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< SPECIAL INVITATION TO THE PRESS >

Fish Friendly Stream Crossing Workshop Aims to Educate Public, Address Environmental Concerns

GRAY – Cumberland County Soil & Water Conservation District (CCSWCD), in conjunction with Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP), will conduct a public workshop at Totten Road on Tuesday, September 30 at 1:00 PM on the role of culvert design in promoting effective fish passages and aquatic ecosystem health.

The workshop, entitled “Fish Friendly Stream Crossings for Maine Roads,” will be led by CBEP Executive Director Curtis Bohlen. During the workshop, Bohlen will lead a tour of several stream crossings in the Totten Road area and discuss the connection between culvert design and issues related to stream health, stormwater management, fish habitat and passage, and climate change.

Bohlen said, “Most culverts are not designed to do what we want them to do today, which is to provide free passage for fish, sediment, woody material, and of course, water.” He added that the replacement culvert is “an example of technology intended to address these issues.”

The public workshop is part of a three-day culvert replacement project to take place at the Totten Road crossing of a tributary to the Pleasant River. A primary goal of the project is to replace the existing twin undersized culverts, which have caused significant erosion and flooding over the years, with a larger open-bottom, aluminum culvert. The new culvert is expected to significantly reduce bank erosion and overtopping of the road, while also providing a natural stream bottom for native brook trout populations and other fish species, as well as to promote overall stream health.

Narrow, circular-shaped culverts, such as those at Totten Road and most locations in Maine, often fragment and erode stream habitat and act like fire hoses during severe storm events. The “open bottom” replacement culvert, however, is considerably wider and spans the tributary, allowing for a continuous natural stream bed with fewer obstacles and gentler flow, and therefore improved habitat connectivity crucial to successful anadromous fish passage.

According to Betty Williams, Project Manager for the Cumberland County Soil & Water Conservation District, this is one of only a few culvert projects of this kind in the area. She said that the environment has typically taken a back seat to other considerations and that this demonstration project aims to change that by generating more awareness of ecological concerns among decision-makers.

“They haven’t really thought about fish passage in the past,” she said. “We would like them to start thinking about culverts and stream crossings in a different way.”

Bohlen echoed those comments, saying the project provides a good way to build existing local knowledge and expertise among municipal officials and staff, as well as to generate public awareness. The newly installed culvert may also serve as a demonstration site for future workshops, Williams said.

The culvert replacement project has a total cost of \$39,000 and is a collaborative effort between the Town of Gray, CBEP, and CCSWCD. The Conservation District is organizing and carrying out the project. Casco Bay Estuary Partnership is providing the bulk of the funding through its Presumpscot Watershed Initiative (\$20,000) and Habitat Restoration Fund (\$12,500), and the Town of Gray is contributing \$6,500 toward the project. Gunderboom, a Scarborough environmental consulting business, will install a sediment turbidity barrier downstream to catch displaced sediments.

“Working together is the key to accomplishing on-the-ground projects such as this,” Williams said.

The demonstration workshop focuses on providing education to public works departments and local contractors, but is open to the general public at no charge and is good for credits towards Stormwater NPDES staff training and continuing education credit for the MDEP Voluntary Contractor Certification Program. For more information on the demonstration workshop and a complete schedule of events, email Betty Williams at betty-williams@cumberlandswcd.org or call 892-4700.

Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District (CCSWCD) is a non-regulatory organization providing conservation information, services and products for citizens of Cumberland County facing the challenges of soil and water pollution, land development, wildlife habitat and flood mitigation.

Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP) was formed in 1990, when Casco Bay was designated by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as an “estuary of national significance” and included in the agency’s National Estuary Program. CBEP’s mission is to preserve the ecological integrity of Casco Bay and its watershed and ensure compatible human uses of the Bay’s resources through public stewardship and effective management. The Partnership consists of local, state, and federal officials, schools, organizations, businesses, and individuals.

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