

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
New England Regional Office
Boston, Massachusetts**

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EPA Announces \$740,000 Award to Improve Presumpscot River Watershed

BOSTON - After months of awaiting word about the winners of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's 2005 Targeted Watershed Grants, the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership and the Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition received the good news today – that the groups were chosen to receive close to \$740,000 to further their plans to improve the Presumpscot River.

From a ceremony at the University of Southern Maine, Robert W. Varney, regional administrator of EPA's New England office, announced the award and noted that Maine's watershed project was one of 12 selected by the US Environmental Protection Agency nationwide to receive more than \$9 million. The Maine project was among 74 proposals submitted nationally, including nine proposals submitted by five New England states. With the watersheds announced today, and those selected in the first two years of the program, EPA has targeted 46 watersheds across the country, giving them more than \$46 million, including \$4.3 million to four New England states.

"EPA is pleased to further support improvements for the health and vitality of the Presumpscot River, the largest freshwater source to Casco Bay and a critical resource to Maine's fisheries and recreation," said Varney. "This award will help repair past damage to the watershed and will establish new models for river stewardship." Since 1990, EPA has already provided about \$9 million to support the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership.

"This grant recognizes the significant work of the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership in restoring the watershed," said Governor Baldacci. "I am pleased that the Maine Department of Environmental Protection contributed resources in-kind to the project, and I congratulate the broad based stakeholder group that has contributed to this valuable effort."

The Casco Bay Estuary Partnership and the Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition will work together to put the watershed improvement projects in place. The Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, one of 28 National Estuary Programs in the country, has worked since 1990 to protect Casco Bay and the multiple sub-watersheds that drain into Casco Bay, including the Presumpscot River. Since 1996, it has worked to carry-out the recommended actions in the *Casco Bay Plan*. The Partnership also brought together stakeholders and provided financial support to develop the 2003 *Plan for the Future of the Presumpscot River*.

The Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition is made up of more than a dozen government and private organizations concerned with improving fisheries, mitigating impacts from watershed development and preserving open space along the River. It is also guiding the efforts to implement the 2003 Plan. The selection of Presumpscot Watershed project to receive a Targeted Watershed Grant will help the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, the Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition and their partners to further implement the plan.

"This is a great day for the Presumpscot River. This grant will significantly bolster the watershed protection and fisheries restoration efforts already underway. It makes a very important statement about the value of this incredible resource and the many organizations who

are working together to bring it back" said Karen Young, Director of the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership.

The Presumpscot River Watershed, one of the most developed and fastest growing watersheds in Maine, drains over 200 square miles including the greater Portland metropolitan area. In recent years, the river's water quality has improved with the end of discharges from an upstream pulp mill and removal of the lowest dam on the river, Smelt Hill Dam. Despite the river's progress, runoff still pollutes the lower river and tributaries with elevated levels of bacteria and low levels of dissolved oxygen. Sedimentation from roads and eroding stream banks are deteriorating important fish spawning areas, and toxic and nutrient loads from residences and golf courses are affecting water quality. Lack of vegetation along streams of the River further degrade water quality.

The money will be used for the following watershed improvement projects:

- stabilizing stream banks and providing culverts at 62 critical stream sites to reduce sedimentation while involving local students and volunteers;
- re-establish forested buffers by planting 3,000 trees along river and stream banks;
- develop a cost-sharing program with agricultural land owners to keep cows out of streams using fencing and providing an alternative watering system;
- work with six golf courses to certify their maintenance practices as environmentally friendly;
- conduct outreach to homeowners to reduce pesticide and fertilizer use;
- and monitor water quality to assess progress and report the results of restoration efforts.

For more information about this year's selections or about the Targeted Watershed Grant program go to: <http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/initiative>.