



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers**

Philadelphia District

# Public Notice

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Public Notice No.      Date: April 8, 2016  
CENAP-PL-E-16-02      Comment Period Closes: May 9, 2016

USACE Philadelphia District: <http://www.nap.usace.army.mil>

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## **COBBS CREEK FISH PASSAGE PROJECT SECTION 566 OF THE WATER RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT ACT OF 1996 PHILADELPHIA COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA**

Pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1977 and Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act OF 1899, NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Philadelphia District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) proposes the Cobbs Creek Fish Passage Project in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Figure 1).

The project site is located along Cobbs Creek and involves modifications to the Woodland Dam in order to restore fish passage (Figure 1). The Woodland Dam is located close to the Cobbs Creek Parkway and Woodland Avenue. It is the first impediment to fish passage on Cobbs Creek and serves as the demarcation between tidal and non-tidal influences along the creek. Historically, the project area and Cobbs Creek were also an important location for early mill dams. The dam is approximately 100-feet in length (Figure 2 and 3) by 8 feet in height. Cobbs Creek is an urban watershed located in Philadelphia, PA.

Philadelphia Water Department biologists performed multiple surveys along the tidal and non-tidal portions of Cobbs Creek to determine the numbers and types of fish present and to assess the overall fish population diversity. Biologists collected nineteen species above the Woodland Avenue Dam and identified forty-three species in the tidal portions of Cobbs Creek. Most notable was the absence of anadromous and semi-migratory fish species in the non-tidal reaches (above Woodland Dam).

This project investigated the best alternative to reestablish fish passage along Cobbs Creek. Various alternatives were examined, but the most effective method of restoring fish passage is to remove the stream impediment and restore the channel to natural conditions. However, existing conditions such as the historical and cultural aspects of the dam, the chemical composition of sediment behind the dam, and the potential for increased downstream flood hazard risk influenced the selection of the recommended alternative.

The Cobbs Creek Fish Passage Project would provide access to approximately four miles of spawning and rearing habitat for migrating fish with benefits to populations that historically spawned and foraged in Cobbs Creek and its tributaries. The target fish species for the project is blueback herring (*Alosa aestivalis*), but many other aquatic species will benefit from the increased connectivity of the stream as a result of this project.

The property is owned by the City of Philadelphia and managed by the Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Department. The Corps would be responsible for design and construction of the project, while the non-federal sponsor, Philadelphia Water Department (PWD), will be responsible for any future maintenance of the project.

The draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project was forwarded to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Region III, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP), Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC), Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC), Chester County Conservation District (CCCD), and all other known interested parties.

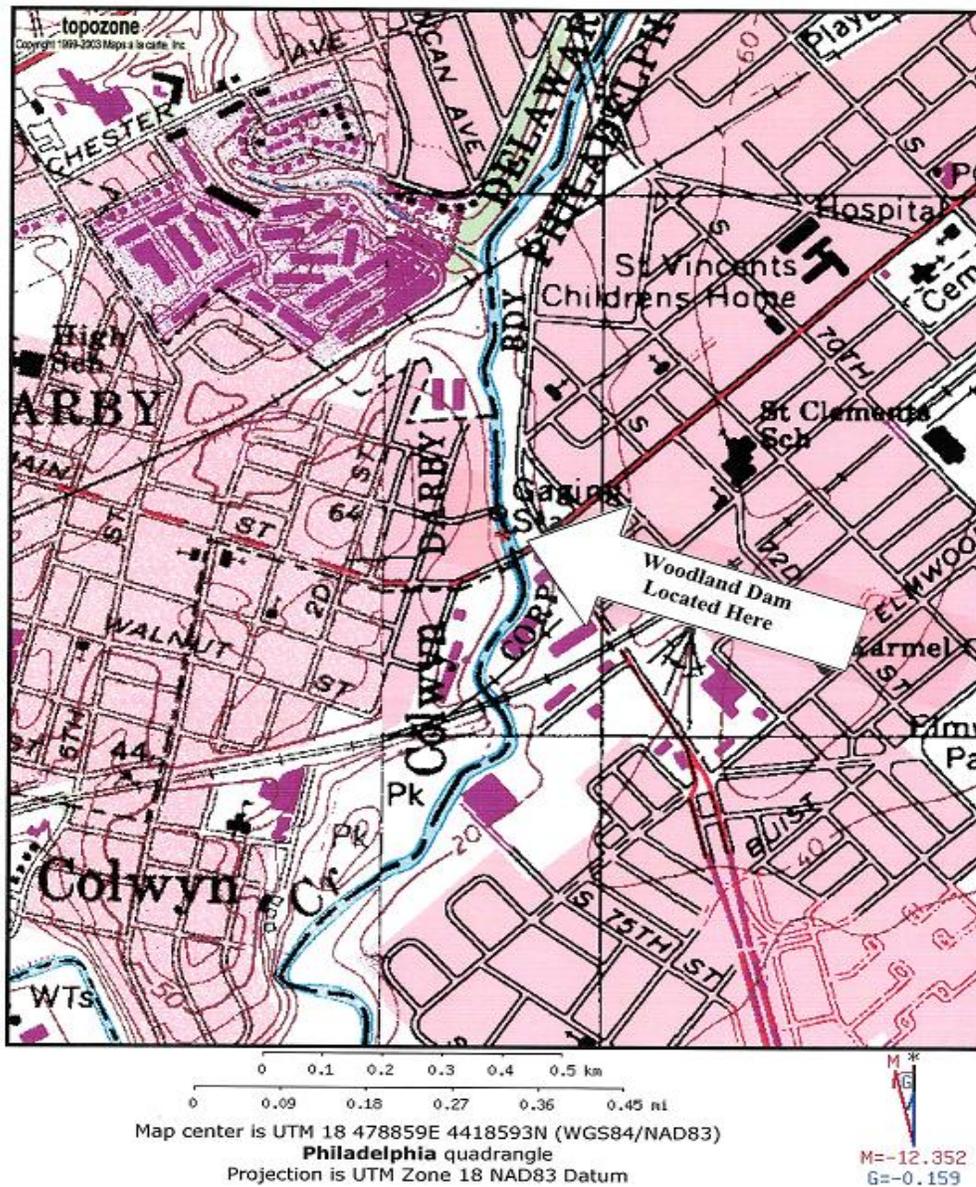


Figure 1. General vicinity map of the Woodland Dam in Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 2. Woodland Dam shown from the bank adjacent to the Blue Bell Inn.



Figure 3. Woodland Dam shown from the Woodland Avenue Bridge approximately 200 feet downstream of the dam.

Alternatives considered for this project included the following:

### 1. No Action

The “no action” alternative would not remove the impediment to fish passage along Cobbs Creek, and therefore the Corps considers this option unacceptable. The Corps will keep the “no action” alternative in the analysis pursuant to National Environmental Policy Act regulations.

### 2. Complete Dam Removal

This alternative involves the removal of approximately 100-foot in length, 6-foot high rock concrete dam and adjacent abutments. The Corps would remove debris to an offsite location for disposal. The site under this alternative will be left in a nearly natural, pre-dam state. The purpose of this alternative is primarily to restore a more natural river ecosystem with significant improvement to aquatic habitat.

As the dam is removed, the impoundment will drain and the upstream river channel will become narrower. In the new channel, velocity will increase and sediment transport will resume. The river will gradually develop fluvial features including a thalweg, localized pools, riffles, runs, and depositional areas. In an attempt to sequester most of the accumulated sediment behind the dam and insure the stability of the stream, an engineered rock riffle (pool and weir) will be created in the streambed at the location of the existing dam .

When the dam is removed, the elevation of the water surface in the impoundment will be lowered and it will expose banks, as well as sediments that are currently under water. The project has developed a planting plan using native vegetation to stabilize any exposed streambanks. The stabilization and restoration plan will involve planting trees and shrubs on unconsolidated exposed streambanks upstream to create riparian habitat and provide erosion control upstream of the dam. Numerous native plants will be used to replant the project area, including any disturbed riparian and forested areas. Some of the species being planted will include: black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*), grey dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*), elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*), southern arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*), and swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*). In addition, there will be seeding of any disturbed riparian and forest areas with appropriate native seed mixes.

### 3. Partial Dam Removal

A partial removal would provide all of the same benefits of a complete removal (i.e. passage for aquatic organisms and recreational boats, restoration of the impoundment, downstream movement of materials, elimination of a safety hazard), but would also provide several additional benefits listed below.

- The remaining sections would help to maintain the structural integrity of the existing embankments.
- The remaining sections would direct high flows toward the center of the river, diverting them away from the downstream bridge abutments.
- Remnants of the dam would be visible for appreciation as a historic resource, including the stone retaining walls.
- There will be less demolition material that requires re-use or disposal.

Based on an evaluation of the various alternatives, including the environmental impacts, design elements, and costs, Alternative #3 - Partial Dam Removal was determined to be the selected plan. The other alternatives were eliminated because of cost and long-term maintenance issues. Alternative #3 most successfully achieves the project goals, which include enhancing the aquatic habitat, improving local/resident fisheries by providing access to additional habitat, restoring the river to a more natural conditions, and low future operational / maintenance costs.

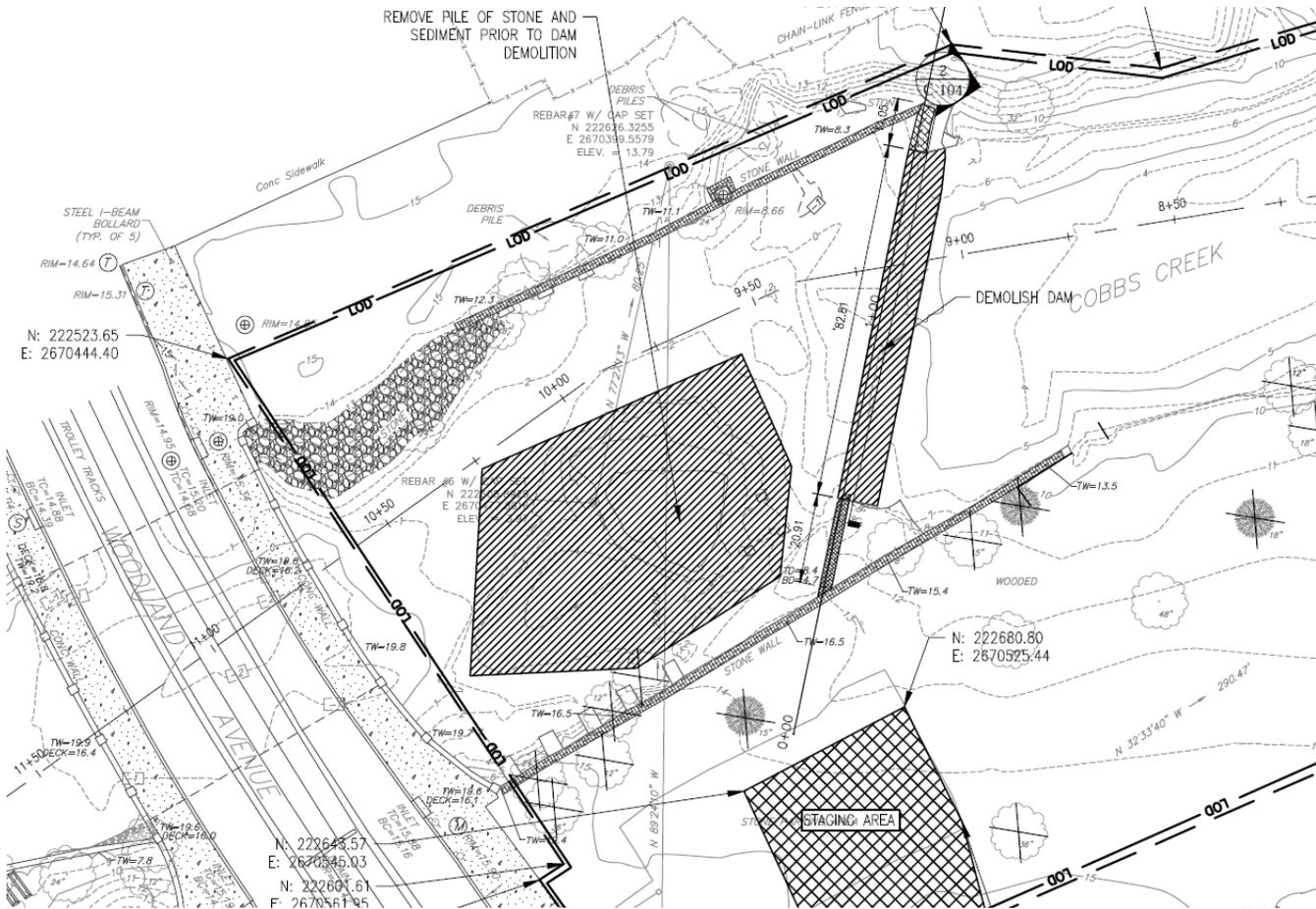


Figure 4. Demolition plan for the Woodland Dam.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, a draft EA has been developed for this project. The EA concludes that the proposed action would not have a significant adverse impact on the environment. Therefore, a draft Finding of No Significant Impact has been prepared for this project.

The Corps has determined that this project meets the terms and conditions of Nationwide Permit #27 (Aquatic Habitat Restoration, Establishment, and Enhancement Activities) for the construction of this project and with that permit, the Pennsylvania, Section 401 State Water Quality Certificate is automatically issued. In addition, any future maintenance requirements of the project undertaken by the non-federal sponsor, PWD, will be covered by Nationwide Permit #3 (Maintenance). Based on the information gathered during the preparation of the EA, the project does not fall under the jurisdiction of Section 307(C) of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 and thus a coastal zone consistency determination from the PADEP will not be necessary for the project.

Information gathered for the project indicates that the proposed activity is not likely to affect any species or the critical habitat of any fish, wildlife or plant, which is designated as endangered or threatened pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, as amended. In accordance with Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, a Section 404(b)(1) analysis was prepared for the proposed action. Approximately 2600 cubic yards of cobble/rock will be used to create the engineered rock riffle associated with this project. Cumulative impacts associated with this project would be beneficial in nature since the dam will be removed and the project area planted with native plants. This will result in an increase in stream connectivity and an improved riparian buffer on Cobbs Creek.

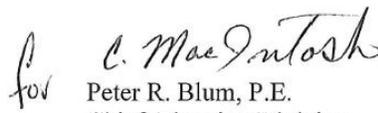
Based on the results of the cultural resource investigations, the USACE has determined that no historic properties will be affected by the proposed project in compliance with 36 CFR 800.4(d)(1). The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission concurred with this determination in a letter dated 22 September 2010.

The decision whether to accomplish the work proposed in this public notice will be based on an evaluation of the probable impact of the proposed work on the public interest. The decision will also reflect the national concern for the protection and utilization of important resources. The benefits of the project must be balanced against its reasonable foreseeable detriments (costs). All factors, which may be relevant to the proposed project, will be considered. Among those are conservation, fish and wildlife, general environmental concerns, economics, historic values, recreation, safety, water quality, aesthetics, and in general, the needs and welfare of the people.

The public and all agencies are invited to comment on this proposal. This public notice and the entire Cobbs Creek Fish Passage Project EA are available to download from the Philadelphia District web page at: <http://www.nap.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks/PublicNoticesReports.aspx>. Copies of the draft EA are also available upon request by calling Mr. Steve Rochette of the Public Affairs Office at (215) 656-6432.

A public meeting discussing this project will be held on April 13, 2016 at 6:00 PM at the Cobbs Creek Environmental Education Center, 700 Cobbs Creek Parkway (63rd & Catharine Streets), Philadelphia, PA. In addition, any person may request, in writing, to the District Engineer, within the comment period specified in this notice (**April 8, 2016 through May 9, 2016**) that a public hearing / meeting be held to consider this proposal. Requests for a public hearing / meeting shall state, in detail, the reasons for holding a public hearing.

All comments on the work described in this public notice should be directed to Mr. Peter R. Blum, ATTN: Planning Division - Environmental Resources Branch, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Wanamaker Building, 100 Penn Square East, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107-3390 or sent via email to [PDPA-NAP@USACE.ARMY.MIL](mailto:PDPA-NAP@USACE.ARMY.MIL) by **May 9, 2016**.

  
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