

## HYPOTHETICAL SAMPLE IMPACT NARRATIVE

***Note to Applicants:** As noted in the instructions, a narrative is required for NEPA-related impacts that you anticipate will be non-negligible in nature. We provide this sample impact narrative to clarify the content and level of detail expected. The example project, associated impacts, towns, citations, and other elements described below are hypothetical and are not meant to reflect preferred restoration approaches or project locations.*

The proposed boat launch would be a full-service facility, with a paved ramp suitable for trailer-towed boats and a gravel parking lot large enough to accommodate roughly 12 vehicles. As noted, the launch would be located on Route 33 in Smithville, just south of the intersection of Routes 33 and 57.

This narrative discusses the six key issues highlighted in our checklist of potential environmental and socioeconomic impacts. First, we focus on the potential negative environmental impacts. As with any paved boat launch, localized **water quality impacts** are likely. Vehicular traffic and surface runoff from the proposed parking area may contribute to sedimentation in the river. Likewise, launching activity and boat use near the launch may disturb bottom sediments and aquatic plants, decreasing water clarity in roughly a one-acre area surrounding the facility. We anticipate that these impacts will be minimal, however. The parking lot design will include large rock gravel and erosion control structures in the area nearest the riverbank. Likewise, the ramp will be built to a sufficient depth to avoid propeller churning from most vessels. It is noteworthy that a comparable ramp in Townsville (10 miles south of the Smithville border) was built in 1988 and has had limited water quality impacts.<sup>1</sup> Finally, any negative water quality impacts may be offset by reduced bank erosion in the immediate area. Boaters currently use this location as a makeshift put-in for canoes, kayaks, and other small boats. Foot traffic has caused significant erosion along the riverside trails. Focusing this activity at a more formal access point may help reduce erosion.

Second, construction of the boat launch will require filling of approximately one half acre of **wetlands**. The location for the proposed launch was selected after a detailed review of potential

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<sup>1</sup> Average suspended sediment concentrations of 90 mg/L were recorded at the Townsville launch in 1998, but concentrations dropped to an average of 8 mg/L 100 meters downstream from the ramp (USGS, 1998).

alternative sites. The objective of this review was to satisfy access and convenience goals while minimizing the environmental impact of the launch. The site search focused on the 15-mile river stretch from Smithville to Jonestown, currently the largest river reach not served by a paved boat launch. The wetland segment at the chosen site represents a shrub swamp community, typical of those found in this reach of the Housatonic where farming was common in the past. The flora is dominated by short woody plants and the area lacks a closed canopy. Field surveys (see Johnson, 1992) in this area have found no species of special concern. In contrast, other available land parcels in this stretch of the river feature less abundant and/or ecologically sensitive habitats, including red maple swamp and deep emergent marsh. Furthermore, the design of the proposed facility would minimize wetland filling by setting the parking area 20 feet back from the river bank.<sup>2</sup>

A final potential negative impact involves the **value of adjacent residential properties**. While the proposed launch site is bordered on one side by town land, two private residences occupy a three-acre lot north of the site. One home is situated near the riverbank, roughly 100 feet upstream of the boat ramp; the other is located closer to Route 33, roughly 50 feet from the proposed parking lot. The homeowners have expressed concern that the boat launch would create noise, traffic, litter, and other aesthetic impacts that would reduce the value of their properties. The proposed facility design would seek to minimize these disturbances. First, the parking lot would be fenced to discourage trespassing on adjacent private land. Second, the forested area between the parking lot and the houses would be left intact, creating a visual barrier. Third, buoys would be used to mark departure and approach routes to the ramp, limiting boat traffic in the immediate area of the shoreline home. Likewise, signage regulating boat speed would seek to limit noise and wake disturbance in the area immediately surrounding the ramp. It is noteworthy that other sites considered in our search raised more significant property value issues, with more densely populated residential areas and more organized neighborhood opposition.

The proposed boat launch also will offer a variety of beneficial impacts. First, the boat launch will provide much needed **recreational access** in the Smithville and Jonestown area. As noted, this river reach currently has no paved boat ramp access. Recreational surveys (e.g., Anderson,

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<sup>2</sup> Note that the project will require approval under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. We have received preliminary project approval from the Army Corps of Engineers, and are coordinating with the Smithville Conservation Commission regarding additional local, state and federal review requirements (see list of permits and approvals under Project Implementation Plan, page 3).

1995) conducted at the Townsville boat ramp suggest that the majority of users travel from Smithville and Jonestown, and would prefer a more convenient location. Likewise, surveys of recreational anglers on the Housatonic suggest that most use the Townsville boat launch, despite the relatively long boat trip back upriver to preferred fishing locations near the confluence of the Housatonic and the Green River. Finally, overcrowding at the Townsville launch has been a problem in summer months. The proposed launch would ease this congestion and likely would allow an overall increase in river use by boaters, anglers, and other recreationalists.

Second, we believe that the project may provide **public safety benefits** by reducing traffic hazards currently experienced on Route 33. Currently, boaters access the river at a variety of makeshift put-ins along Route 33. In summer, this can result in frequent u-turns, shoulder parking, and roadside foot traffic. Police records suggest that several serious accidents have occurred in this location in the last five years. The proposed launch will provide a more focused access point and ample parking, curtailing these public safety risks.

Finally, we believe that the boat launch may offer modest **economic benefits** for local retailers. Rusty's Gas and Go, located directly across from the proposed site, has expressed enthusiasm for the project. The launch would likely increase sales of gas, bait, food, and other supplies. Rusty Jones, the store owner, also indicates that he would use an adjacent vacant lot to establish a small canoe and motor boat rental operation.