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Request for Information: Project Idea Instructions

HOUSATONIC RIVER  
NATURAL RESOURCE DAMAGES FUND  
ROUND 1, 2005  
Massachusetts SubCouncil

PROJECT IDEA FORM

PART A. SUBMITTER AND PROJECT INFORMATION

Responses may be entered electronically, saved and printed. Or, print form and complete with black ink.

Project Idea Name Integrated Habitat Acquisition Strategy.

Project Type See instructions for project type descriptions. Check all relevant boxes.

- Resource-based
- Access-based
- Maintenance-based

Restoration Priority Category See instructions for category descriptions.

Primary Category. Check one box.

- Aquatic Biological Resources and Habitat
- Wildlife Resources and Habitat
- Recreational Uses
- Environmental Education and Outreach

Secondary Categories. Check all relevant boxes.

- Aquatic Biological Resources and Habitat
- Wildlife Resources and Habitat
- Recreational Uses
- Environmental Education and Outreach

Submitter

Name

Jack Buckley

Title

Deputy Director, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife

Address

251 Causeway Street Suite 400

Boston, MA

02114

617-626-1572

Phone

Jack.buckley@state.ma.us

Email:

Type of Entity

Check the box that best describes the submitter.

- Private individual
- Non-profit organization
- Municipal government
- State government
- County government
- Federal government
- Tribal government
- Corporation or Business
- Academic Institution
- Other (explain)

[Empty box for other entity explanation]



10:30 AM JCH

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**List Specific Injured Natural Resources and/or Impaired Natural Resource Services to Benefit from Project (see Section 1.2 of the RPSP for a Summary of Damages)**

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**Project Location** (if known) See directions for additional materials to provide (maps, aerial photographs).

Municipality/ies: Housatonic River watershed

Longitude for approximate center of project area:

Latitude for approximate center of project area:

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**Project Budget Estimate** (if known)

Total Project Cost Estimate: \$ N/A

Housatonic River NRD Fund Estimate: \$

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### PART B. PROJECT NARRATIVE

#### Integrated Land Acquisition Strategy

We are proposing that the Trustees specifically earmark a significant percentage (75%) of the NRD funds available for habitat acquisition and implement a more integrated approach to habitat protection. Funding criteria should incorporate habitat assessment tools and takes advantage of developing mapping tools. This approach should rely on and benefit from the experience and knowledge of state agencies and NGO's such as the Nature Conservancy, Land Trusts and Berkshire Natural Resources Council.

Habitat acquisition targets all four NRD restoration priorities and is the single most important activity to protect the ecological resources and public access to the Housatonic River. The approach taken in the current RFR process does not effectively evaluate acquisition in the context of other protected resources, evaluate acquisition in terms of ecological resources or coordinate acquisition with other state and NGO acquisition programs. For example, the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife owns over 17,000 acres within the watershed and that ownership should be integrated into the evaluation of acquisition projects. The current approach appears, based on the RFR, to fund projects on an individual basis thereby creating a piecemeal approach that may not maximize protection. This approach also creates a competitive system where land protection organizations must compete against each other for acquisition funding rather than a cooperative partnership approach where these same organizations work together as a team to identify and protect the most important habitats. The Trustees should fund the development of a cooperative and integrated acquisition program that takes advantage of the long term acquisition programs of state agencies and NGO's (as a supporting document attached is the Division acquisition process). An integrated program should have the following components:

- Clear Conservation objectives (e.g. high quality riparian, specific natural communities, biological diversity)
- Evaluation of project in a landscape context
- Clear criteria that allows for the analysis of the degree of threat, public use, feasibility, and relative value
- An acquisition process that allows for flexible partnerships
- A conservation planning process that identifies conservation priorities
- Evaluation of specific parcels using the best scientific evidence and analysis available
- A decision making process that is transparent and balances needs with a focus on resource protection

We are proposing an approach that builds on successful acquisition programs and uses past experience with a refined focus on the Housatonic watershed. This would present an opportunity for agencies and NGO's to bring significant knowledge and experience to developing an integrated approach to acquisition.

The Division would apply a number of mapping and assessment tools in developing an acquisition focus such as Biomap, Living Waters and other specific GIS tools used in our focus area planning process. The Division has established focus areas in the Housatonic River watershed based on the best scientific and mapping information available. In addition, the Division is in the process of completing a new mapping tool that provides the delineation of rare species habitats on a species-by-species basis. This will provide a flexible and powerful tool that will: 1) help land protection plans focus on the actual habitat of rare

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species, 2) enable a more accurate assessment of the levels and kinds of protection that already exist for rare species habitats, and 3) help identify which species are most in need of further habitat protection. These and other methods should be used to develop a comprehensive acquisition framework that will maximize the use of NRD funds for habitat protection. Beyond the development of this acquisition framework, we believe integration with current ownership will increase the opportunity for acquisition. The Division is committed to directing significant resources as match to acquisitions if such a process is developed. We believe that an integrated acquisition process can be designed to incorporate any additional resource information that is developed through the NRD grant process.

An integrated collaborative approach that integrates current protected open space and associated planning processes would potentially increase the probabilities of creating funding partnerships that would leverage acquisition funds to supplement the NRD funding. The Division would commit matching resources if we can link our acquisition priorities and focus areas with significant NRD acquisition funding. For public access we believe an integrated planning approach would provide similar potential partnerships with the Office of Fishing and Boating and others. The success of a collective approach is based on combining multiple interests within a common vision.

An additional benefit of an integrated acquisition strategy is the opportunity for the concurrent development of stewardship and management plans that will insure that habitat functions are maintained.

### **PART C. PROJECT LOCATION (if known)**

Housatonic River Watershed

### **PART D. CRITERIA STATEMENTS**

#### **A. Relevance and Applicability (85 point maximum)**

1. Provides restoration benefits in advance of the natural recovery period.

Habitat protection provides long term protection for public access and resources protection regardless of recovery status

2. Located within the Housatonic River watershed in Massachusetts.

Yes

3. Provides long-term sustainable benefits.

Land acquisition by definition represents a long-term sustainable benefit

4. Maximizes the level of ecological benefits.

Habitat protection in combination with resources information and management maximizes ecological benefits

5. Presents minimal or no potential for adverse effects on human health and safety.

None

6. Benefits one or more restoration priority categories.

An effective and integrated acquisition program benefits all restoration priorities

7. Complements or enhances remedial actions.

#### **B. Technical Merit (65 point maximum)**

1. Employs well-known and accepted techniques/technology, principles, and concepts.

The success of the Division's acquisition program demonstrate the value of the approach both in terms of quality and quantity

2. Demonstrates Applicant has relevant qualifications, experience, and capacity.

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The success of the Division's acquisition program demonstrates the value of the approach through the protection of over 17,000 acres in the Housatonic River watershed

3. Presents minimal or no potential of adverse environmental impacts.

No adverse environmental impact

4. Results can be measured and evaluated.

Results can easily be measured through acres acquired and/or value /acre

5. Incorporates problem identification and contingency actions, when appropriate.

N/A

6. Applicant possesses administrative capacity to conduct proposed project.

Past performance in acquisition planning and acquisition demonstrates capacity

### C. Project Budget (60 point maximum)

N/A

### D. Socioeconomic Merit (75 points maximum)

1. Enhances public's ability to use, enjoy, or benefit from the Housatonic River watershed.

The Division currently owns over 17,000 acre in the watershed which significantly enhances public enjoyment through hunting, fishing, bird watching and other resource dependent activities

2. Likely to result in an "informed citizenry" that will help ensure ongoing environmental stewardship of injured natural resources and services.

Protected open space creates a context for stewardship and an ownership interest in protecting and managing resources

3. Provides an opportunity for public involvement.

4. Presents minimal or no potential of adverse socioeconomic impacts.

5. Complements goals, needs, and/or recommendations in existing plans that incorporated public input and involvement in their development.

6. Includes public outreach component(s).

7. Demonstrates diversity of contributing partners.

Project Idea submittals will be ranked by their score and within each restoration priority category. The evaluations and scores provided by review team members, and the comments received by the public, will be advisory in nature.

Project Idea submittals that are selected by the MA SubCouncil for consideration of further development are termed "Proposed Alternatives" and will proceed to Stage Three.

## **PART E. SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Attached Land Acquisition Proces

Support letter

THE DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL LAW ENFORCEMENT  
AND  
THE DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE  
LAND ACQUISITION PROCESS

This land acquisition process is intended to be used for all Bond and Land Stamp funded acquisitions.

ACQUISITION GOALS, OBJECTIVES & CRITERIA

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Primary Goal

To acquire land in order to protect and perpetuate ecosystems that contain significant fish and wildlife resources and to conserve the biological diversity of the state. These lands shall be open for compatible public use and enjoyment.

Secondary Goal

In conjunction with the Public Access Board, provide adequate routes of access to the lands and waters of the Commonwealth to ensure public use and enjoyment of the state's biological resources compatible with natural resource conservation.

Land Conservation Objectives

The highest priorities of the land acquisition effort are to protect:

- \*High quality riparian, palustrine, and estuarine habitats  
e.g. cold water streams, major rivers, emergent marshes  
and other wetlands
- \*Outstanding natural communities  
diversity of natural community types, e.g. limestone  
wetlands, floodplain forests, old growth forests, and  
vernal pools.
- \*Diversity of the state's native species  
habitats for species of management concern, including  
state-listed species, harvested species, and species  
associated with interjurisdictional initiatives (e.g.  
neotropical birds)

CRITERIA IN EVALUATING AND PRIORITIZING FOCUS AREAS OR PROJECTS

PRIMARY CRITERION - NATURAL RESOURCE VALUES

Meets Conservation and Public Use Objective

\*Degree to which the acquisition addresses stated agency land acquisition conservation objectives and priorities

\*expand opportunities for compatible public recreation

Other Natural Resource Values

\*Creation of large blocks of ecologically viable natural land e.g. 500+ acre contiguous tracts of protected land

\*Linkages between conservation lands that create larger holdings and may provide possible corridors for wildlife. Enhancement and protection of current DFW holdings which have been identified as high priority expansion areas and acquisition of inholdings within existing Wildlife Management Areas

\*Additional natural resource conservation values e.g. watershed protection, forestlands, agricultural lands and aquifer protection

SECONDARY CRITERIA

Threat

Imminence of threat  
Degree or nature of threat

Public Use

Variety of passive recreational uses compatible with conservation objectives

Feasibility

Willing seller  
Staffing considerations  
Legal considerations

Value

Cost - value for the price  
Leverage further protection  
Cooperative project

## Management Considerations

Impact on DFW land management responsibilities relative to other properties

Costs associated with waste/building removal  
Geographic and programmatic distribution

## ACQUISITION PROCESS

### FISH & WILDLIFE LANDS COMMITTEE

The duties of this committee would be to establish and refine land protection priorities, specifically to:

- (1) help formulate and review all "focus areas" for acquisition planning and
- (2) review and recommend all specific parcels being considered for purchase.

F&W Lands Committee would be composed of individuals from each of the three natural resource sections of the Division, the DFW Chief of Realty, Departmental bond administrator, Departmental land attorney, and a representative from each District, namely, the District Manager or District Land Agent.

The Committee should meet at least quarterly. At the beginning of each fiscal year, the Lands Committee should review progress made towards land acquisition priorities in the previous fiscal year and reevaluate, and adjust as necessary, acquisition priorities for the new fiscal year. Later in the fiscal year, meetings should be largely devoted to consideration of particular acquisitions.

If parcels of land come up between meetings that require rapid action, the DFW Chief of Realty and Departmental bond administrator would consult jointly with agency staff as necessary, then make the best decision possible and subsequently report the action taken on the parcel to the Lands Committee.

### ACQUISITION PLANNING

#### Potential Acquisition Parcels or Focus Areas Suggested By:

DFW District Offices  
Wildlife, Fisheries & Natural Heritage and Endangered Species  
Sections  
Other F&W staff

other state agencies or municipalities  
sportsmen's clubs

non-profit conservation organizations  
citizens

### Conservation Planning/Focus Areas

Establish a workable number of "focus areas" for land acquisition in each District. Focus areas should be large enough to protect the specific natural resource features of interest. These areas should be delineated by holding meetings in each District with the Lands Committee at the beginning of each fiscal year. Most acquisitions will be selected from these focus areas. At the beginning of each fiscal year the Lands Committee will report to the Fisheries and Wildlife Board and the Commissioner on the prior year's acquisitions.

### Focus Area or Property Evaluation

Acquisition proposal prepared by proponent  
Review of property acquisition proposal by District Land Agents

Does proposal address agency's land protection priorities?

Do attributes constitute a viable ecological system?

What is significance of contained natural resources on a District Level or state wide basis?

Review deed and maps

Communicate with District and three natural resource sections

Analyze resources using GIS

Conduct site visit

Consider land management concerns

Contact with land owner to discuss:

willingness to sell

options for acquisition/protection - full fee, CR, easement

structure of compensation - full value, gift bargain sale

More detailed evaluation

additional site visit or field work if necessary

inventory/evaluation form completed

acquisition criteria addressed

### DECISION MAKING

### Land Acquisition Committee Discussion and Recommendation

Presentation/discussion at F&W Lands Acquisition Committee  
Acquisition objective articulated

Rough ranking of importance by consensus

Geographic balancing if any (e.g. expensive land in east v. cheap west)  
Acquisition and management issues addressed  
Proposed project structured to meet the agency's needs  
    acquisition alternatives explored  
    role of other organizations clarified  
Formal recommendation for approval to the Commissioner and Fisheries & Wildlife Board

#### ACQUISITION IMPLEMENTATION

##### Outside Technical and Legal work Initiated as Needed

Negotiation

DCPO Requirements

Financial Documentation/Processing

Legal Documentation or Acquisition

Acquisition

Notification

Data Management

Outstanding Issues

cooperative management agreements

##### DFW Realty Committee

Role of Realty Committee: continue oversight of DFW land management and disposition policy issues and specific problems. Management problems posed by a particular new acquisition should be discussed here.

March 17, 2006,

Veronica Varela  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, New England Office  
70 Commercial Street, Suite 300  
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

Dale Young  
Massachusetts Executive office of Environmental Affairs  
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900  
Boston, Massachusetts  
02114-2524

Dear Ms. Varela and Ms. Young,

We are writing in support of the idea proposal submitted by Massachusetts Fish and Wildlife to earmark a significant percentage of the NRD funds for land acquisition (both fee and development rights) and highlight the importance of this proposal not only for rare species protection, but also other natural communities and land uses that are essential for maintaining the natural and working landscape that maintain the Housatonic River watershed. The requirements for land acquisition in the full proposal for NRD grants, combined with the tight deadline for application, makes it challenging to match up willing landowners with scientific criteria, and complete necessary pre-acquisition activities such as appraisals, negotiations and application preparation. During many public meetings of the citizen based Housatonic River Restoration Plan it was clear that land acquisition was a top priority for use of NRD funds (<http://www.restorehousatonic.com/land.html>).

We support and applaud those applicants who were able to nominate specific parcels for protection, but we believe those particular applications should be augmented by a fund set aside for future acquisitions as well. Providing the flexibility for funding both individualized and coordinated land conservation projects is critical to the future of the river and its watershed.

The Housatonic River has a long history of partnerships to protect public and private lands. Sections of the watershed have already been protected for public use or habitat or working landscape purposes by a wealth of state agencies, towns and community and conservation organizations, including the signatories of this letter. But there is so much more to be done.

We believe it is critical to set up a dedicated land acquisition fund so that essential planning, private negotiations, and land and development right purchases can come to fruition.

We urge you to consider this idea.

Sincerely,

Berkshire Environmental Action Team - Jane Winn  
Berkshire Natural Resource Council - Tad Ames  
Berkshire County League of Sportsmen -Mark Jester  
Great Barrington Land Conservancy--Anthony Barnaba  
Housatonic River Initiative -Tim Gray  
Lee Land Trust -Jeannette Kegler  
Sheffield Land Trust -John Wightman