

12 October 2007

Review Team Evaluation Comments

c/o Woodlot Alternatives

30 Park Drive

Topsham, Maine 04086

Dear Massachusetts SubCouncil, Housatonic River Natural Resource Trustees:

The Massachusetts Audubon Society and Housatonic Valley Association appreciate the thoughtful review of our project, *Housatonic Environmental Literacy Program (HELP) for the River* (Proposal #3). Following are clarifications to the reviewer comments recently posted.

Criterion A1 (Natural Recovery Period): *There was a difference in how each of the reviewers interpreted “the natural recovery period.” Although there was disagreement on this point, all agreed that the proposal inadequately addressed this issue.*

Since PCBs are extremely stable organic compounds, they are likely to persist in the environment for a very long period of time, perhaps thousands of years or more. This would push the natural recovery period of the Housatonic well beyond the restoration benefits that we expect will be achieved by our project. Our project is primarily directed to children from grade school through high school, and the project will also impact adults, including parents/guardians of the students, teachers, volunteers, guest speakers, and civic leaders. With such a long natural recovery period, the children benefiting from our programs today will be the conservation commission members, mayors, selectmen, town meeting members, and voting public of tomorrow. We hope that the knowledge of the river and the stewardship values our program will instill in these students will make them mindful of the decisions they make and the actions they take as adults with regard to the river’s health. In this way, we believe that our project will have a long-term, positive impact on the river and its watershed.

Elements of our program are specifically designed to slow down the degradation of the Housatonic, leading to its improvement ahead of the natural recovery period. In fact, we feel that our program will instill a desire in children and adults to safeguard the river and watershed through immediate, positive actions. For example, the fourth grade program includes a storm drain awareness component, and by locating and labeling storm drains, we expect an immediate, positive impact on the river’s health. The sixth grade program includes segments on land use, plus a unit on the government and non-profit groups involved in Housatonic River issues. We hope that many of these students will become involved as volunteers for these groups, with more immediate benefits for the river as a result of their volunteer participation. Through their research topics, the high school students participating in the Envirothon can have the ability to

effect change at the local level through presentations to local boards and conservation commissions. All of these changes would be well in advance of the river's natural recovery period.

Criterion A3 (Sustainable Benefits): *Two reviewers raised scores because they felt that the school funding would provide a moderate amount of sustainable security. One reviewer lowered score because there would be an amount of human intervention that would be required for the length of the project.*

Sustainability can be addressed on several levels. After participating in *HELP for the River*, we expect that many teachers will be inspired to continue environmental programming in their classrooms in subsequent years. Some schools will be able to sustain elements of the programs on their own with the assistance of the curriculum notebooks and website that will be created through this program. Other schools, because of teacher turnover or lack of expertise in teaching science, will continue to need our help with all or parts of the program.

Mass Audubon has extensive experience in environmental education through its statewide network of sanctuaries, and we find that despite the intensity and depth of our programs, many schoolteachers remain uncomfortable teaching in the out-of-doors without the support of specially-trained experts such as our staff. Particularly with regard to the canoe programs, most schools do not have the staff trained in First Aid and canoe techniques to run this program, and the school systems also do not own canoes. HVA has been providing their storm drain and river education program since 2002. Many of the teachers have asked for the program to be repeated each year, and some have started carrying it out on their own. We plan to work with the teachers to help them integrate this into their curriculum so that it is seen as a tool to help them reach their education goals for their students. A grant from this program will increase the capacity of both Mass Audubon and HVA to sustain these projects into the future. Education does require human intervention – it is people teaching people!

In the long term, the combined resources of both agencies will be used to sustain educational programs focused on the river beyond the period of this grant. Through their websites and newsletters, both agencies have an enormous reach throughout the region. Mass Audubon and HVA have long histories of successful environmental programming in the Berkshire County schools, and both agencies will continue to seek funding from a variety of sources to accomplish their goals. Statewide, Mass Audubon is in the quiet stages of a \$55 million comprehensive campaign, *Connecting People and Nature*, and part of this will increase the Berkshire Wildlife Sanctuaries' programmatic capacity over time through expansion of a dedicated, local endowment for education.

At a certain level, the benefits of the program transcend the scope of the grant itself, as the participants and all involved with the program will, we hope, develop a stewardship ethic towards the river that will influence them and their actions throughout their lives.

Criterion A4 (Magnitude of Ecological Effects): *There was no clear demonstration of direct ecological benefits as part of this proposal.*

We recognize that by their nature, education programs do not address this category completely. *HELP for the River* aims to make a positive impact through stewardship over the long term provided by educated, committed, and motivated citizens. However, there are direct impacts to slowing the degradation of the river that were mentioned above (Criterion A1), including the awareness of storm drains and their use, plus their labeling to discourage illegal dumping.

Criterion C1 (Relationship of Expected Costs to Expected Benefits): *Two reviewers lowered scores because they felt the proposal did not demonstrate that the project demonstrated exemplary net benefits. One reviewer raised score reflecting expected net benefits pointed out by other reviewers.*

We realize that the costs to mount an educational effort serving the number of schools that we propose are great. But the benefits are great as well, as the number of children served is very high and the geographic distribution is throughout the Housatonic watershed in Massachusetts. *HELP for the River* programs are not just one shot programs or field trips, they are coordinated, in-depth, and multi-unit programs that address the state curriculum frameworks while at the same time educating and building a constituency for the Housatonic and its recovery. Both Mass Audubon and Housatonic Valley Association are experts in experiential education, which is best achieved through using educators trained in this approach. Outdoor educational experiences require more adult supervision for safety reasons as well, and our budget reflects those added costs. We believe that *HELP for the River* is unique in its attention to the future stewardship of the river – in advance of the natural recovery period. Without building an understanding, appreciation, and even a love of the river, we risk repeating the same mistakes that led to the current degradation.

Additional Review Team Comments: *Project would have scored higher if more partners or additional financial support from others had been secured. Ratio of other committed funds was rather low compared to what was being requested.*

Mass Audubon is teaming with Housatonic Valley Association to offer this comprehensive education program, and we look at all Massachusetts schools in the Housatonic River watershed as our collaborators. We will draw upon people from the local communities in the watershed for assistance in the programs, particularly with the canoe programs; as guest speakers in the classroom; and as coaches and mentors for the Envirothon students. Most schools are unable to contribute monetarily to bring programs such as these to their schools. Our budget and the request amount reflect the funds that we will need to offer a program of this magnitude. We are providing 10% of the expenses as our match.

Mass Audubon's Berkshire Wildlife Sanctuaries are comprised of three sanctuaries—Pleasant Valley in Lenox, Canoe Meadows in Pittsfield, and Mt. Everett in Sheffield—providing a major educational presence in the region. With 262 acres, Canoe Meadows is within Reach 5A of the

Housatonic River, which it borders for one-half mile. Past sampling has indicated the presence of large quantities of PCB contaminated sediments along this stretch, as well as in the floodplain area of the sanctuary. The Massachusetts office of the Housatonic Valley Association is located on another stretch of the river in South Lee. Both organizations are committed to building a constituency for the river and educating the next generation to ensure a positive future for it.

If you have any additional questions about our proposal, please feel free to contact either of us. Thank you again for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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