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State and Federal Officials Begin Process for Second Round of Projects to Restore the Housatonic River Watershed *Massachusetts EEA and USFWS will hold informational meeting on Sept. 25*

BOSTON – The second round of restoration work to remedy years of environmental degradation caused by General Electric’s release of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) into the Housatonic River begins this month, when the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) host a meeting in Lenox to discuss the process for selecting land acquisition and other restoration projects.

Following the September 25 public meeting, EEA and USFWS - acting as the Housatonic River Natural Resource Trustees – will solicit proposals for projects worth approximately \$4 million later this fall. EEA and USFWS were named Trustees as the result of an October 2000 consent decree, under which General Electric paid over \$15 million to compensate for natural resource damages in Massachusetts and Connecticut caused by release of PCBs from the company’s Pittsfield facility. PCB pollution affected aquatic wildlife and habitats, as well as waterfowl and predators that consume contaminated organisms. Roughly half of the \$15 million total was made available for restoration efforts in each state. EEA Secretary Ian Bowles serves as the Commonwealth’s Trustee.

In January, EEA and USFWS announced contracts for \$4 million worth of Round 1 restoration projects, ranging from invasive species control and restoring river flow to implementing an environmental literacy program. For Round 2, the Trustees will concentrate on land protection and acquisition and on projects that directly benefit aquatic and wildlife resources.

This month's informational meeting will focus on procedural differences between the Round 1 and Round 2 project selection processes, and Trustee representatives will discuss formation of a committee to provide input on criteria for land acquisition. The public will have an opportunity to comment on the Trustees' proposed Round 2 procedures at the September 25 meeting and written comments will be accepted for two weeks afterward.

“With Round 1 projects underway, this month's meeting paves the way for the next phase of restoration for the Housatonic River Watershed,” Secretary Bowles said. “This next round will focus specifically on aiding the wide range of flora and fauna that make the watershed their home. I look forward to seeing the projects that will be proposed to restore these resources to their full health and potential.”

Traversing 69 miles of the Bay State, the Housatonic River flows north to south between the Taconic Mountain Range of eastern New York and the Berkshires of western Massachusetts, and then through Connecticut where it empties into Long Island Sound. The approximately 504-square-mile watershed supports 117 rare plants and 33 rare animal species. Under the NRD process, the Massachusetts Trustees will later this fall solicit proposals for spending approximately \$4 million to restore, rehabilitate, replace and/or acquire the equivalent of injured natural resources in the Housatonic River Watershed. Information about the Housatonic River Watershed Restoration Project can be viewed at www.ma-housatonicrestoration.org.

Restoration achievements are made possible by cooperative efforts of the Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Programs of EEA and the USFWS. The Trustee representatives, who administer the funds and work with local communities to restore the Massachusetts portion of the Housatonic watershed, are EEA NRD Program Director Dale Young and USFWS NRD Specialist Veronica Varela.

The September 25 public meeting regarding the Round 2 process will take place from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at Lenox Town Hall, 6 Walker Street, Lenox.

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