



**Massachusetts State Office**

451 West Street, Amherst, MA 01002  
413-253-4350, fax 413-253-4375  
[www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov)

# NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Diane Baedeker Petit  
413-253-4371  
413-835-1276 cell  
[diane.petit@ma.usda.gov](mailto:diane.petit@ma.usda.gov)

## Briggsville Dam removal begins

*Project will improve wildlife habitat, protect public safety and save jobs*

AMHERST, Mass. (Nov. 4, 2010) – Removal of the Briggsville Dam in the town of Clarksburg, Massachusetts has begun. The 15 foot high and 145 foot long dam is being removed to improve wildlife habitat, restore natural river functions, eliminate the threat of dam failure to the downstream properties, reduce the risk of upstream flooding and save jobs by eliminating the need for costly repairs.

Last week the site was prepared by removing sediment and cutting a notch in the dam to slowly release water. Demolition work, taking place this week, involves breaking up and removing the concrete and masonry structure with heavy machinery. Approximately 11,000 cubic yards of material will be removed.

The project also involves stabilizing and vegetating banks, protecting an upstream bridge, and restoring native stream and riparian habitat in the North Branch of the Hoosic River. The restoration is expected to be completed by mid-December, will improve over 30 miles of high quality headwater streams and exemplary trout habitat, and will benefit native river species, including Eastern brook trout, slimy sculpin, longnose sucker and other native fish species. The longnose sucker is a state-listed species of concern.

The Briggsville Dam has blocked upstream movement of aquatic species since the 1840s. In addition, the dam has changed the flood regime, negatively impacted water quality by increasing water temperatures in the impoundment, and altering the movement of beneficial sediment downstream. The improved habitat diversity will benefit coldwater species that rely on cold, swiftly moving, oxygenated water to support their spawning.

The dam is 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 will help 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 over 150 people in Northern Berkshire County.

“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.”

(MORE)

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.

A diverse group of public/private partners are working together to remove the Briggsville Dam and restore the North Branch of the Hoosic River. In addition to NRCS and Cascade, project partners include American Rivers, the Town of Clarksburg, the Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration, MassWildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Hoosic Chapter of Trout Unlimited, the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, the Wildlife Conservation Society, Massachusetts Corporate Wetland Restoration Partnership, Proctor & Gamble, National Grid and the Hoosic River Watershed Association. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is providing more than \$350,000 in financial assistance for the project. Other conservation partners in conservation will provide an additional \$200,000 bringing total funding for the dam removal project to nearly \$550,000.

"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 Rebecca Wodder, President of 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."

"Investments like this one not only ensure public safety but protect critical wildlife habitat," said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian Bowles. "We're proud to partner with the US Department of Agriculture, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the town of Clarksburg and numerous conservation, community and wildlife groups to complete this important project."

"The removal of the Briggsville Dam will allow over 30 miles of connected stream network for the benefit of wild trout, an endangered fish 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 in Clarksburg helps to build ecosystem resiliency to buffer the impacts of a changing climate," said Division of Ecological Restoration Acting Director Tim Purinton.

"As part of the 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.

NRCS is celebrating its 75<sup>th</sup> year of helping people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment. NRCS works with local conservation districts and other partners to serve farmers and landowners throughout the state.

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