



## A PRESS RELEASE FROM THE TRUSTEES

### **Trustees Awarded Funding from the North American Wetlands Conservation Council, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service-MA Division and MA Division of Ecological Restoration for Innovative Great Marsh Restoration Project**



*Pictured above (from left to right): (1) Flooding during an astronomical tide completely covers the marsh and encroaches upon Newman Road, at Old Town Hill in Newbury; (2) Brilliant waves of green high marsh hay stand out against gray morning fog over Newman Road and Old Town Hill in Newbury, a high marsh habitat (Photo courtesy Coco McCabe).*

**Boston & Ipswich, MA** – April 25, 2019 – The Trustees of Reservations (The Trustees) is pleased to announce it has been awarded \$160,000 in additional state and national funding for an innovative salt marsh habitat restoration and climate adaptation project already underway at its Old Town Hill reservation in Newbury. Old Town Hill is part of the Great Marsh, the largest marsh in New England at 20,000 acres. The Trustees protects more than 15% of the Great Marsh, which is under increasing threat from flooding and sea level rise.

The funding includes a nationally competitive award from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) grant program, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) for \$100,000, \$30,000 from the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, and \$30,000 in state grant funds through the Department of Fish and Game's (DFG) Division of Ecological Restoration's (DER) Priority Projects Program. The Trustees became a qualifying member of the DER program last November.

The Great Marsh restoration project aims to fortify 300 acres along Old Town Hill and two other Trustees sites in Essex and Ipswich. Over time historic ditching processes have compromised the resilience of the marsh by destroying its natural draining process, leaving it increasingly vulnerable to floods. In order to 'heal' these ditches, the Trustees and partners will use an innovative, nature-based method of "ditch remediation" which, to date, has only been piloted on a very limited basis on the neighboring USFWS Parker River Wildlife Refuge. Marshes serve as important habitats for sea life that support the local ecosystem and seafood economy and provide a natural flood barrier to protect neighboring communities.

The awards bring The Trustees another step closer to fully funding the first phase of the restoration project, which is focused on 115 acres in Newbury. The parcel includes 30 acres belonging to the Massachusetts Division of USFWS, the adjacent landowner and Trustees project partner.

“Salt marshes are on the ‘front lines’ of the coastal impacts from climate change,” says Tom O’Shea, Trustees Director of Coast and Natural Resources. “These funds uniquely allow us to not only protect and bolster the resilience of our salt marsh in its current location, but also to anticipate future shorelines and begin to protect and strengthen the ecology of those parcels as well. We are grateful for the support of our many partners.”

### **Focus on the Great Marsh**

As the largest conservation nonprofit in Massachusetts with 27,000 acres under its care, including 37 coastal sites and 120 miles of managed waterfront, The Trustees recognizes the urgent need to bolster the resilience of its properties which are becoming increasingly vulnerable to the effects of our changing climate.

As a result, the organization conducted an extensive coastal vulnerability assessment (CVA) in 2017 – the first of its kind by a statewide conservation nonprofit -- in partnership with The Woods Hole Group to assess the vulnerability of its coastal sites to climate change impacts. The CVA identified coastal beaches and salt marshes as two of the most “at risk” natural areas.

Soon thereafter, The Trustees launched its “Saving the Great Marsh: Ditch Remediation, Habitat Preservation and Resiliency Building at the Landscape Scale,” project in the summer of 2018 with the first phase of funding awarded through a \$15,740 MassBays grant that kick-started the restoration of 85 acres of salt marsh at Old Town Hill Reservation, in Newbury. The three to five-year restoration process will include a natural “healing” technique of harvesting salt hay from the marsh and loosely braiding and layering the hay within historically ditched areas. Over time, this technique will allow the braided hay to collect sediment from the incoming tides and rebuild marsh “peat” naturally to restore the health and natural function of the marsh.

“Tidal marshes are one of the most important habitats for migratory birds, other wildlife, and people along the Atlantic Coast,” says U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Atlantic Coast Joint Venture Coordinator Aimee Weldon. “Salt marshes host a high diversity of birds and fish, including some of our most at-risk and iconic species like Saltmarsh Sparrow, Black Rail, and American Black Duck. The Atlantic Coast Joint Venture and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are excited about supporting this project, which is an excellent example of the kind of innovative salt marsh restoration efforts that are critically and immediately needed to help restore declining species and maintain the ecological benefits (e.g., protection from coastal flooding and nursery habitat for commercially important fish) and quality of life that are so important to the public.”

Much of the Great Marsh ecosystem has been compromised due to widespread historic ditching, an agricultural practice dating back to early colonial days and up until the early 1900s when marsh hay farming was ultimately abandoned, allowing the marsh to flood as agricultural infrastructure fell into disrepair. During the Great Depression, vast re-ditching programs were launched to drain the marsh, in some cases for mosquito control in areas viewed as swampy, nuisance land. By the late 1930s nearly 94% of New England salt marshes had been re-ditched, negatively altering the ecology of this important habitat. Today, the remnants of these ditches continue to disrupt natural tidal flow by not allowing for what should be natural draining, drowning the plants.

“This process ultimately damaged and compromised the natural flow and ecosystem in our marshes,” adds O’Shea. “Now, we are working on an innovative approach to reverse this degradation, using a technique that draws on the power of nature to heal itself to improve the overall health and resiliency of the salt marsh at a landscape scale.”

Monitoring is scheduled to begin this spring and the restoration is slated to start by early fall. The project is initially estimated to take three to five years to complete, with the goal being to help the marsh keep pace with sea level rise so it can continue to serve as a buffer to adjacent uplands from storm surge and continue to provide habitat for species that rely on it for their livelihood.

“We are excited to partner with The Trustees and the project team to pilot innovative restoration techniques that strengthen the ecological resilience of our vital salt marshes,” said DER Director Beth Lambert. “This important work will not only improve our understanding of how historic ditches continue to impact coastal wetlands, it will also bolster efforts to reverse those impacts by using nature-based methods to restore marsh health and increase its ability to respond to sea level rise.”

The new funding will allow The Trustees to accelerate its restoration of important marsh habitat for species including the American Black Duck; Mallard; Green-Winged Teal; Gadwall; Greater Scaup; Common Goldeneye; Bufflehead; Red-Breasted Merganser; Canada Goose; and Atlantic Brant. The additional funding will also allow for the restoration of 50 acres of salt marsh adjacent to Trustees land, a parcel owned by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW), to restore high marsh, special habitat for the at-risk salt marsh sparrow species, and for the acquisition of new land to protect pathways from future saltmarsh migration in the same project area.

"The long-term monitoring of this project is critical to understanding the effects of our collaborative restoration effort and additionally will provide important information for other restoration projects being considered in New England," says Eric Derleth, USFWS, Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program Coordinator for Massachusetts.

Trustees Press Contact:

Kristi Perry | PR Director | 617.542.7696 x2123 | [kperry@thetrustees.org](mailto:kperry@thetrustees.org)

###

**More about The Trustees**

*Founded in the City of Boston by landscape architect and open space visionary Charles Eliot in 1891, The Trustees is the nation’s first and the Massachusetts’ largest preservation and conservation nonprofit with a mission to preserve and share places of natural and historic significance and beauty with everyone, forever. With 117 natural and historic sites located from the Berkshires to the Cape and the Islands, Trustees sites range from barrier beaches and coastal landscapes to working farms, designed landscapes and gardens, historic homesteads, and urban and community parks. Supported by generous members, donors, volunteers and supporters, The Trustees welcomes millions of residents and visitors to its properties annually and offers thousands of engaging experiences and programs designed to inspire a deeper connection to nature and the outdoors, conservation, community, and culture. [www.thetrustees.org](http://www.thetrustees.org).*