

## NMFS Northeast Region

# News



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Release**

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## **NOAA's Community-Based Restoration Program Makes Funding Available for Parker River Fisheries Restoration Project**

**GLOUCESTER, MASS.** -- The Essex County Sportsmen's Association and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announce the availability of funds to reconstruct the Central Street fish ladder on the Parker River in Newbury.

This project was funded with an \$18,000 grant awarded to the Essex County Sportsmen's Association by the NOAA's Community-Based Restoration Program in partnership with the FishAmerica Foundation. A national funding source, the Community-Based Restoration Program supports community groups -- like the Essex County Sportsmen's Association -- and municipalities who use volunteers in restoration efforts to help develop a sense of local stewardship in protecting the nation's natural resources.

Reconstruction of the Central Street fish ladder is possible because of the cooperative efforts of the Essex County Sportsmen's Association, NOAA Fisheries, the FishAmerica Foundation, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, Massachusetts Audubon Society, the Parker River Clean Water Association, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Leading the project is the Essex County Sportsmen's Association, the official steward of the Parker River under the Massachusetts Commonwealth Division of Marine Fisheries "Fishway Steward-

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ship Program". The 74 year old organization has long held an interest in the conservation of Parker River resources, and began an Atlantic Salmon restoration effort on the River in the 1940s.

The Central Street fish ladder project will significantly improve fish passage at this first, most critical blockage on the Parker River. The now crumbling dam wall will be fortified, a step will be added to the base of the ladder and a deep "holding pond" will be created at the base of the dam to assist fish migration during periods of low water flow.

Construction is planned to begin in the summer of 2001.

The Parker River is approximately 23 miles and its watershed encompasses 82 square miles in Essex County, including the towns of Boxford, Georgetown, Byfield, and Newbury, where it empties into Plum Island Sound. A number of anadromous fish migrate to the Parker River to spawn, including alewife, blueback herring, rainbow smelt, and white perch. Important for recreational fishing, these species also provide a significant food source for bluefish and striped bass. Abundance of these species has declined to historic lows due in part to inadequate fish passage at dams constructed earlier this century. Many of these dams have no current function, yet they remain in place and present a continued obstacle to fish migration. Fishways constructed in the 1930's and 1960's have long since deteriorated and cease to function properly. Only 6,000 fish returned to the river in 1997, less than one-fifth the numbers observed in the 1970's.

Recently, a new Alaskan Steeppass was placed at the Main Street Dam on the Parker River in Byfield, another project funded by NOAA in partnership with the FishAmerica Foundation. These two projects are part of a larger system wide effort-- the Parker River Anadromous Fish Restoration Project -- to improve fish passage at each of the existing dams. A fact sheet on the restoration project is available by calling the NOAA Fisheries.

Since the decline of the Parker River's mills, the Essex County Sportsmen's Association has taken it upon themselves to maintain the River's fish ladders. The Essex County Sportsmen's Association is committed to charitable, educational, and scientific purposes which serve to protect and preserve regional wetland resources in conjunction with their local partners. Since achieving tax exempt status, they have used grant money from local businesses to federal agencies to broaden their maintenance efforts.

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