



Delegated Action of the Executive Director

PROJECT Paint Branch Fish Passage Restoration at I-495 Beltsville Agricultural Research Center 10300 Baltimore Avenue Beltsville, MD	NCPC FILE NUMBER 7830
SUBMITTED BY United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service	NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER 3212.10(03.43)44436
	ACTION TAKEN Approve as requested
	REVIEW AUTHORITY Advisory Per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in collaboration with the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA), has submitted preliminary and final site development plans for the proposed Paint Branch Fish Passage Restoration at Interstate 495, located at the Henry A. Wallace Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) in northwest Prince George's County, Maryland. BARC is the largest federal facility in the Anacostia watershed and the primary science research campus for the USDA. The installation is comprised of over 6,600 acres with a mix of agricultural fields, mature forest, non-tidal wetland areas, offices, and research laboratories. The Paint Branch fish passage, located on the BARC's South Farm, to the south of the Interstate 495 Capital Beltway, is part of a larger stream and wetland restoration effort. This project combined with the *Stream and Wetland Restoration Project* on the BARC's North Farm, approved by the Commission on September 2015, will provide mitigation credits to offset the stream and wetland impacts resulting from the construction of the Greenbelt Metro Access to I-495.

The purpose of the project is to provide additional water quality, stream protection, and improve fish passage for the widest range of anadromous and resident target species along the Paint Branch at the Interstate 495 Capital Beltway crossings. The upper Paint Branch supports naturally reproducing trout populations and is a unique aquatic resource of the larger Anacostia River watershed. However, existing unfavorable conditions at the I-495 crossing, including flow depth, velocity, sediment and debris load, and existing culverts, prevent fish from traveling further upstream. This fish passage restoration project will reconnect high quality stream habitat, enhance sediment transport, increase availability of spawning and nursery habitat, and support interagency efforts to restore the diverse fish population throughout the Anacostia River watershed. The Paint Branch Fish Passage project will remove two fish blockages along Paint Branch at the I-495 Capital Beltway culverts and reestablish fish access to 0.64 miles of upstream habitat. Additionally, more than 26 miles of high quality fish habitat will be opened to species that can pass partial obstruction at two I-95 culverts upstream.

The SHA proposes four mitigation sites for fish blockage removal located on the floodplain of Paint Branch near its confluence with other tributary streams, near the west end of BARC property. Three of the sites are within SHA's right-of-way for the I-95/I-495 interchange, and one extends within BARC's South Farm, south of I-495. The SHA has requested the right to access BARC

property on South Farm to replace the existing non-functioning, fish ladder in the Paint Branch, which was installed in the 1990s. The fish ladder will be replaced with three 100-foot long nature-like riffle structures at an approximate 2 percent slope within the streambed to promote optimal fish passage. The proposed riffle structures will include boulders within the streambed downstream of each blockage to slow the flow of water, and raise the elevation of the stream to allow fish to travel further upstream to spawn. The channel section of each riffle will require a shallow pilot channel of approximately 0.5 feet deep by 6 feet wide. The project will also entail removal of the accumulation of debris at each culvert. In addition to the fish passage, the project includes a 25-foot riparian buffer along the Paint Branch extending from the edge of the stream. This buffer will not compromise any existing BARC fields. The riparian buffer will lower stream temperatures necessary for good fish habitat; improve water quality along this section of stream by slowing sheet flow; and minimize the effects of soil erosion from adjacent research plots. The SHA will assume long-term maintenance of the buffers and stream structures. The estimated construction time is 12 months.

The project is not inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan of the National Capital. The proposed fish passage installation and riparian buffers on the South Farm's segment of the Paint Branch will improve stream health, open high quality upstream habitat and historic spawning areas to anadromous fish, and help achieve restoration goals for the Anacostia and Chesapeake Bay Watershed. While the project is not specifically included in the 1996 BARC Master Plan, the long-term protection of the passage will be documented through an addendum to the BARC Master Plan. The project has been fully coordinated with state and local agencies. As this is a federal project located outside of the District of Columbia, NCPC has an advisory review authority and therefore, does not have an independent obligation to fulfill the requirements of NEPA and Section 106.

* * *

Pursuant to delegations of authority adopted by the Commission on October 3, 1996 and per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1), I approve the preliminary and final site development plans for the Paint Branch Fish Passage Restoration at I-495, located at the United States Department of Agriculture, Beltsville Agricultural Research Center in Beltsville, Maryland.

// Original Signed //

October 27, 2016

Marcel Acosta
Executive Director

[Date]