

Herring River Restoration Project Updates – December 4, 2020

Permitting

Permit applications are in development for submission to Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and US Army Corps of Engineers in early 2021.

Community Survey for Adaptive Management

To select the best way to reintroduce tidal flow, the expected outcomes of potential management options (i.e. how quickly should tidal flow be reintroduced?) are compared against specific objectives. The objectives include topics like water quality and habitat changes, along with things that directly affect people, like recreation and the appearance of the river. Predictions about how restoring tidal flow affects each of the objectives come from computerized models, expert judgements from scientists, and public surveys designed to gather community perceptions. All of this information is compiled and analyzed to identify which management option provides the highest expected benefit for all of the objectives.

Over the past year, the HRSG provided vital input in the formulation of a community survey to gather public perceptions on possible outcomes of restoration related to: views, public safety; salt marsh smell; recreation; and public access in the intertidal area. The survey was conducted over the summer months and 286 year-round residents, seasonal residents and visitors participated. The feedback gathered by the survey will be incorporated with other information in the Herring River Adaptive Management Program used to manage the pace of restoration. A presentation on the community survey results will be presented publicly for the first time at the December 17th HREC meeting. Information about how to participate in the virtual meeting via computer or phone is provided on page 3.

Land Transfer Process

Town of Wellfleet and Cape Cod National Seashore, with support from the Project technical team, are continuing to evaluate land exchanges needed for the restoration project. The exchange is needed because the proposed elevation of town road segments encroaches on linear segments of federally-owned land in the Seashore located along the roadways. The National Park Service does not have the ability to grant easements for encroachments associated with transportation projects such as roadwork. Information about the land exchange process was presented to the HREC at the April 16th meeting. The disposition of town-owned land for the exchange would require Selectboard and/or Town Meeting approval.

High Toss Road Design Modifications

A portion of High Toss Road crossing the marsh plain will be excavated and the natural channel connecting Lower Herring River and Lower Pole Dike Creek will be re-established. Plans also call for the elevation of a remaining portion of High Toss Road to address potential over-topping of the road due to tidal flow. Two design questions were posed to the HREC to provide guidance to the project team. Decisions about these two design issues were needed to finalize permit applications and continue the land exchange process between the Town and Seashore.

1. Options for elevation of High Toss Road

The HREC decided to elevate a portion of the road from Way 672 to a point east of Hopkins Drive (1,100 ft), leaving 2,200 ft in its current condition (not elevated). The alternative of elevating the entire length of the road from Way 672 to Pole Dike Road (3,300 ft) would have increased resource impacts and project expense. Both options maintain emergency access for all residences, and the only difference in use of High Toss Road would occur in later stages of restoration, following Phase 1. Figure 1 on page 4 illustrates the two options.

2. Right-of-Way

A second design decision made by the HREC is to elevate the roadway in its current layout, which runs outside the bounds of the existing town right-of-way and encroaches on Seashore property. The alternative of relocating the travel way to the right of way would have resulted in extensive loss of vegetation and encroachment on private properties. Figure 2 on page 5 illustrates how the current roadway layout differs from the town right-of-way along a segment of High Toss Road.

In addition to the High Toss Road work described above, approximately two miles of non-contiguous low-lying segments of Way 672, and Old County, Bound Brook Island and Pole Dike Roads will be elevated. The design objective is to elevate the roadways to avoid over-topping during storm of record conditions. All road elevation plans are designed for full restoration conditions, even though permits are seeking Phase 1 restoration only. The cost of road elevation work is included in project budgets for which funding is being sought. The Wellfleet Department of Public Works Director has estimated that the roadwork will save the Town millions of dollars in road repairs that would otherwise need to be undertaken.

Fecal Coliform Testing

Dr. John Portnoy repeated a previous study of fecal coliform distribution in the River and estuary. Despite significantly higher concentrations of coliforms in discharging river water above the dike this year, conditions below the dike to Egg Island were similar to those recorded in 2005. This shows how well the harbor's natural tidal mixing and salinity control fecal bacteria, and suggests that tidal restoration will greatly extend this protection to shellfish waters both below and above the new bridge at Chequessett Neck Road. The final report will be released later this month.

Baseline Well Monitoring

As a service to interested property owners, the Town of Wellfleet offered to test samples of drinking water from wells located within 200 feet of the estuary. This testing is intended to provide baseline measurements of well water quality before tidal restoration begins. The measurements would provide a basis for comparison in the event that a property owner believed they experienced a change in water quality following tidal restoration. Sampling will be repeated next Spring. Questions about the testing should be directed to Hillary Greenberg-Lemos, Town of Wellfleet Health and Conservation Agent, at Hillary.Lemos@wellfleet-ma.gov.

Zoom Meeting Access Information for Herring River Executive Council meeting on Thursday, December 17th at 3 p.m.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/96095536505?pwd=bitVMXlWoxlycjVKRXNsRkJMRHIPQT09>

Meeting ID: 960 9553 6505

Passcode: 552514

One tap mobile

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+19292056099,,96095536505#,,,,,0#,,552514# US (New York)

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Passcode: 552514

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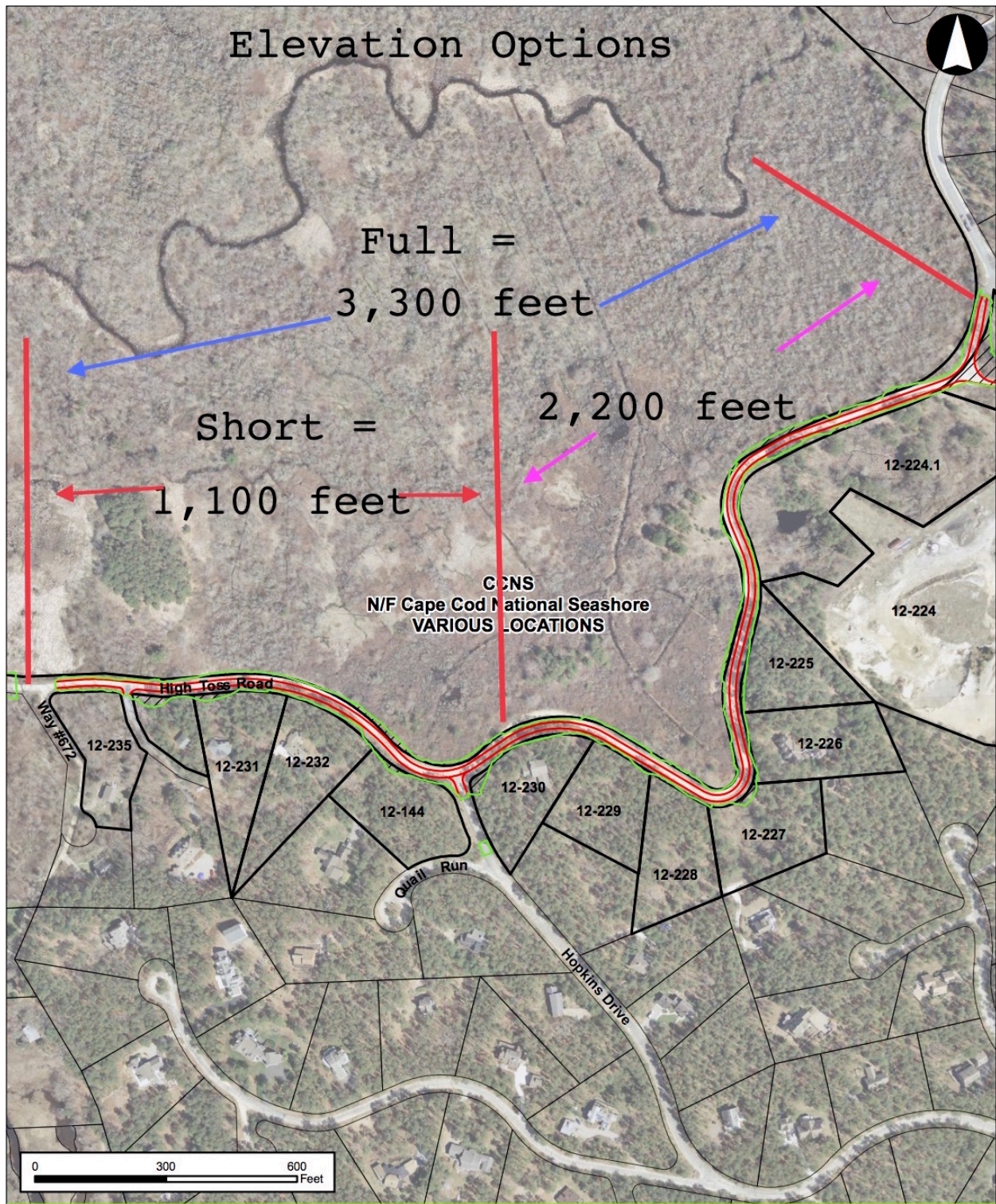


Figure 1

The HREC voted to elevate the 1,100 ft segment of High Toss Road from Way 672 to east of Hopkins Drive, rather than the full 3,300-foot distance to Pole Dike Road. Emergency access is maintained at all times via High Toss Road and/or Hopkins Drive.

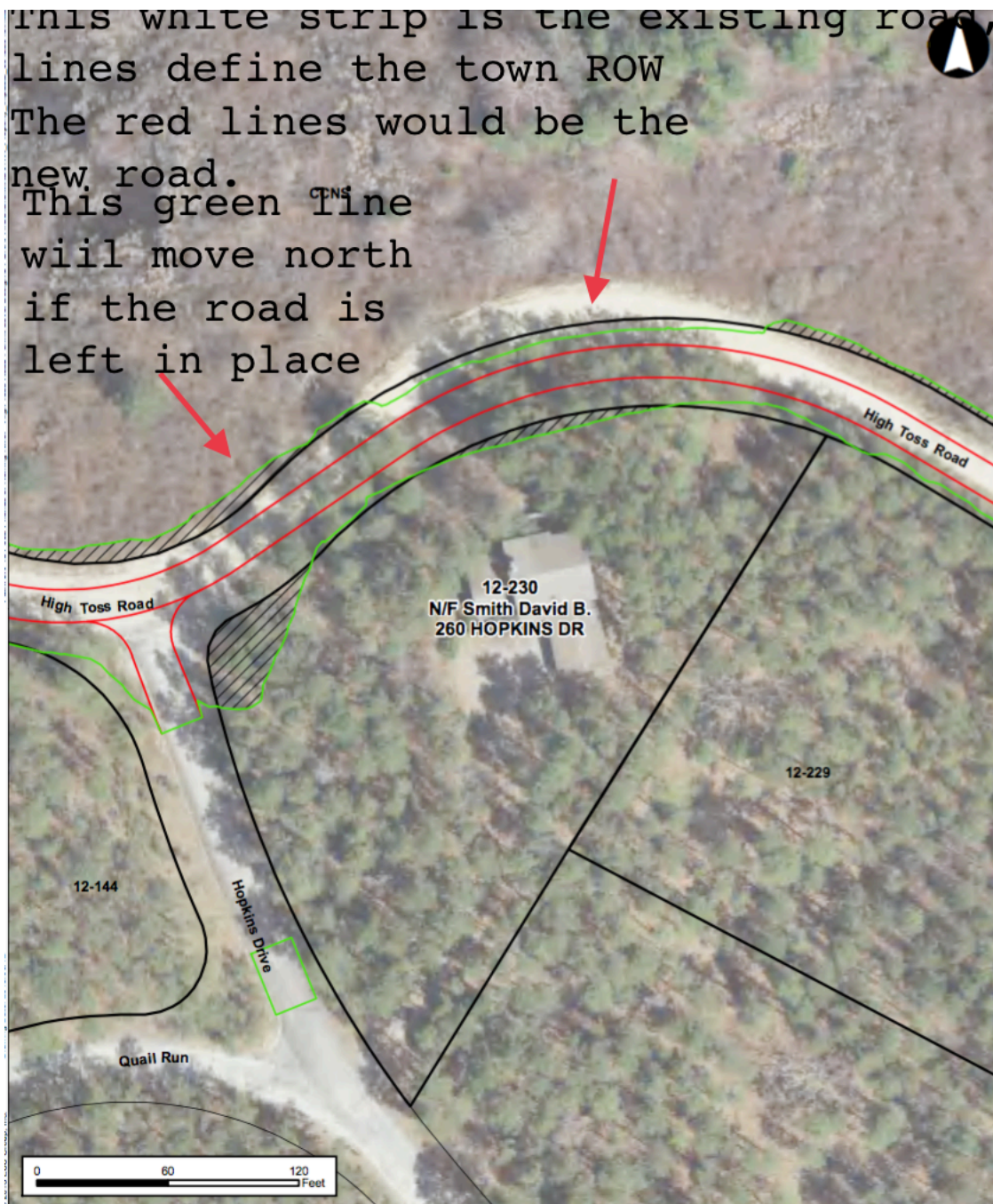


Figure 2

Red lines show the town right-of-way, which varies from the existing (white) travel way. The HREC voted to elevate the travel way in its existing location. Relocating the travel way into the right-of-way would have resulted in impacts to vegetation and private properties.