



[Massachusetts](#)

## **Cape Cod National Seashore to undergo \$6 million restoration**

**Coalition to improve more than 1,700 acres in major conservation effort**



Herring River project site.

CAPE COD, Mass.— June 28, 2022 – A \$6 million, once-in-a-generation conservation effort led by Ducks Unlimited and partners will help jumpstart the restoration of more than 1,700 acres of habitat, much of which is in the Cape Cod National Seashore, starting in 2023.

The project will restore tidal flow to the Herring River estuary on Cape Cod to improve water quality, wetlands habitat, rare species habitat, fisheries and recreational opportunities throughout the Herring River floodplain. The sweeping conservation effort will also improve the estuary's resiliency and ability to adapt to climate change.

Prior human development has cut off the Herring River estuary from natural tidal flows. What's left behind is a dying marsh system that has lost all but 10 acres of nearly 1,000 acres of former native salt marsh, water quality impairment that violates Federal Clean Water Act standards, barriers to fish migration and loss of wildlife habitat. The subsided marsh plain is no longer resilient to sea-level rise and storms.

"This is a rare opportunity to restore a single large tidal wetland project in a National Park and a state-designated Area of Critical Environmental Concern," said Sarah Fleming, Ducks Unlimited director of conservation programs in the North Atlantic. "The constant threats of development, sea-level rise and coastal habitat loss place a significant burden of importance on restoring estuarine wetlands for people and wildlife."

The Herring River restoration effort may be the East Coast's largest and most significant tidal restoration project. Funding for vegetation and marsh management activities essential to the

restoration comes from a \$2 million North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant and \$4 million in matching funds from Ducks Unlimited, Town of Wellfleet, Wellfleet Conservation Trust, Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game, Friends of Herring River, Friends of Cape Cod National Seashore and private landowners.

Restoring the Herring River estuary is crucial for people, fish and wildlife who rely on the Cape Cod ecosystem. The region supports critical species and habitats identified in the 2015 Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan. It's a migration stopover point for more than 300 bird species.

As part of the Cape Cod National Seashore, administered by the National Park Service, the restored area will improve existing recreation opportunities, including hunting, fishing, birding and kayaking on portions of the project site.

The project is anticipated to generate approximately \$624 million in local and regional economic benefits over the project's life. Tourism accounts for nearly \$11 million annually to the local community and supports many jobs. The project also supports and enhances recreational and commercial shellfish resources in Wellfleet Harbor, valued at more than \$7 million annually.

Herring River Coalition is a collection of stakeholder organizations dedicated to reversing the estuary's health. Carole Ridley, Herring River Project Coordinator, said this \$6 million investment is the first step of what is expected to be up to a \$70 million restoration project to restore the integrity of the tidal marsh estuary.

"This project has been in development for more than a decade, and is a model for local, state and federal partnership to restore a degraded estuary and reclaim the vast ecological benefits of a healthy tidal river," Ridley said. "It's a large, complex effort that uses cutting edge science to restore an important component to our ocean health."

Ridley said the restored area is an excellent example of how tidal marshes help sequester carbon. The existing pools of water in the estuary, cut off from the natural tidal process, emit methane. Getting rid of those stagnant pools and restoring estuary function will enable the watershed to hold heat-trapping carbon in the ground.

Crucial to making the program a success are the numerous organizations pooling expertise and resources, said Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game Commissioner Ron Amidon.

"This effort, through the work of many dedicated partners, will benefit the local community and environment by improving water quality and fish passage, restoring habitat for important species and increasing coastal resilience to climate change. The Baker-Polito Administration is happy to be part of this critical work to restore an important Cape Cod ecosystem and prepare for a climate-ready future," Amidon said.

**Ducks Unlimited is working with the Cape Cod National Seashore on vegetation and marsh management activities needed to implement infrastructure changes that will reconnect the Herring River estuary to Wellfleet Harbor and Cape Cod Bay.** Changes include replacing a portion of the Chequessett Neck Road Dike with a bridge and new water-flow gate structure, installing a new water-control structure at the confluence of Mill Creek, and removal of the High Toss Road berm and culvert.

Work on the bridge and water-flow gates is scheduled to begin by 2023. Upon completion of construction in 2025, the gates at the new Chequessett Neck Road Bridge will be incrementally opened to provide tidal salt water where salt marsh species are expected to recolonize over the years.

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Ducks Unlimited Inc. is the world's largest nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving North America's continually disappearing waterfowl habitats. Established in 1937, Ducks Unlimited has conserved more than 15 million acres thanks to contributions from more than a million supporters across the continent. Guided by science and dedicated to program efficiency, DU works toward the vision of wetlands sufficient to fill the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow and forever. For more information on our work, visit [www.ducks.org](http://www.ducks.org).

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