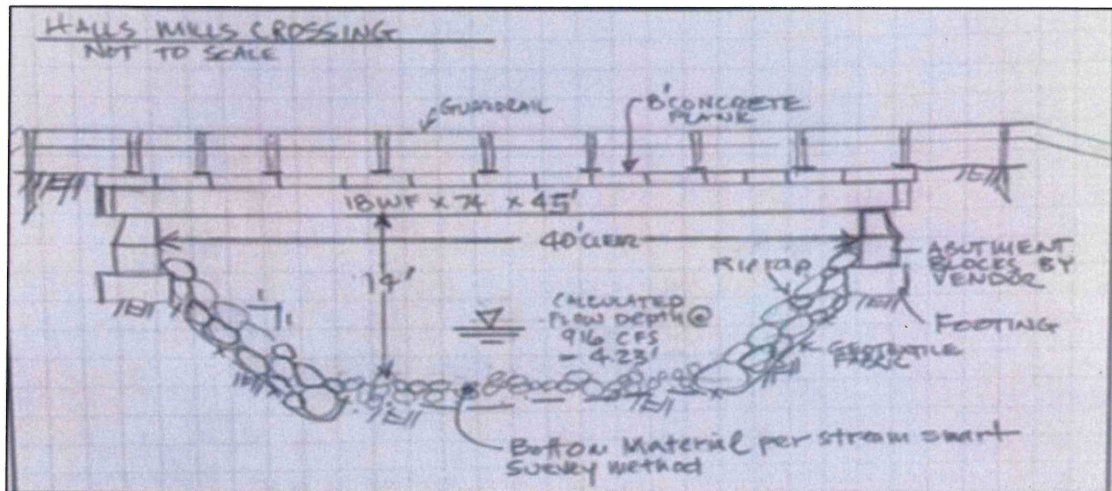




WASHINGTON COUNTY COUNCIL
OF GOVERNMENTS
FY17 LAND USE TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE

Washington County Culvert Bond Implementation - StreamSmart Culverts



The Washington County Council of Governments provided extremely valuable assistance to the Town of Whiting in procuring the grant funds for the work on the Halls Mills Road bridge and also with the RFP which led to our decision to contract with CES of Brewer. The amount of monies required to complete this work would have been a significant expense for the town and probably would have had to be a loan to be paid back over several years. We are most appreciative of the help we received.

Mary-Alice Look, Member of the Board of Selectmen Town of Whiting

PROJECT DESCRIPTION (completed June 2017)

The Maine Coastal Program supports the Washington County Council of Governments (WCCOG) in their role as technical assistance provider to 26 coastal municipalities in deeply rural Washington County. Maine voters approved a bond in 2015 to create a competitive grant program for Stream Crossing Public Infrastructure Improvement Projects AKA “the culvert bond”. Originally designed for 5 rounds of funding proposals, the public demand to “improve public safety and minimize impacts on water quality and aquatic habitat” consumed all bond funds in three grant rounds.

WCCOG fielded numerous inquiries and assisted with 2 culvert bond applications. Both applications were funded, one in the coastal town of Whiting and another in the inland town of Cooper but on a stream and lake with habitat connections to anadromous fish species including the federally listed species, Atlantic Salmon. Construction is underway on both projects in the summer of 2017.

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APPROACH

None of the municipalities in Washington County have staff to assist them with planning activities; some barely maintain office hours for mandatory administrative functions. Maine Coastal Program funds from NOAA that flow to regional planning agencies like WCCOG provide enormous leverage so that rural municipalities can hear about grant opportunities like the culvert bond, get assistance in scoping out their eligibility, assemble advisors and data to prepare successful grant applications, and, in both cases described here, get help in the procurement process to find engineering and design services to carry out the purposes of the grant.

RESULTS

On the Orange River in Whiting the culvert restoration project will address significant structural deficiencies identified by the Maine Department of Transportation. The replacement bridge/culvert is designed at 1.2 times the stream bank width with an open bottom to the stream floor. This will provide greater resilience to extreme precipitation events and remove a barrier to fish passage that the former “hanging” culvert created on the downstream side of the culvert. On Chubb Cove Road in Cooper an unnamed stream formerly provided brook trout and salmon habitat. Replacing the Chubb Cove Road culvert – also at 1.2 times the bank width of the steam - is a key component in the restoration of the stream habitat because it acts as a sediment choke point. Upstream Maine DOT has improved the ditches that were the source of the sediment. Once the crossing is replaced, the stream will begin to flush itself and flooding and safety issues will be alleviated.

NEXT STEPS AND OPPORTUNITIES

There are numerous examples statewide of similarly successful projects that followed from implementation of the culvert bond. Likewise, other coastal regional planning commissions relied upon NOAA funding to help rural towns to avail themselves of this opportunity. The demand for the culvert bonds funds far outstripped the available supply. Future bond requests can now point to this successful partnership with NOAA as well as to on-the-ground improvements to climate resilience and habitat connectivity that resulted from the investment in stream improvement infrastructure.

NEEDS

There were at least 2 jurisdictions that did not seek assistance from WCCOG as they scoped out their eligibility and actually made application for the culvert bond funds. Neither of these efforts was successful in obtaining culvert bond funds. All situations are unique and it may be that the need and readiness was simply greater in the two applications in which WCCOG was successful when providing assistance. However, there is no escaping the value of the NOAA funds in enabling WCCOG staff to offer thorough and ultimately successful assistance to small rural municipalities. Obviously, at the state level, the demand that exceeded available funds indicates the need for additional bond funds.



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APPLICABILITY FOR OTHER MUNICIPALITIES

As often happens after successful grants are announced WCCOG gets several phone calls from other municipalities seeking the same kind of help. This occurred with the culvert bond after all bond funds were expended. With support from NOAA WCCOG will continue to support coastal municipalities to provide notice, scoping, preparation and implementation of applications for funds and technical assistance in climate resilience and habitat connectivity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Maintain the alignment of High Priority Coastal Issues with programs like the Stream Crossing Public Infrastructure Improvement Projects AKA “the culvert bond”. Recognize the significance of the support that regional planning agencies provide to rural municipalities with virtually no professional staff. Remember that limited NOAA funds are significantly leveraged by regional planning agencies working across large rural geographic regions.

CONTACT

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Maine’s Regional Planning Organizations receive funding from the Legislature and Maine Coastal Program to provide general planning assistance to municipalities within their respective regions. Oversight and administration of annual Land Use Planning Assistance contracts is provided by the Municipal Planning Assistance Program at the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

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