NOAA NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Contact: Monica Allen
301-713-2370
202-379-6693 (cell)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Sept. 24, 2009

NOAA and Partners Gather at Hunt's Mill Dam to Celebrate $3 Million Rhode Island River Restoration Projects

NOAA Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco joined today with federal, state and local officials and volunteers at Hunt's Mills Dam on the Ten Mile River in East Providence, R.I., to celebrate a $3 million American Reinvestment and Recovery Act project, restoring a migratory fish passage that will eventually accommodate 400,000 herring and shad along both the Ten Mile and Pawcatuck rivers.

"The Rhode Island River Ecosystem Restoration project creates good local jobs removing dams and building the ladders that will restore important fish habitat and rebuild their populations," said Lubchenco, as she stood at the dam site. "This project is part of a major effort along the East Coast by federal, state, and local partners to bring back blueback herring, alewives, and American shad, which have been so important, both economically and ecologically, to coastal communities in the Northeast since Colonial times. Not only do they support local fisheries, but they are very important as prey for other fish, birds, and other animals. Their annual migrations are welcome signs of spring."

The Ten Mile River project has brought together a diverse partnership that includes the state's Department of Environmental Management, the Army Corps of Engineers, the state's Coastal Resource Management Council, Save the Bay, the city of East Providence, the Environmental Protection Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Ten Mile River Watershed Council. A similar partnership is working to remove two dams and build a fish ladder along the Pawcatuck River in the southern part of the state.

"The public has been waiting more than 30 years to see this herring run restored, and in that time fishermen have kept the run alive by lifting fish over the dam every spring, so they could spawn in the Ten Mile River," said Keith Gonsalves, president of the Ten Mile River Watershed Council. "We look forward to the day the ladders are complete and we are put out of business. No longer will we have to lift the fish over the dam by hand. Instead, we can gather to see thousands of fish swim up the ladders."

"The three fish ladders along Ten Mile River will allow migrating herring and shad to swim from Narragansett Bay up this river and into Turner Reservoir to spawn," said Col. Philip T. Feir, of the Army Corps of Engineers, New England District, which will have invested $2.8 million in recent years in this project. "The fish ladders will be concrete waterways with wooden baffles that would allow fish to swim to their natural spawning habit."

W. Michael Sullivan, Ph.D., the director of Rhode Island's Department of Environmental Management, said both river restoration projects will restore fish habitat for an estimated 400,000 river herring, while also improving the overall ecosystems of the rivers. "This project is important for fish and wildlife and also improves these rivers for fishing, kayaking and canoeing, hiking and birdwatching," Sullivan said. "The Ocean State depends on healthy coastal ecosystems for its own residents and to attract tourists to our beautiful state."

The Rhode Island River Ecosystem project is one of 50 high quality, high priority projects funded by the Obama Administration's Recovery Act to restore the nation's coastal habitat and jumpstart the nation's economy. NOAA selected these 50 projects from a pool of 814 proposals,

totaling more than $3 billion in requests, demonstrating the high level of interest in coastal states to restore habitat. In addition to improving the environment and creating jobs, these projects will assist recreational and commercial fishing and support more resilient coasts in the face of climate change.

For more information on funded projects nationwide, go to the NOAA Recovery Act website at http://www.noaa.gov/recovery. The public will be able to follow the progress of each project on the web site, which includes an interactive online map that enables the public to track where and how NOAA recovery funds are spent.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit http://www.noaa.gov.

- 30 -