Geographic Response Strategy Development Project – Meduxnekeag River in Maine

Meduxnekeag River Tactics Sub-Group Meeting Summary

June 29, 2023 – 2:00 – 3:00 PM

Held virtually via Zoom Meeting

Nuka Research and Planning Group, LLC, has been contracted by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 1 to develop up to six (6) Geographic Response Strategies or GRS, for the Meduxnekeag River in Maine. GRS are map-based plans tailored to protect specific sensitive areas from oil spill impacts. They show first responders where sensitive areas are located and where to place oil spill protection resources to protect those areas. GRS can save time during the critical first few hours of an oil spill response.

A multi-agency, multijurisdictional workgroup consisting of Federal, State, and local environmental emergency response partners, and the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians have identified the candidate area(s) for the development of these GRS. Nuka Research will facilitate the Work Group and the GRS development process. This project will be completed in August 2023, and we anticipate two (2) Work Group meetings and one (1) Sub-Group meeting to be held over the life of this project.

This meeting was the Tactic Sub-Group meeting of the Meduxnekeag River GRS Work Group. The purpose of this meeting was to review the 6 Meduxnekeag River draft tactic maps, examine each tactic carefully, and gather any additional information to capture on the tactic maps or in the GRS.

Participants

- ME DEP: Kelly Langley, Bill Sheehan, Bob Shannon, Jesse Clarke
- US EPA: Karen Way
- Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians: Sharri Venno
- Houlton Water Company: Will Hogan
- Nuka Research: Mike Popovich, Haley Griffin, and Sam Butler

Agenda

Introduction and Opening Comments: Mike Popovich (Nuka Research) opened the meeting by thanking everyone for attending the site surveys and providing a brief overview of the purpose of conducting tactics meetings. Mike also provided a brief review of some of the iconography used in each GRS. Karen Way thanked everyone for attending the site surveys and the tactics sub-group meeting.

Review of Post-Site Survey Project Activity: Site surveys were conducted on June 7th, 2023[1] with a small group of experienced spill responders including personnel from EPA Region 1, Maine DEP, Houlton Water Company, and the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians.

Project/Tactic Review Process Overview: Mike Popovich then used Google Earth to provide a general project overview of all the sites selected during the site survey process and presented draft tactic maps for review. Mike explained the naming and Site ID convention for each site and that all of this information is subject to change based on the group's input throughout the remainder of the project.

[1] Site surveys were based on the site survey schedule sent to the Work Group on March 21, 2023, and published on the project website.

Meduxnekeag River Draft Tactic Map Review Comments:

Prospective MX River GRS Site(s)

MX-ME-01 - Houlton West

Mike Popovich drafted booming tactics at two prospective locations in the vicinity of the Houlton Railyard as a potential 6th GRS site to be developed. These two locations include a river area to the west of the railyard and an area north of the railyard near the confluence of Captain Ambrose Bear Stream. Another area just west of the Route 1 bridge in Houlton was discussed after Will Hogan, at the request of Nuka Research, visited this location to determine its viability as a potential staging/deployment site. Will indicated that the site is too steep to access on both sides of the river and that the plant growth along the riverbank is very thick, making any prospective equipment deployment difficult. Will also indicated that the prospective deployment site along Captain Ambrose Bear Stream in the vicinity of the Route 2 bridge is the location of an old pumping station previously owned by Houlton Water Company, but that the current owner and purpose of the area is unknown.

Sharri Venno offered to engage her staff in evaluating the viability of these two deployment locations. Mike will reach out to Sharri with a formal request for feedback.

MX-ME-02 - Houlton Riverfront

Mike Popovich provided a summary of the intended strategy, which calls for a diversion (DV) tactic with shoreside recovery near the Staging Location. He noted that Riverside Park, located across the river, may serve as an alternate Staging Location, as is labeled on the GRS. Mike then identified a nearby outfall and provided a description of the icon used to identify outfalls on a GRS.

- Bill: A large storm drain and small perennial stream is located here, flowing year-round. Significant flow can occur at certain times of the year, and there have been cases where town wastewater has flowed out of it.
- Sharri: The outfall is about 3 or 4 feet wide.
- Mike: Suggests deploying exclusion booming in this location.
- Jesse: Hard to fight the flow rate of the river, so there is limited potential to deploy any equipment.

MX-ME-03 - Houlton Waste Water Treatment Plant

Mike Popovich provided a summary of the intended strategy, which calls for a DV tactic with shoreside recovery near the Staging Location. He also noted the presence of a culvert and proposed deploying an exclusion tactic (EX) around it.

- Will: That culvert is the underdrain outfall from the plant, only groundwater drains from here.
- Mike: Is the underdrain at risk for releasing contaminants into the water?
- Jesse: Does the river ever back up into it?
- Will: There is only a small amount of water coming out of the drain at any given time, and the river does not back up into it.
- Mike: Sam noted a nearby boat ramp that could be useful for gaining waterfront access even without key access to the gated facility.
- Will: There is a dirt path here that was used when the facility was being built. The Plant has a chain-link fence around the perimeter of the facility, but even if the gate is closed and locked, access to the river is still possible from the path. The area (at the end of the path) is not much of a boat ramp, but has a gentle slope, making it a good location to deploy small vessels or equipment.

MX-ME-04 - Houlton Band of Maliseet Indian Tribal Land South

Mike Popovich provided a summary of the intended strategy, which calls for two DV tactics (one at the northern and southern end of the nearby athletic field), with shoreside recovery near the Staging Location. He noted that the southern tactic location has access via a nearby dirt farm road.

- Mike: Can the Tribal boundaries be included on the final GRS?
- Sharri: The boundaries for the Tribe are public information, so the EPA can give accurate information to include on the GRS.
- Jesse: The tactics are feasible in these locations.

MX-ME-05 - Houlton Band of Maliseet Indian Tribal Land/Lowry Rd Bridge
Mike Popovich provided a summary of the intended strategy, which calls for a DV tactic with shoreside recovery near the Staging Location.

- Sharri: There are important ash stands downstream – it is important to protect the resources downriver (including the water quality), so a tactic here is important to stop oil from traveling further downstream.
- Jesse: There is a shallower area better for recovery slightly downstream. Equipment can be deployed along the river bank here. The river was also extraordinarily high when the surveys were conducted – in most other times of the year, the river will be much shallower.

MX-ME-06 - Littleton/Framingham Rd Bridge
Mike Popovich provided a summary of the intended strategy, which calls for a chevron DV array that involves shoreside recovery near the Staging Location on both sides of the Meduxnekeag River.

- Jesse: The DV tactic on the left has easier access with a gentler slope down to the river.

NOTE: All current GRS names remain tentative and subject to change up to the conclusion of the final Work Group meeting

GRS Development Process & Project Timeline
Following the review of the draft tactic maps, Mike Popovich indicated that the next phase in the GRS development process is to draft the GRS documents and prepare for a final Work Group meeting. Nuka Research will draft these documents within the next few weeks and send them to the Work Group for feedback. The final Work Group meeting will occur virtually sometime in August 2023. The project end-date is August 24, 2023. This will allow Nuka Research time to make any additional changes identified during the final Work Group meeting. At the conclusion of this project, EPA and Nuka Research will finalize these documents and EPA will post them on the RRT1 website for public access.

Comments and Suggestions

- Sharri: We can have photos of the railyard sites taken to give the group visibility into the feasibility of developing another GRS in this area.
- Mike: Mapping areas are usually no longer than a mile, so a single GRS may be feasible around the railyard with the multiple tactics.
- Mike: Asked ME DEP to draft language for pg. 1 of the MX River GRS that ME DEP has available equipment around the state for deployment and to specifically contact the NE Regional Office if there is a spill.
- Sam: stated that he enjoyed meeting everyone, and greatly appreciated local input and the site survey process. Karen: thanked everyone on behalf of EPA and Nuka, expressing her appreciation for the state and tribal support provided throughout this process.

Next Steps:
Nuka Research will:

a. Send Sharri photos of the prospective railyard sites for her staff so they can look at the area and characterize river accessibility and await feedback for GRS development.
b. Post the meeting summary on the project website and accept feedback within a set comment period.
c. Post documents and presentations used in this meeting on the project website.
d. Make edits to the draft tactic maps identified at this sub-group meeting.
e. Determine a final Work Group meeting timeframe (August 2023) based on Work Group feedback and schedule the virtual Zoom meeting accordingly.
f. Prepare the draft Meduxnekeag River GRS documents and send them to the entire Work Group for feedback prior to the final Work Group meeting.

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