Final Notice and Public Explanation of a Proposed Activity in a Floodplain and Wetland – Stonington, Maine

To: All interested Agencies, Groups, and Individuals

The Town of Stonington (the applicant) intends to complete the following Proposed Action with funding from Northern Border Regional Commission's (NBRC's) Catalyst Program. NBRC has prepared an 8-Step Decision-Making Process review in compliance with Executive Order (EO) 11988 (Floodplain Management) as amended by EO 13690 (Establishing a Federal Flood Risk Management Standard and a Process for Further Soliciting and Considering Stakeholder Input), which established a more protective standard for evaluating flood risk to ensure projects funded by the Federal government are more resilient to the impacts of flooding. Additionally, NBRC is in compliance with Executive Order (EO) 11990 (Protection of Wetlands), which established a more protective standard for wetlands. This standard aims to avoid, to the extent possible, the long and short-term adverse impacts associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands and to avoid direct or indirect support of new construction in wetlands where there is a practicable alternative.

The purpose of this project is to address road infrastructure vulnerabilities caused by critical flooding in Stonington, Maine. This is aligned with the Catalyst Program's economic development priority to revitalize transportation infrastructure. The Proposed Action includes raising approximately 400 feet of Oceanville Road by two (2) feet from its current elevation to mitigate flood risks. Additionally, the Proposed Action would install approximately eight (8) 24" culverts at 50-foot intervals to facilitate safe crossing or passage for animal species and buffer hydrologic shifts from storms. The reconstruction would use reinforced materials designed to withstand severe weather conditions. The Proposed Action would be located at 128 Oceanville Road in Stonington, Maine.
The applicant considered the following alternatives in selecting the Proposed Action:

No Action Alternative: The No Action Alternative would result in no federal funds supporting the elevation and reconstruction of 128 Oceanville Road. While this option would avoid any impacts to the wetlands, it would not address the significant and recurring flooding issues that threaten road access and safety. Without action, the road would remain vulnerable to floods, causing ongoing disruptions for residents, emergency services, and businesses.

Alternative Site/ Bridge Construction: This alternative option involves constructing a bridge to provide hydraulic connectivity underneath the road. A bridge would allow for natural water flow, which could help with coastal dynamics and water movement in the area. The possibility of rerouting the road to avoid the floodplain and wetlands was considered. However, it was dismissed due to the significant environmental, engineering, and property acquisition challenges. Rerouting would require extensive land acquisition and likely affect additional wetlands and resources, and it would result in increased construction and maintenance costs. Furthermore, the new route would not serve the same population effectively, increasing travel times and reducing access for the community.

Nature-based approach alternative: EO 13690 requires federal agencies to consider nature-based approaches when developing project alternatives. Nature-based approaches were considered as alternatives to the Proposed Action. However, no viable options were identified that could meet the specific needs of the Proposed Action. The applicant has identified the following to minimize potential impacts:

Property impacts: To mitigate potential infrastructure damage from flooding, the road would be elevated 2 feet above the base flood elevation. This increased elevation would ensure that Oceanville Road remains accessible during flood events, reducing the likelihood of road closures and ensuring continued access for both everyday use and emergency

services. The 2-foot elevation would also help prevent structural damage to the roadbed and subgrade, minimizing the impact of water saturation and erosion, which can weaken the foundation and lead to long-term degradation.
In addition, the road design would incorporate flood-resistant materials, such as reinforced asphalt and concrete that are specifically engineered to resist water infiltration and damage caused by prolonged exposure to moisture. The use of water-resistant road surfaces would extend the lifespan of the roadway, reducing the frequency and cost of repairs. This is particularly important in areas subject to frequent or severe flooding, where roads are often damaged by heavy rains, storm surges, or floodwaters. The combination of elevated road construction and durable materials would enhance the road's resilience to flood events, preventing cracking, potholing, and erosion, which can compromise the safety and functionality of the infrastructure. Moreover, the improved drainage design, including additional culverts and grading to direct water flow away from the road, would further safeguard against flood-related damage.

Impacts to lives: The proposed elevation of Oceanville Road would significantly enhance the safety and well-being of the local community, which includes approximately 1,000 residents, businesses, and emergency services that rely on the road for access during flood events. There is no alternate route available for the community, therefore, elevating the road 2 feet above the base flood elevation would reduce the chances of it being impassable during heavy rains or storm surges, ensuring continual access for residents, businesses, and emergency services.

Natural values impacts: The project would limit the amount of fill material placed in floodplain and wetland areas, preserving natural water retention and filtration functions. This would reduce the potential for increased flooding in adjacent areas. Appropriately sized 24-inch culverts would be installed to maintain the natural flow of water and ensure connectivity between wetlands and groundwater systems. This would support the health of the wetland by reducing hydrological disruptions. A gravel sub-base material would be placed under the road to provide structural support and aid in drainage, contributing to water infiltration that supports nearby wetlands. These materials would reduce surface runoff, decrease erosion, and limit sedimentation in adjacent wetland areas, helping to preserve the natural hydrological balance and protect the surrounding ecosystem. To control erosion to the roadway surface from wave run-up, riprap would be used for slope stabilization. Erosion control measures would adhere to Maine Department of Environmental Protection's Sediment and Erosion Control guidelines, ensuring minimal impact on surrounding ecosystems. Existing wetland vegetation and buffer zones would be preserved or restored. These buffers would support water quality, reduce soil erosion, and protect biodiversity, thus helping to maintain ecological functions and minimize habitat disruption for local wildlife.

It is NBRC's determination that due to 1) sufficient mitigation measures, 2) the lack of practicable alternatives, and 3) the importance of the Proposed Action in meeting the needs of the Town of Stonington, the benefits of the Proposed Action in the floodplain and wetlands outweigh the requirements of EO 11988 (as amended by EO 13690), to avoid floodplain development and the risk of flood loss, and EO 11990 to avoid wetland impacts.

Files that document compliance with steps 1 through 6 of EO 11988 (as amended by EO 13690) and 11990 are available for public inspection, upon request. Please send an email request to nepa@nbrc.gov. The 8-Step Decision-Making Process materials will be provided in electronic format unless a hard copy is specifically requested.

This notice provides people who may be affected by activities in the floodplain, in wetlands, and those who have an interest in the protection of the natural environment an opportunity to express their concerns and provide information. NBRC is accepting comments on this notice from October 11, 2024 through the end of the day of October 18, 2024. Comments should be submitted by email to nepa@nbrc.gov.
Date of Posting: October 10, 2024

Note to Contractor or Grantee: The Final Notice public comment period starts the day after publication and lasts for 7 days. Please insert the correct dates and remove this before submitting the Final Notice.