



**Gulf of Maine
Council on the
Marine Environment**

Gulf of Maine Council

Press Release

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Commerce Department Announces Open Rivers Initiative

Retired Navy Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher Jr., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator, today announced the Open Rivers Initiative (ORI), designed to spur economic and environmental renewal and improve public safety in small towns and communities. The initiative will provide grants to communities committed to removing obsolete and derelict stream barriers.

“Many small communities and private owners understand the benefits of removing these obstructions, but simply lack the funds to do so,” said Lautenbacher. “This initiative is intended to help provide assistance where funding is an issue. We envision this initiative as an investment in our society, our economy and our ecological future.”

The Gulf of Maine Council, in partnership with NOAA, supports community-based habitat restoration efforts throughout the Gulf of Maine. Habitat restoration which supports anadromous fish passage is one of the types of restoration supported through this program. The Partnership has funded 43 projects for a total of \$1.2 million with roughly \$3.9 million contributed from other sources and has been an effective method of restoring regionally significant habitat in the Gulf of Maine.

Of the 43 restoration projects funded, 20 have focused on some aspect of freshwater riverine environments. This includes riparian plantings, fish ladders, dam removal feasibility analysis, and fish surveys. For more information or to view the Partnership’s Habitat Restoration Strategy, visit, www.gulfofmaine.org/habitatrestoration/

There are an estimated 2.5 million dams across the country, many less than six feet tall and some up to 200 years old. The ORI will target only those small dams where community consensus and the dam owners support removal, the dam no longer serves a useful purpose, and removal will have the greatest benefit to anadromous fish like salmon, striped bass and shad.

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Many derelict dams pose a safety hazard, particularly to downstream communities; cause economic hardship for towns forced to pay for upkeep and liability; and disturb delicate ecosystems by preventing the free flow of water and species through the river. Removing dams and other blockages opens habitat for migratory fish and can help boost local economies by increasing property values and increasing recreational opportunities such as fishing and kayaking.

Under Secretary Lautenbacher made this announcement today at the White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation in St. Louis, Mo. The conference, convened by the White House Council on Environmental Quality, brought together a diverse group of leaders to discuss innovative and effective approaches to promoting cooperative conservation.

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The mission of the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment is to maintain and enhance environmental quality in the Gulf of Maine to allow for sustainable resource use by existing and future generations. For more information visit the Council's website at www.gulfofmaine.org