April 12, 2022

Wellfleet Conservation Commission
Leon Shreves, Chair
220 W. Main Street
Wellfleet, MA 02667

Truro Conservation Commission
Carol Girard-Irwin, Chair
24 Town Hall Road
P.O. Box 2030
Truro, MA 02666

RE: NOI for Ecological Restoration Limited Project for Herring River Restoration Project

Dear Members of the Truro and Wellfleet Conservation Commissions:

The Association to Preserve Cape Cod (APCC) writes in response to the Notices of Intent filed in the towns of Wellfleet and Truro by the town of Wellfleet and the Cape Cod National Seashore for an Ecological Restoration Limited Project for the Herring River Restoration Project. APCC strongly supports this important restoration project.

Founded in 1968, APCC is the Cape Cod region's leading nonprofit environmental advocacy and education organization. Representing thousands of members across Cape Cod, APCC's mission is to promote policies and programs that foster the preservation of the Cape's natural resources. APCC focuses its efforts on the protection of groundwater, surface water, and wetland resources, preservation of open space, the promotion of responsible, planned growth and the achievement of an environmental ethic.

One of APCC's major program areas involves promoting and assisting in salt marsh restoration efforts on Cape Cod, and with good reason. Cape Cod has experienced a critical loss of salt marsh habitat. More than 7,000 acres—or 38 percent—of our salt marshes on Cape Cod have been lost or destroyed due to damming, dredging, filling, ditching and other human development activities.

The Herring River project is the largest tidal restoration project in the Northeastern U.S., representing a unique opportunity to restore an extensive salt marsh ecosystem

to reclaim important ecological and economic benefits that have been lost for over one hundred years. Due to the existing tidal restrictions, 90 percent of the original salt marsh system has been replaced by upland forest, shrublands and invasive species. The restrictions have severely impeded the passage of migratory fish to their spawning grounds. Deterioration of peat in the salt marsh has created conditions that allow acid water to leach into surrounding waters, resulting in fish kills, closure of shellfish beds, and subsidence of the marsh surface.

The project will significantly improve wetland resources in the Herring River estuary. It will restore 570 acres of degraded salt marsh and tidal wetlands at the end of Phase 1, resulting in considerable improvements in water quality, rare species habitat, fisheries, and climate resilience throughout the Herring River system. It will help to eliminate a major source of bacterial contamination to downstream shellfish resources, thereby protecting and improving shellfish resources in the estuary and in Wellfleet Harbor. The project will also restore the ability of species such as river herring, American eel, winter flounder and striped bass to utilize the river and marsh system for migration, spawning and as a protective nursery.

In addition, the project will contribute to efforts to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change. It will reestablish the ability of the marsh system to store carbon and will reduce current methane emissions from the degraded salt marsh. It will also help offset the impacts of sea level rise in the immediate area by once again allowing the marsh to increase elevation through the natural deposition of sediments.

Technical direction in developing the project comes from a partnership of local, state and federal agencies in consultation with leading estuarine scientists from public, private and university sectors to ensure that the work is founded on sound, peer-reviewed science. The project has been carefully planned for reestablishing tidal flow to the estuary incrementally by using an adaptive management approach that will balance ecological goals with water level control measures. This will allow the highest tide range practicable while still protecting structures on public and private properties.

For the reasons cited above, APCC strongly supports the Herring River restoration project and urges the Truro and Wellfleet conservation commissions to approve this project.

Sincerely,

Andrew Gottlieb
Executive Director