



Geographic Response Strategy Development – Housatonic River (MA)

Initial Work Group/ Site Selection Meeting

Thursday, November 16, 2023: 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 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 ten (10) sites for GRS development along the Housatonic River in Massachusetts. We will also discuss other planned project activities including conduct of site surveys, tactics development, and final GRS development.

Participants

Karen Way, Ila White – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency R1	Cathy Kiley, Dave Slowick, Steve Mahoney – Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)
Janko Tomasic – Town of Dalton	Mike Popovich, Haley Griffin – Nuka Research
Chief Paul Storti, Adam Carlotto – Great Barrington Emergency Management	Caleb Mitchell – Hinsdale Conservation Commission
Robert Van Der Kar – Pittsfield Conservation Commission	Jane Winn – Berkshire Environmental Action Team (BEAT)
Kate Bednaz – Housatonic Valley Association (HVA)	William Gop – Lenox Public Works
Jennifer Doherty – State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)	Matt Packard – Pittsfield Fire Department
Jacinta Williams – Pittsfield Department of Community Development	Carl Shaw – Pittsfield Wastewater Treatment Plant Division

Intro and Opening Comments

Mike Popovich (Nuka Research) opened the discussion 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 Housatonic River. He introduced Karen Way, the project coordinator for EPA Region 1, followed by David Slowick and Cathy Kiley with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP), to the group.

Project/Site Selection Process Overview

Mike provided a general project overview, reviewed project objectives, and provided an overview of GRS design and content. He also discussed the different variables that were relevant to the sites, including sensitive habitats, historical sites, conservation areas, and spill risk. He mentioned that these GRS will be used to identify culturally and historically significant resources along the Housatonic River, in addition to identifying economic resources and areas at greater spill risk.

Finally, Mike reviewed the project's phases and timeline.

Inland GRS and the Inland ACP

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Karen Way 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 created in the Housatonic River will be included in the Inland ACP and available for viewing and download at the [RRT website](#).

MA DEP Emergency Response Program

Dave Slowick, Emergency Response Section Chief for the MassDEP Western Regional Office, gave a brief presentation on MassDEP emergency response capabilities. After introducing his colleagues, Cathy Kiley and Steve Mahoney, to the group, he spoke to the passage of the Oil Spill Act of 2004 following the 2003 Bouchard B120 oil spill and the related preparedness and response initiatives and emphasized that preparedness is key to all response and cleanup operations.

He then gave an overview of the Operations structure of MassDEP and the duties of the Western Region's Emergency Response Operations Section. He reviewed the priorities of an incident (life, environment, incident clearance, and property), notification criteria, and MassDEP's communication structure during an emergency response and how it can change depending on the incident. He also touched on MassDEP's assets, including the equipment contained in the oil spill response trailers located at various municipalities across Massachusetts.

Geographic Response Strategies

Mike spoke to how the acquisition of and immediate access to oil spill response equipment by local communities can sometimes allow resources to be deployed at an incident before resources from the State and spill response contractors can be mobilized. He 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 contingency plans of which they are a part. Mike then provided an overview of the GRS template, structure, and content.

Review of Site Selection Criteria and Site Selection Discussion

Before reviewing individual sites, Mike highlighted that the impetus for GRS development on the Housatonic River is the presence of a rail line running along much of the eastern and main branch of the river.

The following list includes all preliminary site areas that were discussed during the meeting and any additional feedback and corrections received by meeting attendees immediately following the meeting. Site names in **bold text** will be the primary focus for potential GRS development though other areas may be surveyed based on any further work group discussion and feedback that occurs between the meeting date and conduct of the site surveys. Based on the results of the site surveys and further discussion with work group and site survey team members, up to 10 site areas will be identified for final GRS development.

Note: The Tribal Historic Preservation Officer with the Stockbridge Munsee Band of the Mohican Nation (Stockbridge Munsee Community) will be involved in this project but was unable to attend this meeting. We do anticipate additional feedback from the Stockbridge Munsee Community regarding tribal interests and concerns within the development area. This may result in additional sites being considered for GRS development.

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

Hinsdale - Old Mill Trail/Old Dalton Rd: Dave commented that there are no direct conduits in this portion of the river and not many incidents have occurred here. This site was not selected for GRS development.

Dalton – Crane & Co. WWTP: Janko Tomasic, planner for the Town of Dalton, stated that this site is one of the easiest points to access on this portion of the river. He expressed uncertainty over how cooperative the WWTP company is, stating that they're strict with the land uses and it is not clear whether they would let emergency services on their land to access the river.

Janko suggested Mill Pond north of Main Street as another good access point and a location on West Housatonic Street with a road crossing the river over a dam that is in close proximity to the rail line. Some citizens have

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expressed concern in this area. Dave added that the WWTP has had recent staffing changes, but the company is usually cooperative, and this facility is located downstream of the Route 9 and Route 8 intersection that has experienced a few incidents.

Dalton – East Street: Dave commented that MassDEP has done some scoping for access in this area and that the Lakewood Park across the street could be used as a staging area. This site was not selected for GRS development.

Dalton – Lakewood Park: Jane asked the group if there was awareness of the General Electric facility in that area and ongoing levels of PCB contamination there. She added that the riverbanks are steep and difficult to access. This site was not selected for GRS development.

Pittsfield – Fred Garner Park: Mike stated this area might be the last opportunity to stop a spill from reaching the main branch of the Housatonic River if there was an incident in the East Branch. Dave concurred. Carl Shaw, superintendent of the Pittsfield Wastewater Treatment Plant Division, commented that this site is accessible via a canoe access, is not gated, has a parking lot and a path that leads from the park to the south-central end of the marked site.

Pittsfield – Canoe Meadows Wildlife Sanctuary: Mike commented that while this is an important area to protect, it may not be accessible. He suggested that resources can be mobilized upstream to protect this area, taking action such as deploying exclusion boom along the river banks to protect sensitive shoreline if there is any. Jane added that there was access on the eastern side of the river via a dirt road that runs from Holmes Road to the Pittsfield WWTP along the river. She stated that upstream of Fred Gardner Park was used for river clean-up on the East Branch. Carl said that this road follows the main interceptor coming into the treatment plant's main facility.

Lenox – Decker Canoe Access: Dave commented that this site is a good area to recover oil or deploy resources into the river.

Lenox – Woods Pond Dam: Mike pointed out that Lenox WWTP and the Berkshire Scenic Railway Museum are in this area and natural collection could take place here if there is a large spill. Jane added that Woods Pond has been the collection point for PCBs, and it is in the process of being cleaned up. Dave concurred that natural accumulation would take place here.

Lenox Dale: Mike flagged this site because it looked like there was an area for staging. No comments.

Lee – Columbia Mill Dam: Mike flagged this site as it is in the vicinity of the Berkshire Power Tech facility but there was uncertainty regarding access. This site was not selected for GRS development.

Lee – Bank Field: Mike commented that while this area was selected as a prospective area for GRS development, oil may not want to be collected here because the surrounding area is populated. Dave added that river access was difficult in this area. This site was not selected for GRS development.

Lee – Pleasant Street/Mass Turnpike: Dave commented there is a Big Y with a large parking lot in the area and it could be a good point of access. He added that the bridge close by has a lot of accidents there and that this site should be favored due to the public parking lot accessibility. Mike agreed, stating that the bridge has a potential for vehicle rollovers.

Lee – WWTP: Mike stated that this could be a source for spills and if a GRS is developed here the WWTP will need to be contacted and incorporated into the work group. No comments.

Lee – Beartown Brook: No comments. This site was not selected for GRS development.

South Lee – Hurlbut Dam: Dave stated this area is private property and will require communication with property owners to obtain access. This site was not selected for GRS development.

Stockbridge – Stockbridge Industrial Park: Mike stated there are not many people or facilities in the area. This site was not selected for GRS development.

Stockbridge – Stockbridge Town Park: Mike commented that there is a canoe put-in at this site and Dave concurred, stating that this area has good river access and an area for staging at the Town Park.

Housatonic – Glendale Dam: Mike stated that this is a questionable area for GRS development due to the issues of river bank elevation. This site was not selected for GRS development.

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Housatonic – Monument Mills Power House: Mike stated that the Monument Mills is included in the National Register of Historic Places and should be considered for GRS development so that booming strategies can be developed to protect any riverside structures related to the Mills. Dave concurred.

Great Barrington – Rising Paper Co: No comments. This site was not selected for GRS development.

Great Barrington North: Both Dave and Chief Storti concurred that the banks of the river are steep, making access difficult. This site was not selected for GRS development.

Great Barrington – WWTP: Dave commented that this site would be good to keep because of the WWTP and feasibility of access.

Great Barrington – Brookside Canoe Access: Chief Storti commented that there is a very small canoe launch here and on the opposite side of the river there is a large field that is easily accessible. Dave made a point that it is easy to get stuck when working with heavy equipment in fields. Jane commented that Columbia and Eagle Mill dams are slated to be removed by GE.

Sheffield – N. Main St. Rest Area: Mike and Dave concurred that this was a good access point on the river.

Sheffield – Bartholomew’s Cobble Reservation: Jane identified this site for development as it warrants protection due to presence of rare species with significant sensitivities. She said that flood plain work and forest restoration has been done in this area and to ask the trustees of the Reservation where canoes may be launched.

Dave commented that the largest threat in this area is closer to the state border where the highway and rail lines are located.

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. 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-up on tactics development, GRS draft development, and final GRS review and approval by the work group. He reiterated that site surveys gather information on sensitive areas, shoreline types, current flow, accessibility, and other factors that may influence tactic development. These site surveys will encourage the consideration of which tactics may be developed at each of the sites. Mike concluded by stressing the importance of continued local stakeholder participation and how critical local knowledge and input is to the entire GRS development process.

Comments and Suggestions

Mike and Karen both thanked everyone for their time and expressed their appreciation for the participant’s willingness to contribute to the meeting. Karen reiterated that local knowledge is an invaluable tool for these projects. They asked for the group members to provide any additional information that may be informative to the work group and GRS development process. Dave also thanked the group, stating that GRS are very useful tools and that developing them on the Housatonic will help resources be mobilized more quickly and efficiently.

Review Action Items

Nuka Research will:

- Disseminate the meeting summary to the meeting participants for review, then to the entire work group and project website.
- Look into Bartholomew’s Cobble Reservation as a potential GRS development site.
(<https://thetrustees.org/place/bartholomews-cobble/>)

Adjourn

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Project Website: <https://www.inlandgrpne.com/massachusetts-grs>

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