

## **Final Notice and Public Review of a Proposed Activity in a Floodplain – Bethel, Maine**

To: All interested Agencies, Groups, and Individuals

The Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) is considering funding the following Proposed Action under its Catalyst Program. NBRC has prepared an 8-Step Decision-Making Process review in compliance with Executive Order (EO) 11988 (Floodplain Management) as amended by EO 13690 (Establishing a Federal Flood Risk Management Standard and a Process for Further Soliciting and Considering Stakeholder Input), which established a more protective standard for evaluating flood risk to ensure projects funded by the Federal government are more resilient to the impacts of flooding.

The Town of Bethel is seeking \$1,000,000 from the NBRC through the Catalyst Program to contribute to the rehabilitation of the wastewater treatment facility (WWTF) in the Town of Bethel, Maine. The location of the Proposed Action is 199 Main Street in Bethel, Maine (approximate GPS coordinates: 44°24'43.5" N, 70°47'10.4" W).

The Proposed Action involves renovating the interior and exterior of the existing facility to replace aging equipment and improve operational efficiency. Planned upgrades will modernize the Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) Main Building, including replacing outdated interior components such as HVAC systems, electrical and plumbing infrastructure, and architectural elements. Additionally, outdated Programmable Logic Controllers (PLCs) in the control room will be upgraded.

Interior renovations will focus on enhancing laboratory space, providing dedicated equipment storage, and improving employee facilities such as lockers, administrative and meeting areas, a control room, and chemical storage. Most of the original structure will be retained, with construction efforts concentrated on interior updates and a 1,000-square-foot expansion to house a new laboratory. The structural integrity of the existing building will be assessed to determine the scope of necessary renovations. Exterior updates may include installing new siding and/or replacing the roof.

The NBRC has determined that the Proposed Action's footprint exists within an FFRMS floodplain and warrants an analysis under the 8-Step Decision-Making Process.

In addition to the Proposed Action, the applicant considered and dismissed the following alternatives. Factors such as the natural environment, social concerns, economic aspects, and legal constraints were analyzed in determining the practicability of all alternatives.

- **No Action Alternative:** This option would result in no federal funds supporting the modernization and rehabilitation of the wastewater treatment facility responsible for collecting and treating wastewater generated by the Town of Bethel. The No Action Alternative would not address the aging infrastructure, which poses a risk to the Androscoggin River, potentially exposing it to untreated effluent.
- **Alternative Site:** This option is not feasible because the Proposed Action is intended for this specific wastewater treatment facility, and it would be costly to consider alternative site locations. Additionally, the facility is within the 500-year floodplain, and the surrounding area is within the 100-year

floodplain. Considering an alternative site location would make the WWTF more vulnerable to the potential broader economic effects of property damage due to flooding.

- **Nature-based Alternative:** EO 13690 requires federal agencies to consider nature-based approaches when developing project alternatives. Nature-based approaches were considered as alternatives to the Proposed Action. However, no viable nature-based alternatives were identified that would address the rehabilitation and infrastructure improvements of the wastewater treatment facility.

There are no practicable methods to design or modify the Proposed Action to fully avoid the risk of potential impacts to the property, lives, and natural values identified in Step 4 because the existing wastewater treatment facility is in the FFRMS floodplain. However, the applicant has identified the below actions to minimize potential impacts:

- **Impacts to Lives:** The likelihood of flooding at the WWTF is low, but a significant event could impact lives. The facility has a comprehensive Wet Weather Plan to ensure worker safety and effective operations during such events. This plan includes monitoring weather conditions, providing advance flood warnings, and ensuring staff can evacuate safely. Staff are instructed to communicate with local law enforcement and Public Works during wet weather events and to monitor effluent flow to prevent untreated discharges. Upgrading critical infrastructure, including programmable logic controllers, further reduces the risk of contaminating nearby recreational water bodies.
- **Impacts to Floodplain Health and Function:** The WWTF Wet Weather Plan provides operational procedures to manage high-flow events and minimize impacts on floodplain health and function. These operational procedures include monitoring weather and system conditions, adjusting treatment processes to handle high flows, and temporarily storing excess wastewater to prevent overloading the system. These procedures and the Proposed Action involving the replacement of outdated infrastructure, such as programmable logic controllers (PLCs) and other critical infrastructure, reduce the likelihood of untreated effluent discharge contaminating nearby bodies of water utilized for recreational activities by the public.

It is NBRC's determination that, due to 1) the identification of sufficient mitigation measures, 2) the lack of practicable alternatives, and 3) the importance of the Proposed Action to address the needs of the Town of Bethel, the importance of the Proposed Action in the floodplain outweighs the requirements of EO 11988 and EO 13690 to avoid direct or indirect support of floodplain development and reduce the risk of flood loss.

Files that document compliance with Steps 1 through 6 of Executive Orders EO 11988 (as amended by EO 13690) and EO 13690 are available for public inspection upon request. Please send an email request to [nepa@nbrc.gov](mailto:nepa@nbrc.gov). The 8-Step Decision-Making Process materials will be provided in electronic format unless a hard copy is specifically requested.

This notice provides people who may be affected by activities in the floodplain, and those who have an interest in the protection of the natural environment, an opportunity to express their concerns and provide information. The NBRC is accepting comments on this notice for seven (7) days from **[Insert Month Day, Year]**, through the end of the day of **[Insert Month Day, Year]**.

Date of Publication: **[Insert Month Day, Year]**