

Executive Summary of *Priority Riparian Areas* and *Priority Connectivity Projects* in the Upper Connecticut River Mitigation and Enhancement Fund (MEF) Service Area

Appalachian Mountain Club

Cathy Poppenwimer
Kenneth D. Kimball

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Executive Summary

This project developed a list of *Priority Riparian Areas* and *Priority Connectivity Projects* in the Upper Connecticut River MEF Service Area to assist and focus the potential MEF grant applicants. MEF Advisory Committee will place special emphasis on and give funding priority to project proposals within these *Priority Riparian Areas* or of the *Priority Connectivity Projects* listed in these reports.

The MEF *Priority Riparian Areas* recommended contain high concentrations of known important riverine, wetland, and shoreland resources. These areas were derived from overlaying existing data and reports where critical resources were identified by a) state and federal agencies, b) other recognized watershed-scale natural-resource plans, and c) individual community plans. Organizations working within the *Priority Riparian Areas* are encouraged to identify medium to large-scale, on-the-ground projects (not additional studies) that have a strong nexus with one or more of the three MEF resource categories: (i) river restoration, (ii) wetland restoration, protection and enhancement, and (iii) shoreland protection.

Eight priority areas in the MEF area were selected. Emphasis is put on direct nexus with the river or stream and the qualifying aquatic and riparian related resources within this boundary. Each *Priority Area* contains a minimum of six in-stream/riparian resources. Three *Priority Areas* have the potential for connecting large blocks of protected land. Three *Priority Areas* contain the federal listed Dwarf Wedge Mussel - all of the known locations of this species in this region.

The MEF *Priority Connectivity Projects* recommended contain identified important resident in-stream resources that have a strong nexus with the larger river ecosystems impacted by the Fifteen Mile Falls (FMF) Hydroelectric Project. Removing these connectivity impediments (dams), either through dam removal or providing aquatic organism passage, would provide known environmental gains based on the best available data. There may be other equal value 'in-stream connectivity' projects than those identified herein, but until sufficient data becomes available they could not be identified in this report. The MEF Advisory Committee will consider as part of a proposal, when necessary, the purchase of the dam if permitting and removal were shown to be reasonable and achievable.¹

The report identifies nine (9) "Very Highest Priority Dams" and eight (8) "High Priority Dams". The prioritization of dams that met the category requirements were then determined by the highest mileage of Upstream Miles, "A" miles.

Far more culverts that limit aquatic organism passage in part or whole exists within the MEF project area than this fund could possibly resolve. Additionally recent changes in state requirements² addressing culvert connectivity have occurred. Therefore, **MEF will no longer be funding individual culvert replacement and watershed culvert inventory projects.** MEF will consider culvert replacements as part of a larger, watershed-level initiative, or culvert replacements that are directly related to improving AOP at one or more identified dam connectivity improvement projects and known impacted in-stream resources and significant connectivity miles are involved.

It is envisioned that project proposals developed within the *Priority Riparian Areas* or with a *Priority Connectivity Project* would provide watershed-level benefits and may require significant funds for

¹ 2/19/2016 Meeting Notes: Upper Connecticut River Mitigation and Enhancement Fund Advisory Committee Grantmaking Meeting,

² NHDES rules for stream crossing - <http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/legal/rules/documents/env-wt900.pdf> and VT ANR stream alteration standards http://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/wsm/rivers/docs/2014_04_10_Stream_Alteration_GP.pdf.

implementation (possibly as much as \$1 million for large, complex, multi-resource projects). The fund encourages and may fund the inclusion of meander width protection in riparian land projects.

The conclusions in these reports are based solely on available natural-resource information and agency feedback and are not field checked. Before submitting an Application, precursory ground truthing by the applicant should take place. The recommendations do not take into account land ownership patterns or other cultural factors. It is recognized that some portions of the *Priority Riparian Areas* or *Priority Connectivity Project* might not yield feasible projects/proposals due to lack of landowner interest or other constraints.

For a more detail account of the methodology and resources used to determine these priority areas and projects, as well as the results, please refer to the “***Priority Riparian Areas in the Upper Connecticut River Mitigation and Enhancement Fund (MEF) Service Area***” report and “***Priority Connectivity Projects in the Upper Connecticut River Mitigation and Enhancement Fund (MEF) Service Area***” report at <http://www.nhcf.org/page.aspx?pid=676>.