

Geographic Response Strategy Development - Meduxnekeag River, ME

Initial Work Group/ Site Selection Meeting

Tuesday, January 17, 2023: 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Held via Zoom Video Conference

Purpose

This meeting served both to introduce this project, and to review the preliminary Site Selection Matrix, examine candidate sites, develop additional information about resources at risk, spill threat, and site accessibility at each site, and ultimately select up to six (6) sites for GRS development along the Meduxnekeag River. Additional discussion items included future planned project activities including conduct of site surveys, tactics development, and final GRS development.

Participants

US EPA, Karen Way	Kirk Ball, Acheron Engineering/ Houlton Water Company
Hannah Mullally, United States Fish and Wildlife Services	Mike Popovich, Sam Butler, Olivia Norton, Haley Griffin, Nuka Research
Will Hogan, Houlton Water Company	Ila White, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Sharri Venno, Houlton Band of the Maliseet Indians	Jesse Clarke, Maine Department of Environmental Protection
Bob Shannon, Maine Department of Environmental Protection	Bill Sheehan, Maine Department of Environmental Protection

Introduction and Opening Comments

Mike Popovich (Nuka Research) opened the meeting by thanking the participants for attending the site selection meeting and reiterating that this meeting is a crucial part of the process as the group will decide where the GRS will be developed on the river.

Project/Site Selection Process Overview

Mike then provided a general project overview, reviewed project objectives and timeline; provided an overview of GRS design and content; and finally, reviewed the draft Site Selection Matrix for the Meduxnekeag River. He also discussed the different variables that were relevant to the sites, including sensitive habitats, historical sites, conservation areas, and spill risk. Finally, Mike also discussed the opportunities for future GRS testing and validation. Karen Way requested that if any independent or collaborative testing is undertaken by state/non-governmental agencies and/or local municipalities, that EPA Region 1 be notified both to allow for participation, and to ensure that any necessary changes to GRS can be documented and completed.

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Sharri Venno, the Environmental Planner for the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, then shared the reason for requesting this project. A presentation from the Penobscot Nation was given to them regarding the Penobscot Nations work and involvement in GRS development and testing at and near their tribal land, and she and other members of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians were impressed with this work and wanted to pursue GRS development in their area. She indicated that an oil spill occurred a few years ago and the river narrowly avoided contamination, so the Maliseet tribe wants to be prepared for any incidents that could happen in the future. They would also like to be prepared in spill response and prevention and hope to develop an emergency response framework in the future.

The Tribe is concerned about the sensitive ecosystems and cultural resources along the riverbanks on their stretch of tribal land (fiddle head fern gathering areas, brown and basket ash stands, fishing holes, tribal gathering sites and fishing holes) and the overall protection of their tribal and community traditions.

Mike then took the opportunity to share with the group that these projects do not include the procurement of oil spill response equipment, only the development of GRS. He added that once the GRS are developed, those interested in procuring oil spill response equipment can use the existence of developed GRS in their area to justify the procurement of equipment through various funding avenues.

Jesse Clark with Maine DEP then introduced Bob Shannon and Bill Sheehan, and gave an overview of the agency, their duties regarding emergency response capabilities and locations, how the regions in Maine for response are broken down, goals in emergency responses (public and environmental safety), response services and equipment including marine assets, measures and tactics taken during a response to minimize contamination, and spill preparedness steps taken.

Then, Karen Way, the project coordinator for EPA Region 1, gave a brief presentation on the history of contingency planning since the passage of the Clean Water Act and OPA 90 and how these GRS integrate into the larger Inland Area Contingency Plan (ACP). She stated that the GRS strategies created on the Meduxnekeag River will be included in the Inland ACP and available for viewing and download at the RRT website (https://nrt.org/site/doc_list.aspx?site_id=38). Following Karen's presentation, Mike touched on the definition of GRS and the differences in what a GRS is versus what it is not, including that GRS are not a mandate for protection or response, a performance standard, nor the only sites that will or should be protected during an incident. GRS are smaller, site-specific documents which differentiate from the larger and more comprehensive ACPs of which they are a part.

Mike then provided a quick overview of the new GRS template, structure, and content.

Review of Site Selection Criteria and Site Selection Discussion

Mike opened the site selection discussion indicating that as part of this project, Nuka Research compiled available sensitivity data via various online GIS sites and identified prospective development site areas based on this data and by considering potential river access points. This information was used to develop an initial site selection matrix and these prospective areas will be the ones reviewed today. Mike noted that each prospective mapping area (and prospective site name) can change depending on input from the workgroup and that multiple prospective sites can be combined into one GRS, and that a single GRS site can have multiple maps.

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He also reminded the group that site selection can be based on particular sensitivities in and around a site or based upon a sites accessibility and suitability for equipment staging and deployment of various booming strategies.

The following list includes all preliminary site areas that were discussed. Site area names are based upon those on the preliminary Site Selection Matrix. Site names in **bold text** will be the primary focus for potential GRS development. However, because this project development area is relatively small, it will be feasible to survey most of the preliminary site areas. For this reason and based on the results of the site surveys (once completed), and further discussion with work group and site survey team members, identification, and selection of 6 distinctive GRS development areas will be made following the site surveys.

Meduxnekeag River Sites: *NOTE: All current GRS names are tentative and subject to change up to the conclusion of the final workgroup meeting.*

- **Houlton Riverfront Park/ River St. Boat Access** – Kirk Ball indicates that steep banks exist not only along Riverfront Park, but also along both sides of the river upstream to the I-95 overpass. River St. Boat Access should make a good staging and potential deployment area.
- I-95/Trail Bridge – Will Hogan (snowmobile bridge, steep banks)
- **Houlton WWTP** – Could be used in a certain portion where the bank is more sloped
- **Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians/Tribal Land South** – farmlands, other important resources
- **Lowery Rd.** – doesn't have steep bank on westerly side close to bridge, location of Tribal fishing hole, location of gauging station and water quality monitoring.
- **Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians/Tribal Land North** – presence of protected wetlands
- Hayden Lane/Big Brook – wetland areas important, additional parcel on the eastern shore, not great access to this area
- **Framingham Rd.** – Tribal fishing hole just downstream, can potentially provide staging, could be useful
- **Craig Brook** – This location was identified during the call as offering potential access though it is on private property. Access to this location will be determined prior to site surveys and if access is granted, a site survey will be conducted.

Note: For each GRS developed, a site name and numbering convention is used. As indicated above, site names can be determined by workgroup members as late as the final GRS review meeting at the end of the project. Since the inception of these inland river GRS development project series, GRS have also been given a unique letter/number identifier consisting of a two-letter river designator and a two-digit sequential number for each GRS. EPA Region 1 and Nuka Research are currently developing a new numbering convention to account for GRS development on the same river system but in different states. More information regarding GRS numbering will be provided later in this project as the site areas are finalized.

GRS Development Process & Project Timeline

Following the site selection discussion, Mike Popovich reviewed the remainder of the project timeline including the site survey process, follow-on tactics development, GRS draft development, and final GRS review and approval by the work group.

He concluded by stressing the importance of continued local stakeholder participation and how critical local knowledge and input is to the entire GRS development process.

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Final Comments and Suggestions

- Jesse Clarke - the river has high flow rates in May, but you can walk across it in August.
 - One concern should be hazardous discharges in basements.
- Kirk Ball - there are only short periods of time where the river can be navigated with a canoe.
 - A limiting factor is snow.
 - Houlton gets its water supply from wells. Upstream on East side - contamination will not reach the wells unless the entire water shed is affected.
- Mike - will reach out in late March to start planning when we are getting out there (will take a day or less to get through the sites).
 - The Maliseet tribe will have the option to identify specific sites as culturally sensitive and provide a level of detail they are comfortable with.
- Sharri - will send Nuka Research more specific information on the geography and extent of Houlton Band of the Maliseet Indian Tribal land.
 - Two factories (Steel Stone) are located south of the Maliseet tribal area that could be possible contributors to an incident.
 - This land has wetlands and riparian land that should be protected.
- Kirk - they have storm water ponds marked as wetlands.
 - Rail lines are active around the area of concern (Houlton to the Canadian border).
- Bill Sheehan - right below Craig or Refuge Brook there is another area of the river upstream that may be considered as a possible site for GRS development.

Action Items

Nuka Research will:

- Post meeting summary on project website and accept feedback within a set comment period.
- Post documents and presentations used in this meeting on the project website.
- Solicit feedback from workgroup members on additional sites/areas to consider for GRS development.
- Determine site survey timeframe based on Workgroup feedback (in late March 2023) and schedule site surveys accordingly.
- Invite workgroup members to Site Surveys as appropriate.
- Form Tactics sub-group to review proposed tactics from Site Surveys.

Project Website: <https://www.inlandgrpne.com/meduxnekeag-river-me>

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