



*Samantha Woods
Executive Director*

June 24, 2009

Anne Canaday
MEPA
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge Street
Boston MA 02114

RE: First Herring Brook Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge – EOEEA 14405

Dear Ms. Canaday

The North and South Rivers Watershed Association would like to offer comments on the ENF for the First Herring Brook Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge as proposed by the Town of Scituate. In general, the NSRWA is very supportive of public access to the rivers. The NSRWA has a long history of supporting and pursuing public access to the North and South Rivers as an important part of our mission and we believe strongly that it engenders stewardship for those resources. That being said, we seek a careful and responsible balance between promoting access and having the very resources we seek to protect and restore from being harmed by unmanaged public access.

The NSRWA is supportive of the First Herring Brook Pedestrian bridge but with some caveats that we believe will allow the resources to stay protected and intact while allowing the public access to the North River to fish, birdwatch, or to just take in the magnificent views.

The trail will be opening up an area of salt marsh that has not historically been accessible by foot or bicycle traffic. This salt marsh habitat and the river system are sensitive resources and lie within a mapped priority habitat for an endangered species. The proposed bridge is a massive structure in an otherwise relatively unbuilt landscape. The bridge and approaches to the bridge are over 400 feet in length. The NSRWA feels that the scale of the structure should be revisited and diminished to reduce the visual and physical impacts of the bridge and its approaches to the marsh. Limiting the bridge to pedestrian only usage may accomplish reducing the size of the structure needed.

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The NSRWA is also concerned about the long term maintenance and operation of the bridge and the trail and the impacts that bringing people out into these marshes may have if not maintained properly. We believe a plan should be in place to protect the marshes and the river from activity that can degrade these resources. That plan should include regular trash removal, dog walking rules and/or dog waste removal rules, enforcement of rules, a schedule for maintenance of the path and the bridge structure and a commitment to fund the plan by the Town of Scituate.

Unfortunately, public access does not always equate to environmental stewardship – if we want to have public access and we do – we would like to have a commitment from the Town of Scituate to maintain and protect the resources.

In addition, NSRWA has other concerns that have yet to be addressed. They include:

- How will the construction work proceed and what steps will be taken to minimize impacts during construction?
- Has the proposed structure been evaluated by an engineer to ensure that additional flooding will not occur as a result of the bridge?
- How will the impacts from the bridge pilings affect the resource areas, including land containing shellfish, marine fisheries, anadromous fish habitat?

The NSRWA would like to request that the town hire professional oversight during construction to ensure protection of these resource areas as the town's conservation agent is not able to oversee the protection of these resources or compliance with applicable wetlands protection laws.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project.

Sincerely,

Samantha Woods