

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Clearinghouse Review Report

April 26, 2010

SUBJECT: Great Barrington-Bank Stabilization-Green River
EEA#: 14569
LOCATION: Egremont Road, Great Barrington
ESTIMATED COST: \$100,000
REVIEW TYPE: ENF
PROPONENT: George Beebe, Riverhill Farms
COMMENTS DUE: April 27, 2010

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

An Environmental Notification Form (ENF) has been submitted to the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) office for this project. The proposed project consists of the installation of 671 cubic yards of 1.5-2-inch diameter blocky rock in a 5,400 square foot (sf) area along 600 linear feet (lf) of the left bank of the Green River, as well as the excavation of 15,042 cubic feet of compensatory storage in an adjacent unused former corn field. Environmental impacts include the alteration of 0.48 acres of land, 600 lf of Bank, 5,400 sf of Land Under Water, 20,743 sf of Bordering Land Subject to Flooding, and 26,143 sf of Riverfront Area.

The project requires an Order of Conditions from the Great Barrington Conservation Commission (and on appeal only, a Superseding Order of Conditions from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)), a Chapter 91 Permit and Section 401 Water Quality Certificate from MassDEP, and review by the Natural Heritage Endangered Species Program.

Because the project does not involve financial assistance or a land transfer from the Commonwealth, MEPA jurisdiction is limited to the subject matter of rare species and wetlands. According to the filing, status of project design is 100% complete.

The Proponent states that nearly two (2) acres of prime farmland have been lost since 2000, as the high velocity of the river current has changed its course and carved a previously non-existent oxbow channel through his formerly high yield corn field. Stabilization of the bank is proposed to be accomplished through a combination of blocky rock and willow live stakes.

CONSIDERATIONS AND POTENTIAL ISSUES:

Wetlands and Wetland/Aquatic Habitat :

The project requires review subject to 301 CMR 11.03(3), an Order of Conditions under the Wetlands Protection Act (M.G.L. c 131A), with the review of DEP, Chapter 91 License, and 401 Water Quality Certification.

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Rare and Endangered Species:

This project has potential impacts to Wood Turtle Habitats and is under review by NHESP. The specific area of habitat is not in the immediate area of bank stabilization, but does include the proposed area of excavation for compensatory flood storage, an area identified by the Proponent as a Wood Turtle habitat and confirmed by sightings during the MEPA site review.

Consistency with Local & Regional Plans:

This plan does not have significant regional impacts. However, it should be noted that any diversion of the Green River from its normal channel, whether by natural or man-made alterations, has the potential for downstream impacts.

The work falls within the Floodplain Restriction of the Town of Great Barrington Zoning Bylaws and will require either a special permit or waiver from the same.

Alternatives Analysis:

As noted by the Proponent, alternatives examined include diverting the river back into a former meander channel upstream or armoring longer sections of bank with higher berm elevations. The Proponent state that diverting the channel would result in potential erosion as the old channel is scoured out. This would result in increased volumes of sediment into the river.

As stated by the proponent, no long term assurance can be made that diversion would continue to work.

Armoring longer sections of bank with higher elevation at the top of the berm would give greater long term assurance to the stability of the reach but would do so with a greater loss of flood storage, which in turn leads to a greater area needed for compensatory flood storage. The Proponent states that the proposed design minimizes the length of bank affected by construction, while giving the Proponent reasonable assurance of long term stability.

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COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

BRPC does not believe that an EIR (Environmental Impact Report) is necessary. Bank stabilization is clearly indicated, and the project details will require review and permitting by DEP and NHESP.

NHESP will be working with the Proponent on an alternative location for the compensatory flood storage area prior to approval.

The Town of Great Barrington Planner Chris Rembold will recommend issuance of a waiver from the Town's Floodplain Restriction Bylaw.

It is recommended that in addition to the willow live stakes proposed by the Proponent the plan should include more diverse plantings in the bank revegetation effort, including such plants as red twig dogwood, cottonwood and sycamore.

In addition to the above comments, it should be noted that due to the velocity and unpredictability of the Green River in this location, it is unclear that this stabilization plan will provide a final resolution to the problem.

The BRPC Clearinghouse Review Committee approved these comments on April 26, 2010 as authorized by the BRPC Executive Committee on April 8, 2010.