



May 4, 2021

Division of Ecological Restoration
Ione Hughes, Program Coordinator
251 Causeway Street, Suite 400
Boston, MA 02114

Dear Ms. Hughes,

The Weymouth Back River was designated an Area of Critical Environmental Concern in 1982, (about 950 acres), and is part of the Boston Harbor and Weir Watersheds. It is a short tidal river, a mile and a half long, located largely in the coastal communities of Weymouth and Hingham, Massachusetts. It is located approximately ten miles south of Boston. Weymouth Back River consists of 180 acres of tidal waters. Whitman's Pond is also an important part of the Back River and flows north through area tributaries in ponds, and swamps and empties into Hingham Bay and into Boston Harbor.

Within the highly productive estuary of Weymouth Back River and its surrounding watershed there are approximately 100 acres of valuable salt marshes and wooded wildlife preserves. It supports many forms of aquatic life including 31 native species of fin fish, shellfish beds, herring, smelt and eel runs. Over 150 species of birds, including osprey, feed on live fish such as herring, flounder, and perch.

The Weymouth Herring Run in East Weymouth is one of the most productive herring runs in Massachusetts. Weymouth town records of 1648 state that the herring run provided an important food source for its citizens, and for Native and European people. River Herring are considered the keystone species supporting the marine food web and play a vital role, both environmentally and economically, in restoring many depleted fisheries.

Today, River Herring continue their annual migration over fish ladders to spawn at Whitman's Pond, but in far less numbers than in previous decades when herring were allowed to migrate to both Whitman's Pond and onto Great Pond. At present, the migration of River Herring is limited to their spawning habitat at Whitman's Pond, which also serves as the Weymouth's secondary source of drinking water. The dam at Great Pond, Weymouth's primary drinking water supply, prevents River Herring access to one of their historical spawning habitats. Other dams at the Mill River and the Old Swamp River SNUP Dam at Weymouth Libbey Industrial Parkway all adversely affect natural waterflow of the rivers. Furthermore, urban development coupled with increase water demand have resulted in a significant loss of spawning healthy habitat for River Herring and other fish.

The Back River Watershed Association is a 501(c) (3) tax exempt organization organized to preserve, protect, and promote the Back River and its watershed in Weymouth, Hingham, and parts of Abington, Rockland & Braintree.

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The Back River Watershed Association is pleased to lend its strong support to the Town of Weymouth's DER Priority Projects Grant application for the removal and restoration of the SNUP Dam on the Old Swamp River. The SNUP Dam and its system was constructed in the 1980's as part of the Weymouth Libbey Industrial Parkway. Its intended purpose was to divert river water into a series of small ponds before discharging into Whitman's Pond to reduce nutrient loading into the South Cove of Whitman's Pond. The SNUP Dam system has not been maintained since it was constructed, and is functionally obsolete. More importantly, the SNUP Dam is an obstruction for spawning River Herring and other fish such as native Brook Trout.

A 1998 study by Ambient Engineering notes that the SNUP Dam restricts flow for a distance of at least 500 feet upstream, causing a buildup of sediments that should be dredged periodically, which has never been done. Overall, the SNUP Dam is negatively impacting conditions including temperature on the Old Swamp River. The Old Swamp River which is designated a cold-water fish resource that supports a population of native Brook Trout, a species that requires cold healthy rivers to survive. Restoration of the cold-water fishery is a priority of the Weymouth Herring Wardens and the Division of Marine Fisheries.

The Back River Watershed Association's mission is to preserve, project, and promote the Weymouth Back River and its watershed. Our mission is strengthened with the Town of Weymouth's proposal to the DER Priority Projects Grant to remove the SNUP Dam and associated infrastructure. Removal of the dam and sediment allows the restoration of the impacted areas of the river, including its banks and riverbed.

The Back River Watershed Association considers the goals of this important project to restore passage to River Herring and the ecological health of the cold-water fishery a very worthy one.

Thank you for your consideration of this project

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda J. DiAngelo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Linda J. DiAngelo

Enclosure:
President, Back River Watershed Association, Inc.
lucyblue@comcast.net
781-337-8085