

New Bedford Harbor Projects Receive \$6.6 Million



New Bedford Mayor
Jon Mitchell

At a public ceremony on the site of one of six planned restoration projects in the region, \$6.6M in funding was awarded with the goal of reclaiming or replacing natural resources damaged from decades of toxic PCB pollution in New Bedford Harbor.

The funding is the final installment from penalty funds following the chronic release of hazardous polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) into New Bedford Harbor. In total, over \$30 million has been distributed by the New Bedford Harbor Trustee Council, consisting of representatives from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Department of the Interior, and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The projects are intended to restore, replace, or acquire and protect injured natural resources in and around greater New Bedford Harbor.

The following projects will be funded through this fourth, and final, round of funding:

1. \$2.9M for the Acushnet River upland riparian walkway in New Bedford
2. \$100,000 for ecological restoration of Palmer's Island in New Bedford
3. \$1.2M for ecological restoration of the sawmill property in Acushnet
4. \$600,000 for the purchase and restoration of the 46.6-acre LaPalme Farm in Acushnet
5. \$1.3M to jump start the restoration of the Round Hill Marsh in Dartmouth
6. \$485,440 to continue work on three Buzzards Bay Islands to provide protection and restoration of common and roseate terns, rare species which were severely impacted by the original release of hazardous substances and continue to be at risk (Bird Island – Marion, Ram Island – Mattapoisett, and Penikese Island – Gosnold).

The ceremony took place at the site of the former Acushnet Saw Mills, where a \$1.2M wetland and riverbank restoration project is beginning under the management of the Buzzards Bay Coalition and funded through the New Bedford Harbor Trustee Council. It is one of the six projects, primarily in the municipalities of New Bedford, Acushnet, and Dartmouth.



New bedford Harbor – photo by Elane LaBelle

The Bay Coalition has recently demolished and removed a group of industrial buildings from the sawmill site and will utilize grant funds from this round to acquire additional riverfront lands, remove pavement and restore natural forest, field, wetland and river habitats at the location. After completion in approximately two years, the scenic area is expected to be open to the public for environmental education and outdoor recreation and will anchor a developing regional trail system along the Acushnet River. Bay Coalition President Mark Rasmussen highlighted the importance of restoring damaged ecosystems like this.

“It is too easy for damaged natural resources to be forgotten and abandoned, but the Acushnet River and greater New Bedford Harbor have been, and should be, the heart of this community,” said Rasmussen. “By funding restoration projects like our work at the Acushnet sawmill we can help heal the ecological damage while also reconnecting the community to their Harbor.”

Representatives of the New Bedford Harbor Trustee Council also were on hand for the ceremony.

“Today, we come together to celebrate important progress in restoring the natural resources of New Bedford Harbor and Buzzards Bay, ” said John Catena, Northeast Regional Supervisor for NOAA Fisheries Service’s Restoration Center. “Over the last 14 years, NOAA, our federal and state partners, and many community partners in the SouthCoast have completed projects to restore fish habitat, wetlands, shellfish beds, preserve land, protect tern nesting areas and improve public shoreline access and recreational opportunities for the people of the region. Today’s funding will support six new projects to continue the restoration that is so important to the region’s people, environment and economy.”

US Fish and Wildlife Service New England Field Office Supervisor Tom Chapman added, “Projects in the final funding round have tremendous benefits to natural resources –

protecting land, restoring salt marsh, and enhancing federally listed endangered roseate tern nesting habitat. Moreover, people will be re-connected with the Acushnet River for generations to come as several of these projects will restore natural areas in the heart of New Bedford and Acushnet.”

“We pursue Natural Resource Damages cases to make sure those who pollute our environment compensate for those damages. We have invested those funds in restoring the vital natural resources in New Bedford Harbor and the Acushnet River, in a way that raises the quality of life for us all,” said Commissioner Ken Kimmell of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. “This progress is only possible thanks to the cooperative work between the state and federal Trustees, local officials, and the Buzzards Bay Coalition.”