

Transcript of Manhan River fish passage project video, New England Field Office (R5EA)

Frank Steplar (FS): It's like taking down a barrier across 91. If all of a sudden we woke up one morning and there's a barrier across 91 and we couldn't go any further, uh...hey.

Michael Tautznik (MT): We had some interest in looking at restoring the habitat, the upper reaches of the Manhan River are really very good habitat that aren't accessible because of the dam, the impediment. There was a lot of student interest, a lot of senior interest and we had some individuals here in the community that thought it would be a good idea to see if we could open up that habitat to the species that were traditionally able to get up into the north branch of the Manhan River. So that discussion led to the Corps of Engineers looking at the project and checking feasibility, doing some preliminary design work, and from there the project sat on a shelf for quite some time.

John O'Leary (JL): My involvement came in probably a couple of phases. But, when my involvement began was one as the Watershed Team Leader, back when there was an initiative within the Executive Office on Environmental Affairs within Massachusetts, I became what was known as the Connecticut River Watershed Team Leader. And they were doing some dam restoration work on the dam in Easthampton, by the time we got involved that restoration work was underway. And a local resident, Frank Steplar, wanted to get involved in maybe taking the dam out or putting a fish ladder in. My background is in fish passage and migratory fish, so I was familiar with that even when I became the Watershed Team Leader. And so that got that part of it working. And the funding part of it that I was involved in was, I was working on what was called the Natural Resource Damage Claim. There was some pollution that occurred in the Connecticut River at Holyoke and a claim was going to be made against the people who did the pollution to actually rehabilitate the area that had been impacted, but also to look for damages, that habitat had been lost. And so the claim was to figure out how you could make habitat where habitat had been lost due to this pollution. So we came up with the idea of creating fish passage would open up a section of river and that, in essence, created habitat. We thought we had a pretty good case for it and I thought that would provide the funding for the fishway. In the end, it didn't work out that way.

Andrea Donlon (AD): The Watershed Council is a member-based advocacy organization that works in the entire four-state Connecticut River Watershed. I've been working here for six years and one of the first things I did was to take a tour with Frank Steplar of the Manhan Watershed. And we have been trying to get funding for the fish ladder for more than six years, and so finally it's really exciting that this is happening.

Melissa Grader (MG): And I came on board when the partners were trying to figure out a way to keep this project moving forward, possibly with the assistance of the Partners of Fish and Wildlife program. We were being solicited for potential ARRA projects, American Recovery and Reinvestment Act projects, and I submitted this project as a possibility.

MT: Luckily, the Federal Fish and Wildlife Agency is still interested in the project, and when the stimulus money started being distributed they put this project up for funding under the ARRA.

MG: There will be a denil fish ladder at the dam which will basically run along, as you're looking upstream, the left side of the dam. And the ladder will provide upstream passage for the fishes and there will also be a downstream passage pipe.

FS: With this fish ladder, these fish will be able to access another 30-some-odd miles of spawnable streams.

Ken Sprankle (KS): We had an exciting event occur this fall, with notification from a land owner on the north branch of the Manhan that he had located an Atlantic salmon in a redd.

JL: That fish could have come to the base of the dam at the Manhan in the spring time and essentially sat there until water conditions were such - a thunderstorm comes by, the river rises abruptly, and that four-foot difference between the rocky ledge of the natural falls and the dam crest, with enough water coming over it, it wouldn't surprise me that there would have been a time and a place where an adult fish could have gotten over the dam on its own. A fish ladder would be much better in terms of passage, but it really looks like that's what happened.

MG: The city and Mayor Tautznik in particular and Stuart Beckley, the City Planner, they've just been incredibly patient and it's amazing that they've maintained their interest in this project and I think it's a testament to what they want to see happen there at that dam. They really see the benefit of, the ecological and the human benefit of getting fish passage at that site.

MT: It's going to be an attraction to the community, I think it's going to provide some environmental justice that is deserved, I think, in this instance. It's a great, it's a wonderful spot, it's a nice dam. It's another attraction it's another reason for people to visit here.

FS: It's a great project, there's been so many kind and nice people that I've gotten involved with, that helped out, and I just think it's a wonderful thing for the future and the world fishery.