

February 8, 2009

Ian A. Bowles, Secretary
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

Re: Proposed Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) designation

Dear Secretary Bowles:

The Nature Conservancy supports the designation of the Housatonic River as an ACEC with boundaries as proposed based on the ecosystem's features of regional and statewide significance:

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. With the help of public and private partners, The Conservancy has protected more than 23,000 acres of land and water in Massachusetts.

The Housatonic River watershed, with marble and limestone bedrock and calcium-rich waters, is unique in Massachusetts. Thirty species of fish are found in the watershed, and many tributaries included in the ACEC proposal support environmentally sensitive, coldwater species such as brook trout and slimy sculpin throughout the year. Thirty-one species protected under the MA Endangered Species Act, such as riffle snaketail dragonfly and wood turtle which are ecoregional target species for The Conservancy, are found in the river corridor. Additionally, floodplain forests along the Housatonic and other large rivers are among the most threatened, globally significant wetland community types in New England. These riverside forests provide invaluable services such as controlling floodwaters, recharging groundwater and filtering pollutants.

The Conservancy is working to reconnect floodplain forests along the Housatonic River and its tributaries by protecting land, removing invasive plants and planting native trees.

ACEC designation has the potential to help protect the Housatonic River by raising public consciousness about its significance and providing enhanced regulatory review of projects that might threaten its ecological values.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. Please let us know if The Nature Conservancy can be of further assistance with this process. If you have questions, please contact me at 413-229-0232 x226, jminer@tnc.org.

Sincerely,



Jason Miner
Geoffrey Hughes Western Massachusetts Program Director