

District Rangers, Public Discuss Master Plan for Charles River Natural Valley Storage Area

By Ann Marie R. Harvie

USACE, New England District

Members of the New England District team gathered with the public, April 19, in Millis, Massachusetts to listen to comments on the Charles River Natural Valley Storage Area Master Plan. The Master Plan will provide guidance for future management of the project. The Master Plan was last updated in June 1984.

Approximately 41 people attended the meeting. Larry Rosenberg, Chief, Public Affairs, served as moderator at the meeting. Joseph Zanca, Project Manager, served as the presenter. "The Master Plan covers 3,229 acres of federally-owned land and 4,865 acres of restrictive flow easement throughout the Charles River Natural Valley Storage Area," he said.

During the meeting Zanca discussed project operations, master planning efforts and public involvement. Zanca, Andrew Labonte and Mark Larson took questions and comments from the audience. Thames River Basin Manager Adam Durando also attended the meeting.

According to the draft plan, the natural resources of the project will continue to be managed to provide the best combination of responses to regional and ecosystem needs, project resources and capabilities. All specific proposals for recreational or other development at the project must comply with this Master Plan, the Charles River Basin flood risk reduction requirements, the National Environmental Policy Act and federal requirements.

The draft document states that the Master Plan prescribes an overall land and water management plan, resource objectives and associated design and management concepts which provide the best possible combination to regional needs, resource capabilities and suitabilities and expressed public interests consistent with the project's authorized flood risk management purposes.

Input to the planning process included surveys and management plans for natural, wetlands and cultural resources and an analysis of recreational use, capability and project needs for project lands, according to the document. Natural and man-made resources were located, identified and analyzed, including wetlands, exemplary natural communities, and cultural resources that require management efforts for their protection.

The Charles River Natural Valley Storage Project lies throughout 16 eastern Massachusetts communities in the middle and upper areas of the Charles River. The creation of the Charles River Natural Storage Project was authorized by Congress in March 1974.

According to the draft Master Plan, federal funds of \$8.3 million were used to purchase 3,210 acres of fee land and 4,891 acres of restrictive easement. The area acts as a flood risk reduction project by using the natural flood attenuation characteristics for more than 8,000 acres of protected wetlands purchased to reduce flooding.

The project has prevented approximately \$11.9 million in flood damages through September 2016. The project attracts more than 60,000 visitors a year, who bike, boat, fish, hike, hunt, view wildlife and partake in other passive recreational uses.

The Master Plan is available for review at the Millis Public Library and can be accessed on the New England District's website. Comments on the Master Plan will be taken until June 15.