



# Herring River Estuary Restoration Project

## We Have An Opportunity To Restore A Vital Native Ecosystem

The Herring River in Wellfleet and Truro, Massachusetts encompasses nearly 1,000 acres and over 6 miles of waterways. Historically, the river supported a vibrant coastal river ecosystem and one of the largest nurseries for commercial and recreational fisheries in the Gulf of Maine. Wellfleet Town reports from the late 1800's indicate that more than 200,000 river herring were netted annually from the Herring River. It is currently one of the largest tidally-restricted estuaries in the northeastern United States.

The ecosystem was dramatically altered in 1909 when efforts to control mosquitos resulted in the construction of a dike across the river's mouth at Chequessett Neck in Wellfleet. Designed to block the flow of ocean tides and salt water, the dike had immediate and devastating effects on the natural and social values of the upstream river and wetlands. Circulation of salt water was essentially eliminated. This caused toxic water quality and fish kills from acidic leaching, closure of downstream shellfish beds, sinking of the marsh by up to four feet, and loss of function as a nursery for commercial and recreational fisheries.

This project will restore natural tidal flow to the estuary by replacing the old dike at the river's mouth with a new bridge. This will reverse the severe damage that has occurred over the past 100 years and bring back the critical ecological, economic and social benefits that a healthy and productive tidal estuary provides. It is timely that we undertake this work now because it will enhance reliance to climate change and sea level rise. Without restoration conditions in the marsh will continue to worsen.

## Benefits Of Restoration

Completion of this project will bring significant benefits and will serve as a model for restoring other estuaries in Massachusetts and America's coast. Reconnecting the Herring River to Cape Cod Bay and the Gulf of Maine will restore the natural coastal food web that numerous fish, birds and other wildlife depend on for their survival. Restoring the estuary is an important step to help increase fish populations and revive the region's commercial and recreational fisheries.

Expanding harvestable shellfish beds will help support Wellfleet's economy, which is heavily dependent on the Cape's \$10.8 million shellfishing industry. Water quality will be significantly improved, allowing extensive areas of shellfish beds that are now closed due to bacteria contamination to be reopened for harvest.



## ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

- » Reduce bacteria loading and acidity contamination by restoring tidal flushing.
- » Remove river from EPA Impaired Waters List.
- » Enhance resilience to storm flooding and sea level rise by restoring marsh health and sediment delivery.
- » Restore productive habitats for finfish, shellfish, and migratory waterfowl.
- » Restore eel and herring runs.
- » Re-open shellfish beds
- » Re-establish salt marsh and estuarine wetland vegetation and reduce invasive species.
- » Enhanced floodplain protection and management.



Restoring the estuary's tidal flows hinge on replacing the 1908 dike with a new bridge and two secondary dikes. With strong partnerships and funding, we hope to start construction in 2018. © Friends of Herring River.

Tourism is a major economic engine in Wellfleet and surrounding communities. In Wellfleet alone, the tourism industry contributes nearly \$11 million annually to the local community and supports jobs. People from around the globe are drawn to Cape Cod for its natural beauty, healthy environment and scenic vistas. The overgrown and degraded Herring River estuary is a severely impaired natural asset. Once restored with clean flowing water, open salt marsh vistas and abundant fish and wildlife, more people will enjoy the region and its amenities.

### Project Status

Over the past decade, numerous partners have worked to develop restoration plans and are firmly committed to seeing this project completed. Engineering design and environmental review are well underway to prepare the Project for construction. Preliminary cost estimates range from \$40-\$50 million over 5 years to build a new bridge and two secondary dikes, elevate 1.7 miles of roads above restored tides and implement measures to protect low-lying structures from flood waters. The Project received state and federal approval of its Environmental Impact Report in 2016. Permitting and fundraising, which are expected to take two to three years, will begin in 2017.

**For more information, please contact:**

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**PROJECT PARTNERS** Towns of Truro and Wellfleet • National Park Service Cape Cod National Seashore

**SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS** • American Rivers • Association to Preserve Cape Cod • Cape Cod Conservation District • Coastal America Foundation • Conservation Law Foundation • Ducks Unlimited • Environmental Protection Agency • Friends of Cape Cod National Seashore • Friends of Herring River • Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment • Herring River Restoration Committee Marine Biological Laboratory • Mass Audubon • MassBays Program • MA Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership • MA Division of Ecological Restoration • MA Environmental Trust • National Park Service • Natural Resource Conservation Service—USDA • The Nature Conservancy • National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration • Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies • Restore America's Estuaries • US Fish & Wildlife Service • Wellfleet Conservation Trust



### ECONOMIC BENEFITS

- » Estuaries provide habitat for more than 75 percent of the U.S. commercial fish catch, and an even greater percentage of the recreational fish catch.
- » Enhanced harvestable shellfish and finfish resources within the estuary and Wellfleet Bay.
- » Enhance spending and support jobs in the local economy from recreation and tourism.
- » Improved public access for recreation, boating, birding, fin and shellfishing.
- » Improved operations, management and oversight of water management infrastructure.
- » Significant local and regional economic stimulus from both short-term construction and long-term project benefits.

