US Army Corps of Engineers
New England District

Project Information Sheet

West Branch Pleasant River
Addison& Columbia, Maine
Section 206 Aquatic Habitat Restoration

December 2011 696 Virginia Road, Concord Massachusetts, 01742-2751

PROJECT NAME: West Branch Pleasant River Aquatic Habitat Restoration Project, Addison & Columbia, Maine

PROJECT PARTNERS: US Army Corps of Engineers and Maine Department of Transportation (MEDOT), National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) are partners in the project.

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION: The West Branch of the Pleasant River is a tributary of the Pleasant River in Addison, Maine. It was tidally influenced until 1940 when MEDOT replaced an existing bridge with box culverts and an earth embankment. The flap gates installed on the downstream ends of the culverts prevented tidal flooding of the West Branch, converting it to a non-tidal freshwater habitat. The project partners recognized the potential value of this site and joined in an effort to restore the marsh under the Corps program for aquatic habitat restoration (Section 206 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996). If tidal flow can be restored to the West Branch, the interior marsh will be transformed from lower value freshwater habitat to higher value salt marsh habitat. See Figure 1 for aerial views of the West Branch and its confluence with the Pleasant River.

Figure 1 – Aerial view of the West Branch of the Pleasant River

A restored salt marsh could resemble the historic condition prior to MEDOT's construction of the Ridge Road embankment and culverts in 1940. See Figure 2 for views of the Ridge Road crossing of the West Branch. To accomplish a restoration, tidal flow would be restored to the West Branch. The study will address a number of issues including mitigation of any effects of restored tidal flow on public roads, a public boat ramp, private dwellings, private wells and agricultural land. The proposed project could restore over 250 acres of historic salt marsh habitat for nesting and migratory birds, as well as estuarine fish and wildlife. Salt marshes are Special Aquatic Sites under the Clean Water Act, Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines. Salt marshes and estuarine habitats provide essential habitat for migratory birds including waterfowl and wading birds, birds that nest in salt marshes, and estuarine fish. Restoration would enhance aquatic productivity and could reduce mosquito breeding. The project will increase the quantity of salt marsh habitat, which has been declining both regionally and nationally. The aesthetics of the area would be improved and made more attractive to the users of the adjacent areas. Project benefits will be measured in acres of wetland restored.

Figure 2 – West Branch at Ridge Road looking downstream in 1940 (above) and 2010 (below).

The MEDOT and the Corps executed a Feasibility Cost-sharing Agreement for the study in August 2011.