



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
GREATER ATLANTIC REGIONAL FISHERIES OFFICE
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

January 27, 2023

Bruce A. Van Note
Commissioner
Maine Department of Transportation
16 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04330

Dear Commissioner Van Note,

I am writing in response to MaineDOT and DMR's funding request to the Culvert Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) Program for replacements of road stream culverts within the endangered Atlantic salmon Distinct Population Segment (DPS) in Maine¹. These crossings are undersized, affect passage of native migratory fish and other aquatic organisms, and disrupt natural ecological processes.

The Gulf of Maine DPS of Atlantic salmon is designated as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. It is one of only nine species designated by NOAA Fisheries under our Species in the Spotlight Initiative, and is a recovery priority for the agency. A key action identified in the Species in the Spotlight Action Plan (2021-2025) is to restore passage at barriers between the Gulf of Maine and headwater streams in order to increase spawning and rearing opportunities for sea run Atlantic salmon. In addition, one of the delisting criteria identified in the 2019 Final Recovery Plan requires that sufficient habitat be made accessible to support a recovered population of Atlantic salmon.

The waterways identified in the AOP provide abundant habitat for spawning Atlantic salmon, and restoring access to habitat in the DPS is essential to achieving recovery goals for the species. Projects that remove passage barriers to fish will help restore access to habitat crucial to endangered Atlantic salmon.

NMFS is in full support of MaineDOT and DMR's efforts to restore the long-standing fish passage issues, increase climate resilience, and address other community priorities in the DPS through culvert aquatic organism passage projects.

Sincerely,

Julia E. Crocker
Branch Chief - ESA Fish, Ecosystems, and Energy
Protected Resources Division

¹ These include 7 proposed projects in Downeast Maine, 6 proposed projects in the Sandy River watershed, and 4 proposed projects in Central Maine.

