Wellfleet Selectboard

300 Main Street

Wellfleet, MA 02667

Re: Herring River Restoration Compliance with Wellfleet Harbor Management Plan

Dear Selectboard members:

On behalf of the Wellfleet Natural Resources Advisory Board (NRAB), I am writing to express strong support for the Herring River Restoration Project. NRAB has long been an advocate for restoration of the Herring River estuary. The recommendation to restore tidal flow to the Herring River is a top priority in the 2006 Harbor Management Plan submitted to the Wellfleet (then called) Board of Selectmen. This plan was not prepared under 301 CMR 23.00, however the plan does reflect current local policy guidance on harbor resource management in the Town.

Specifically, the 2006 plan recommends tidal restoration to protect vulnerable saltmarsh habitats, remediate high coliform bacteria counts in the river, create new shellfish beds, restore alewife and eel migrations as well as a nursery for baitfish, provide storm surge protection, and sequester nitrogen through wetland restoration.

The NRAB is currently working on an updated Harbor Management Plan that will affirm this strong support for salt marsh restoration in Herring River and elsewhere in the Town.

The Herring River today is in poor health due to more than a century of tidal restriction caused by the construction of the Chequessett Neck Road dike. Tidal restriction has caused poor water quality, loss of salt marsh, degradation of habitat, and contamination of shellfish beds downstream of the dike in Wellfleet Harbor. These conditions will continue as long as the existing Chequessett Neck Road dike remains in place.

The Town and the Cape Cod National Seashore had the foresight to develop a restoration plan to reverse these degraded conditions. The Herring River Restoration Project will result in significant improvements in water quality, fisheries and wildlife habitat, and the overwhelming benefits these resources provide to the community and the region.

* Roughly 1,000 acres of salt marsh and other estuarine wetlands-and the habitat and food sources they provide-will be restored;
* Expanded habitat for many species of birds, mammals and reptiles—including rare species—that thrive in salt/brackish marsh;
* 11+ river miles for fish passage will be restored, along with access to 160 pond acres for spawning.
* Water quality will improve in Herring River and Wellfleet Harbor, to the benefit of residents, shellfishermen, and visitors;
* Restored salt marsh will enhance the ability to adapt to sea level rise;
* Recreational access to 6 miles of waterways will be restored;
* Restoration of healthy salt marsh will capture carbon and reduce methane,  resulting in a substantial reduction of the net volume of greenhouse gases released  to the atmosphere.

The existing Chequessett Neck Road dike, which is no longer functioning to control tidal flow, will be replaced with a state-of-the-art tide control structure.  The Herring River Restoration Project is the result of scientific study and extensive community discussions. Changes in tide levels will be made incrementally, while carefully modeling and monitoring of system responses will allow the project to adjust the rate of change and take other management actions to achieve the benefits of restoration while avoiding or minimizing unintended outcomes.

The Herring River Restoration Project will restore the health of a unique and environmentally significant resource for the benefit of the community today and for years to come.

Sincerely,

John Riehl, Chair,

Natural Resources Advisory Board