

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Federal Financial Assistance Grant Number: 42984 Mill River Flood Mitigation and Habitat Corridor Extension, Stamford, Connecticut

The U.S. Department of the Interior's (Department) Hurricane Sandy Coastal Resiliency Competitive Grant Program (Program) supports projects that reduce communities' vulnerability to the growing risks from coastal storms, sea level rise, flooding, erosion, and associated threats through strengthening natural ecosystems that also benefit fish and wildlife. The Program is funded by the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act of 2013 and is administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). The purpose of the Program is to undertake a variety of actions to restore wetlands and other natural areas, better manage stormwater using green infrastructure, and assist states, tribes and local communities in protecting themselves from major storms such as Hurricane Sandy. Overall, the Program goals relate to coastal resiliency and ecosystem enhancement. The Program provides technical and financial assistance to identify, protect, conserve, manage, enhance, or restore habitat and infrastructure on both public and private lands that have been negatively impacted by Hurricane Sandy.

The Department, as lead Federal agency, and its project partners, Mill River Collaborative, are proposing to complete Phase IIA of a riparian redevelopment plan for the West Branch Rippowam River (locally known as the Mill River) to restore the aquatic ecosystem and increase public access along the river. As the project administrator, the Mill River Collaborative is managing the project activities. The purpose of the project is to continue restoration of the Mill River corridor into a vibrant downtown amenity by further restoring an enduring balance between the urban and natural realm by providing public access to this resource while allowing the river the necessary space to expand during extreme storms and floods.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluates two alternatives to continuing the restoration effort: a No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative. The EA further analyzes the potential impacts these alternatives would have on the natural and human environment. This EA has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508), and Department regulations (43 CFR Part 46), policy and guidance.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, installation of public linear trails and completion of park improvements would not take place. The earlier work completed by the City of Stamford and the United States Army Corps of Engineers would not be expanded upon, limiting the

overall effectiveness of the Mill River Restoration Plan, and inhibiting the long-term goal of the City to restore the Mill River corridor into a vibrant downtown amenity. Improvements to prevent future bank erosion, remove invasive species, and restore native vegetation would not take place. Local residents and visitors would continue to have limited access to the river for active and passive recreation in the Project area, and remapping of the Special Flood Hazard Area would not occur to allow for mixed-use development that would complement the linear trail features.

Proposed Action Alternative

Under the Proposed Action, approximately two acres of land would be restored as riparian corridor and resilient recreational area. Various park amenities would be constructed including an extension of a linear trail to encourage recreation near the Mill River, the replacement of dilapidated stone masonry rock retaining walls with rock revetment wall integrated into the natural riparian vegetation, and installation of riprap armoring and riparian plantings to prevent erosion. In addition, a Letter of Map Revision would be developed to correct the Special Flood Hazard Area along the Mill River in the vicinity of the project, which is expected to facilitate future mixed-use development to complement the restored riparian corridor. The Proposed Action would provide a natural buffer between the Mill River and the surrounding urban development, enhancing nearby riparian and upland habitat corridors, protecting and enrich nearby river ecology, and allowing for appropriate expansion of the Mill River during extreme storms and floods.

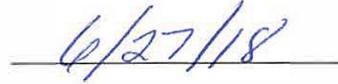
Alternative designs were considered during the development of the Proposed Action, including the inclusion of additional boardwalk and overlook structures over river and the development of structures in the floodway. These were eliminated from consideration following consultation with City of Stamford and the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection due to the potential impacts to the floodplain.

The Proposed Action Alternative will have minimal or negligible impacts on geology, soils and sediment; water resources and wetlands; biological resources and vegetation; human health and safety; cultural resources; socioeconomics, environmental justice, and the protection of children; land use, recreation, public safety, and coastal zone management; or air quality and noise.

The Department finds there will be no significant adverse impacts resulting from the proposed restoration activities of the project. Therefore, the Department concludes that a Finding of No Significant Impact be issued for the proposed project.

This Environmental Assessment/Finding of No Significant Impact becomes a Federal Document when signed by the responsible Federal Official.





Olivia Ferriter, Deputy Assistant Secretary
Budget, Finance, Performance and Acquisition
U.S. Department of Interior

Date



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