authorized the Corps to carry out the project for flood damage reduction and environmental restoration, Muddy River, Brookline and Boston, substantially in accordance with the plans, and subject to the conditions, described in the Corps' draft evaluation report.

“The purpose of this study was to prepare a decision document that develops and evaluates solutions to identified flood control and ecosystem restoration needs, selects and recommends a plan based on economic, environmental and public acceptability criteria, and demonstrates a Federal and non-Federal interest in proceeding to the project implementation phases,” Heidebrecht said.

“A variety of alternatives to reduce flood damages and restore the Muddy River ecosystem were evaluated,” Heidebrecht said. “The goal was to combine feasible, cost-effective and acceptable flood damage reduction and environmental restoration improvements to form a comprehensive solution to problems within the Muddy River watershed. This approach supported the non-Federal sponsors' stated objective of providing holistic restoration of the Muddy River corridor.”

The evaluation focused first on flood control alternatives. Ecosystem restoration elements were added and evaluated, and comprehensive solutions to identified problems and needs developed. Alternative measures were developed and evaluated based on compliance with environmental and historic preservation concerns, engineering feasibility, economic justification, cost effectiveness, and public acceptability. A total of 12 combined ecosystem restoration plans were developed and evaluated based on ecosystem benefits, cost effectiveness, adverse impacts, permitability, and public acceptability.

“The recommended plan consists of a combination of the 20-year flood control plan and extensive environmental dredging,” Heidebrecht said. The major features of the federally recommended plan include: improvements to protect against a flood with a return frequency of

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Corps proposes Muddy River project/4-4-4-4-4

20 years to include channel improvements, removal of undersized culverts, installation of two new culverts, and daylighting two sections (about 700 linear feet) of the Muddy River; dredging approximately 200,000 cubic yards of sediment from the Fens, Riverway, Leverett, Willow and Wards Ponds (the material will be dewatered on site and disposed of in licensed upland landfills); eradication of Phragmites from wetland and riparian areas by dredging and cutting/herbicide treatment; and preservation and restoration of the historic park shoreline and vegetation in construction areas.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the city of Boston and town of Brookline will be the local sponsors of the project and will be responsible for long-term operation and maintenance of the project. This will include monitoring water quality, removal of future accumulations of sediment to maintain flood control, water quality, and sediment benefits, and monitoring to guard against recolonization by Phragmites.

“In addition to flood damage reduction, the recommended plan has a variety of environmental benefits,” Heidebrecht said. “Dredging contaminated sediment, removing invasive species and rehabilitating and restoring wetland habitats will address the major issues that have degraded the Muddy River aquatic and riparian habitats.”

From a cultural resource perspective, restoration of this system of integrated parks would contribute to preserving a nationally significant historic resource. No impacts to federally threatened or endangered are expected. The recommended plan would improve habitat for a state listed threatened fish, the three-spine stickleback.

“Adverse impacts to the project area are expected to be temporary,” Heidebrecht said. “Construction will interfere with recreational use of the park and increase local traffic congestion. Some additional odors may occur during dredging and dewatering of dredged material. Turbidity levels will increase in surface waters during dredging.” Measures to minimize adverse effects will include implementation of a traffic control plan, odor control measures, and use of silt curtains to reduce dredging impacts on water quality.

A draft Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact have been prepared and are available for review (see www.nae.usace.army.mil. Select “projects” and then Muddy River Study). Copies of the draft decision document and Environmental Assessment are

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Corps proposes Muddy River project/5-5-5-5-5

available for review at: the Boston Parks and Recreation Department, the Boston Public Library – Copley Square Branch, the Brookline Department of Public Works, the Brookline Public Library, the Boston Environment Department, the Jamaica Plain Branch Library, the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, the Massachusetts Historical Society, The Emerald Necklace Conservancy, and MASCO.

The proposed work is being coordinated with the following Federal, state and local agencies: the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the National Marine Fisheries Service; the Federal Emergency Management Agency; the National Park Service; the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs; the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management; the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection; the Massachusetts Historical Commission; the Massachusetts Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Law Enforcement; the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries; the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program; the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority; the Metropolitan District Commission; the Boston Conservation Commission; the Boston Parks and Recreation Department; the Boston Water and Sewer Commission; the Boston Landmarks Commission; the Brookline Conservation Commission; the Brookline Engineering/Transportation Department; and the Brookline Parks Department.

To assist in properly evaluating the proposal, the Corps is seeking public comments. Written statements referencing this proposal should be forwarded to this office no later than July 16, 2003. More information is available from Study Manager Richard Heidebrecht at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District, ATTN: Engineering/Planning Division, 696 Virginia Road, Concord, MA 01742-2751.