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NEWS RELEASE

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North Hoosic River restoration celebrated in Clarksburg, Mass.

Project has improved wildlife habitat, protected public safety and saved jobs

CLARKSBURG, Mass. (June 3, 2011) – Dignitaries and community leaders gathered today on the banks of the North Hoosic River in this Berkshire County, Mass., town to celebrate the river's restoration, mark National Rivers Month and participate in some ceremonial fly fishing. The celebration was the culmination of an eight month project to remove the Briggsville Dam, thereby improving wildlife habitat and restoring natural river functions.

Removal of the 15-foot-high and 145-foot-long dam also eliminated the threat of dam failure to the downstream properties, reduced the risk of upstream flooding and saved jobs by eliminating the need for costly repairs. The project also involved stabilizing and vegetating river banks, protecting an upstream bridge, and restoring native stream and riparian habitat.

Pete Cote, President of Cascade School Supplies, and Michael Canales, Clarksburg Town Administrator, welcomed attendees to the event, which took place at the site of the former Briggsville dam, adjacent to Cascade Office Supplies on River Road in Clarksburg.

The speaking program included Ann Mills, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment; State Senator Benjamin Downing; and State Representative Gailanne Cariddi. Tim Purinton, Director of the Mass. Division of Ecological Restoration, and Brian Graber, Director of Restoration Program for American Rivers, served as masters of ceremony.

The event concluded with Commissioner Mary Griffin of the Mass. Department of Fish and Game reading a National Rivers Month proclamation and all dignitaries participating in a ceremonial fly fishing.

More than 30 miles of high quality headwater streams have been restored, benefiting native river species, including Eastern brook trout, slimy sculpin, longnose sucker and other fish species. The longnose sucker is a state-listed species of concern. The improved habitat will benefit coldwater species that rely on cold, swiftly moving, oxygenated water to support their spawning.

The Briggsville Dam blocked upstream movement of aquatic species since the 1840s and changed the flood regime, negatively impacting water quality by increasing water temperatures in the impoundment and altering the movement of beneficial sediment downstream.

The dam was owned by Cascade School Supplies, which purchased the building – and the dam with it – about five years ago. Shortly thereafter, the Massachusetts Office of Dam Safety mandated the inspection of every dam in the state, and the Briggsville Dam was classified as needing significant repairs.

Removing the dam has helped Cascade School Supplies retain jobs. The company faced the prospect of abandoning the facility, laying off employees and leaving the community without one of its largest employers if they had to fund dam repairs or removal. Cascade School Supplies has been in business for 78 years and seasonally employs more than 150 people in Northern Berkshire County.

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"We at Cascade School Supplies are proud to be part of such a committed team of partners. This project represents a great example of how various federal, state and private entities can rally together to fulfill a common goal," said Peter Cote, President, Cascade School Supplies. "We are grateful to the team for making this project a reality to help ensure the fiscal stability of our business in addition to restoring the river to its natural state."

Public and private partners worked together on the project, including the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Town of Clarksburg, American Rivers, Hoosuc Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Massachusetts Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership, Hoosic River Watershed Association, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Sweet Water Trust, Wildlife Conservation Society, Cascade School Supplies. NRCS provided more than \$350,000 in financial assistance for the project. Other partners provided an additional \$200,000, bringing total funding for the dam removal project to nearly \$550,000.

"This project exemplifies how federal, state and local partners can come together to restore wildlife habitat, enhance communities and stimulate local economies," said Deputy Under Secretary Mills. "I'm proud that USDA was able to play a key role in this river restoration project that is so important to the Town of Clarksburg."

"We applaud the leadership of the dam's owner, Cascade School Supplies, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Congressman Olver in their efforts to make this project a success," said Andrew Fahlund, Senior Vice President of Conservation at American Rivers. "American Rivers has been involved in the removal of hundreds of dams around the country, but the opportunity to restore the Hoosic River and create and preserve jobs in Clarksburg makes this project really special."

"This project not only restores critical natural habitat and protects public safety but supports a local business - protecting people, the environment and jobs at the same time. This is a good environmental stewardship model for communities across the Commonwealth," said Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Richard K. Sullivan Jr.

"The removal of the dam has reconnected over 30 miles of stream for the benefit of wild trout, endangered species and range of native species that need clean, flowing water to thrive." said Department of Fish and Game Commissioner Mary Griffin.

"Coldwater streams and especially headwaters are sensitive habitats and will be under stress from the effects of climate change. Removing dams like this one helps to build ecosystem resiliency to buffer the impacts of a changing climate," said Mass. Division of Ecological Restoration Director Tim Purinton.

"As part of the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Fisheries Program and Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program are both pleased to support this important coldwater river restoration project on the North Branch of the Hoosic River," said Eric Derleth of the Service's Partners Program. "The Service treasures opportunities to contribute to both wildlife and communities. Not only did this project restore more than 30 miles of quality streams for important aquatic habitat, but it helped preserve the livelihood of many Berkshire County residents."

The Briggsville Dam, also known as the Hewatt Pond Dam, was constructed in 1848 as part of the Briggs Brothers/Strong, Hewatt Company complex. The structure was repaired and modified at numerous times over its life to support the woolen textile mills operated with the power produced by the falling water. Textile manufacturing at the site ceased around 1970 and the mill buildings were subsequently used for a series of light industrial purposes by numerous owners.

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