

ON-THE-GROUND PROJECTS

Spotlight on The Bradford Dam Removal, Pawcatuck River, Westerly, Rhode Island

Project Partners

The Nature Conservancy in Rhode Island

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

Army Corps of Engineers

US Fish and Wildlife Service

Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership





The Wood-Pawcatuck River Watershed is one of the most important coastal watersheds in southeastern New England, and one of the most undeveloped intact areas between New York City and Boston. This watershed is of significant regional importance to diadromous fish populations including alewife, blueback herring, American shad, and American eel. All four of these species are not only Federal trust species, but are managed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and were listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the 2015 Rhode Island Wildlife Action Plan. While water quality is suitable to support self-sustaining populations of resident fish in this watershed, these migratory (diadromous) populations are threatened by degraded habitat caused by dams, which have obstructed fish passage and caused river fragmentation.

Dams were first built on the river to provide water power to mills in the 1600's. By the early 1900's there were ten significant dams located along the 32 mile main stem of the Pawcatuck River. Populations of diadromous fish could no longer reach their natal spawning grounds, and were completely eliminated from the watershed.



Bradford Dam, Westerly, Rhode Island

Some of these dams have been washed out, breached, or removed, and others have been fitted with functional fish ladders. This project will replace the Bradford Dam with a step-pool nature-like fishway. It will open 32 river miles and providing access from the estuary to spawning and nursery habitat in the headwaters of Worden Pond. The dam is currently fitted with a 40 year old obsolete fish ladder, which is functional only over a narrow range of flows. Removal will not only improve fish passage, but will improve flood resiliency by eliminating the risk of destructive flooding as a result of dam failure.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership with conservation dollars to partially fund the deconstruction and removal of the dam. Pre- and post-removal monitoring will yield quantifiable measures of success, and outreach to local stakeholders and legislatures will keep the community informed of the project progress.

Project text and photos provided by The Nature Conservancy in Rhode Island.

For more information on the Partnership visit us at: www.atlanticfishhabitat.org