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300 Years Later, Fish Passage Restored to Pennypack Creek Fish to Swim Free for the First Time since Colonial America

Philadelphia, PA--Following the wave of momentum created by the removal of three dams on Pennypack Creek, the Philadelphia Water Department will begin construction of a rock ramp fishway over one of the utility lines in Pennypack Park this week. Once complete, these projects will have restored fish passage to the lower 5.8 miles of Pennypack Creek—a tributary to the Delaware River, which has been obstructed by barriers for more than 300 years.

“The health of our nation’s rivers has a direct impact on the health of our communities,” said American Rivers’ President Rebecca Wodder. “Long-term restoration of recreational fisheries in Pennsylvania has a potential economic impact of 36 million dollars and the potential to change lives.”

A rock ramp fishway is a collection of rocks configured underwater to create a “ramp” over a barrier that would otherwise be impassable for migratory fish. Well-designed rock ramps mimic natural river features so that they blend with their surroundings and the average passerby will not notice their presence. While imperceptible to some, these structures can provide important alterations to immovable barriers that allow fish such as American shad, hickory shad, river herring and striped bass to pass with ease.

“NOAA’s goal of habitat restoration can only be accomplished when there is strong local stewardship for fisheries resources,” said Tim Keeney, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere. “This project shows our commitment to citizen driven restoration initiatives and we are proud to have joined our federal and local partners on such a successful project.”

Like the other restoration projects on Pennypack Creek in the last year, the installation of the rock ramp fishway has been a cooperative effort. Funding for the design and construction work was provided through a partnership between American Rivers, the NOAA Restoration Center, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission and the Philadelphia Water Department.

“The Philadelphia Water Department is proud to be a part of the diversity of groups we saw gathered along the creek this past May celebrating the continued restoration of the creek,” stated Bernard Brunwasser, Water Commissioner of the Philadelphia Water Department. “We are excited about the opportunity to install a cost-effective rock ramp which allows fish passage further upstream. The Philadelphia Water Department is working to achieve these goals in other streams as well. This fall, rehabilitation of the Fairmount Fish Ladder with the Army Corps of Engineers, will provide a real boost to ecological restoration in the Schuylkill River watershed.”

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