



# CAPE COD TIMES

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## **Report looks favorably upon Herring River project in Wellfleet**

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WELLFLEET — A 24-page subcommittee report from the Cape Cod Commission gave good reviews to the first phase of plans to restore the Herring River.

Copies of the report were made available to the public at the commission's hearing on the project Monday at the Wellfleet Senior Center. The report is part of the full commission's Development of Regional Impact review of the project.

Jon Idman, the commission's regulatory officer, said while the project will move forward, the question is how to do so in a balanced way.

The project intends to restore one of New England's largest estuaries to its original state. After the Chequessett Neck Road dike was built in 1909, the river upstream of the dike, along with about 1,000 acres of salt marsh upstream, were choked off.

The dike led to degradation of water quality in the river and loss of native tidal habitat. Shellfish areas were closed, and herring all but disappeared. The salt marsh changed, and with it came a change in vegetation and wildlife.

The Herring River is designated as impaired under the Federal Clean Water Act. The dike is a source of bacterial contamination that has caused the closure of hundreds of acres of downstream shellfish beds.

Idman said commission members were comforted by the plan's commitment to flood the river incrementally only after infrastructures were installed and operational. Members also liked how the plan would only allow the river to flood up to a certain level, and would use an adaptive management plan to achieve Phase 1 goals.

Tim Smith, restoration ecologist with the Cape Cod National Seashore, said the project will move forward based on a range of baseline measures for water quality, tide heights, sediment dynamics and other factors.

Tidal flow will be introduced incrementally and can be slowed or stopped depending on what's happening in the estuary, Smith said. Course corrections can be made as needed.

The proposed plan is still in draft form. Some issues were flagged for more attention, such as funding sources for implementing the adaptive management plan. The subcommittee also wants to continue discussions with the public and is requesting information as the project moves forward.

"We can't expect all the details to have been worked out, but we do want to see them put into a decision framework," Idman said.

More than 130 people attended Monday's public hearing, and there was overwhelming support for the project from audience members.

Selectwomen Janet Reinhart, Helen Miranda Wilson and Kathleen Bacon were unanimous in their support. Bacon said she hoped the restoration would lead to the return of a \$1.5 million herring industry, an increase in fin fish and significant environmental and economic benefits to Wellfleet and its surrounding towns.

Reinhart read letters of support from state Sen. Julian Cyr, D-Truro, and state Rep. Sarah Peake, D-Provincetown.

Gordon Peabody, former chairman of the Herring River Technical Committee, said the river system had been breathing through a straw.

"A river should never kill its fish," he said.

Conservation, environmental and historical groups also gave their support to the project, as did residents and property owners.

But there were some concerns voiced.

Zack Dixon, a member of the Wellfleet Shellfish Advisory Board, said while the

project enjoys broad support from the shellfish community, there could be difficulties.

“What happens to those who work shellfish grants, living paycheck to paycheck, if something happens?” he asked.

Martin Nieski, who owns property at 505 Chequessett Neck Road, also spoke in opposition to the project.

“They’ll flood the property, I’ll lose my land, and no one has offered me a nickel’s worth of compensation,” he said.

Project manager Carole Ridley said no structures on Nieski’s property would be affected during Phase 1 operations. Monitoring and adaptive management will ensure it, she said.

Ridley acknowledged that the reintroduction of tidal flow could lead to a potential change in vegetation, but said Cape Cod National Seashore staff would work with any property owner on managing those changes.

A 0.4 acre portion of Nieski’s property is within the jurisdiction of the Wellfleet Wetlands Protection bylaw and regulations. A provision under the state Wetland Protection Act allows regulators to allow the return of tidal flow to damaged wetlands.

Wellfleet Town Administrator Daniel Hoort said the project would pay for costs to protect properties.

The public hearing was continued to 4:30 p.m. April 2 at the Barnstable County Complex, 3195 Main St., Barnstable Village.

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