

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
Beach Park Road / Hammock River Restoration
Project permit number: NAE-2023-00760

Project Overview

The Hammock River Restoration Project is a partnership that began in 2022 between the Town of Clinton, Ducks Unlimited, Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CTDEEP), NOAA Restoration Center, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service where the goal is to replace an outdated bridge and tide gates to allow for the sustainable management of the system for wildlife and community values.

The flow of the Hammock River is altered by several bridges and road crossings with the largest and most significant of these restrictions occurring at the bridge and tide gates on Beach Park Road. This area already experiences tidal flooding during storm events and numerous sea-level rise/storm surge scenarios suggest that the area around this bridge is likely to see increased flooding in the future. The current condition of the bridge and tide gates does not allow for the management of water levels in the marsh, putting millions of dollars in public and private investments and business at risk. The current bridge over the Hammock River was constructed in 1947 and has four wooden flap gates. While minor repairs have been made to the gates in the last 10 years, they are significantly deteriorated and/or non-operational and undersized for the amount of tidal flow. The lack of ability to manipulate the existing tide gates and the tidal restriction from the undersized bridge opening has resulted in high water levels downstream, delayed drainage, impounded water, and loss (-1 ft) of marsh elevation upstream. Under current operation, the marsh condition will continue to deteriorate and erode, causing the system to convert to a mudflat, with surrounding properties likely to see more frequent flooding. The new bridge will increase the span from 22 ft. to 70 ft. to match the river width, and the tide gates, which will be offset from the bridge, will be increased from 64 sq ft. to 120 sq ft. with improved management ability to adjust to protect homes and safety as well as improve water quality, fish passage and wildlife habitat. A sidewalk has also been incorporated into the design to improve the safety of pedestrians crossing the bridge.

With 1,700-acres of the Town of Clinton within the coastal boundary, this area has been designated by the Town and CTDEEP as vulnerable to flooding. The project is expected to reduce impacts to the community by improving tidal flow and drainage of the Hammock River and marsh, thereby reducing the duration, frequency, and extent of high-tide flooding caused by impounded upstream water. This will, in turn, protect the surrounding community, allow the sustainable management of the system, and ultimately provide the much needed first step in restoring the natural ecosystem of the Hammock River estuary.

While permanent environmental impacts of approximately 6,000 SF (0.14 acres) are proposed across the total project area, it is important to note that the project will not result in permanent loss of aquatic habitat or ecological function within the disturbance limits. The proposed placement of structure/fill within subtidal and intertidal zones are minor, localized impacts necessary to facilitate the infrastructure improvements, which will reestablish a more natural tidal regime and in turn restore greater health and function to the surrounding marsh habitat. Any proposed impacts to tidal wetlands will be mitigated with restoration plantings following restabilization of the roadway embankment after all bridge and roadway construction has concluded.

1. What are the long-term benefits of this project for the community?

The project will promote the critical ecological, economic, and social benefits that a healthy estuary and marsh complex provides. Specifically, Beach Park Road, which traverses

Hammock River, is vulnerable to coastal flooding and at times is completely cut off from emergency services. The improvements to the bridge structure, and the surrounding salt marshes, will increase tidal flow, flood storage, and should ultimately reduce localized road closures and improve Beach Park Road as an evacuation route for Kelsey Point and Clinton Beach residents and visitors. The Beach Park Road Restoration Project directly aligns with several community planning documents that have identified the flooding at Beach Park Road as a priority, including: the Conservation and Development Plan, All Hazard Mitigation Plan, Municipal Coastal Plan and the Four Shore Coastal Resiliency Plan. The Project and proposed actions address the following Town strategies:

- Restoration and enhancement of tidal wetlands, including the Hammock River
- Upgrade culverts to meet 100-year storm standards and
- Reconstruct sections of Beach Park Rd to include a self-regulated tide-gate where benefits would accrue to many in the community and will help vulnerable or those not able to recover on their own.

2. What is the project timeline?

The project first began in 2022 with the submission of a grant proposal to fund the modeling and design of the bridge and tide gates. This was followed by subsequent grant proposals to support the construction of the selected designs. The construction/road closure phase of the project is expected to occur from approximately July 7, 2025 to December 17, 2026. There will not be a winter pause for this project. A construction schedule and periodic updates will be posted on the Town's website.

The tide gate structure will be constructed first with the bridge replacement to follow. We are evaluating options that allow passage of emergency services during the tide gate structure phase. The width of the roadway and embankment does not allow safe passage during the bridge construction components.

3. Does Beach Park Road have to be closed completely?

The decision of the closure of Beach Park Road to pedestrians and local traffic was discussed at the public information meeting on March 1, 2023, and approved by the Town. Considerations for emergency service access have been incorporated where possible. Given that the road is only 30-feet wide, staged construction would have proved to be very difficult as well as increased the construction duration substantially. The closure of the road was the selected alternative as it would minimize the total amount of time the road was closed/disruption to the community and reduce costs for the project.

4. What considerations were given to the detour route during the road closure?

Public safety is a priority during the project. The detour route and the complete closure of the road for construction was discussed with, and ultimately approved, by the Town. Given that the road is only 30-feet wide, staged construction would have proved to be very difficult as well as increased the construction duration substantially. The Town is overseeing installation of signs along the detour route to help residents and visitors during the closure. Should you have any questions about the detour, please contact the Town Manager's Office, and you will be directed to the right person to assist.

A Public Information Zoom Meeting was hosted by the Town of Clinton on March 1, 2023, where the engineering design firm presented the project goals, concept designs, construction sequencing, and the permitting process. Residents and attendees on the call were encouraged

to ask questions and express any concerns. One outcome of the public meeting was the incorporation of a sidewalk to allow for safer passage across the bridge. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Land and Water Resources Division also issued a Public Notice on May 6, 2024, where interested parties were invited to express views and submit comments within 40 days of the publication date.

5. How will public safety concerns be addressed during the closure?

Clinton's emergency services are aware of the closure and have implemented adjustments to their emergency response plans to help mitigate the additional distance that may be incurred because of the closure. Upon the closure of the bridge, additional police patrols will be deployed to monitor impacted traffic patterns and implement directed strategies to address them.

6. What will the basic operation principle of the tide gates be after construction?

The tide gates will be set and operated using an approved Operation and Maintenance Plan that has been agreed upon by both the Town and Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CTDEEP). A complimentary Habitat Management Plan will also be developed for the Hammock River marsh system. The Town of Clinton will be the owner of the bridge and tide gate structure with CTDEEP being the entity responsible to the management, calibration, and maintenance of the gates to maintain flood protection for the surrounding community and the health of the Hammock River Marsh. The settings of the self-regulating tide gates will be based on data collected and modeling that was completed during the design process and will be adjusted based on additional measurements/monitoring completed post-installation.

7. Will the tidal river flow as usual per the length of the construction process and will this impact surrounding properties ?

Tidal flows will be altered and monitored during construction. A bypass pump will be used at the construction site on Beach Park Road. Water management will also occur at the culvert on the west end of Beach Park Road through the installation of temporary flap gates. At both locations, water level monitoring equipment will be installed to allow for real-time management during high water and/or storm events.

8. What is the total cost of the project, and can you confirm there is no cost to the Town?

A total of \$ 8,866,045 in grant funding has been secured for this project by Ducks Unlimited, a non-profit partner. The Town is not expending any costs outside of their commitment to the grant through staff time to coordinate with project.