NASHUA RIVER
WILD & SCENIC
STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL
Nashua • Squannacook • Nissitissit Rivers

NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM

Groton Select Board
Groton Town Hall
173 Main Street
Groton, MA 01450

April 17, 2026

RE: Support for West Groton Dam Removal

Dear Groton Select Board members,

The Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council (Council) voted at its April 16th meeting to submit this letter in support of removal of the West Groton Dam, and against the proposed repair article on the warrant of the May 2nd Town Meeting.

The Council was created by the 2019 federal designation of the main stem of the Nashua River and the full length of the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers as Wild & Scenic Rivers. Eleven river communities, including Groton and Shirley, voted at their Town Meetings to support Wild & Scenic designation, and to adopt the *Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Plan* (*Plan*). (www.wildandscenicnashuarivers.org/stewardship-plan.html). The Council is made up of representatives, appointed by the Select Boards, from the eleven river communities, as well as representatives from the Devens Enterprise Commission, Nashua River Watershed Association, MassWildlife, and National Park Service.

The Council's decision to support the West Groton Dam removal is based on goals and actions contained within the *Plan*, particularly in *Chapter 4 "Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Values and Action Plan* as follows:

1. The Council's mandate as set forth in the *Plan* is to protect, conserve, and restore the natural, historic free-flowing nature of these rivers for their nationally-significant biodiversity, scenic, recreational, and cultural values. Removal of the dam reconnects a 3.7-mile free-flowing section to the confluence of the Nashua River, bringing the Squannacook River a step closer to a restored condition as a free-flowing river.

2. Chapter 4 of the *Plan* describes the outstanding biodiversity of our riverine habitat and sets forth a 26-page Action Plan to protect and restore that remarkable biodiversity. In keeping with the goals in the *Plan*, removal of the dam will:

- Sustain and enhance existing biological diversity along and within the rivers and their tributaries. At least 7 rare species inhabit the river, and it is designated by the state's BioMap as aquatic core habitat. *Plan Goals A.1 through A.3*
- Protect and enhance the Squannacook as a coldwater fisheries resource. *Plan Goal A.4*
- Protect and enhance anadromous fisheries. The Shirley Historical Society shared ledger records from 1812 and 1819 verifying the presence of anadromous fish like shad and alewife. "Squannacook" is the Algonquin name for "place of taking salmon." *Plan Goal A.5*
- Sustain and improve populations of freshwater mussels. MassWildlife's Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program supported dam removal in Pepperell enabling a Threatened freshwater mussel to survive. *Plan Goal A.6*
- Maintain and improve the Squannacook River's water quality so that it supports the needs of native wildlife, aquatic resources, and water supplies. *Plan Goal B.1*

- Enhance water flow to support needs of native river fauna. *Plan Goal B.1*
- Restore an important aquatic and terrestrial wildlife corridor thereby reducing vehicle-related deaths near the dam, such as beaver, otter, and turtles. *Plan Goal C.1*
- Restore river floodplain values enhancing biodiversity and flood water attenuation. This improves the ability of the river system to manage the impact of storms of increasing intensity and frequency, thereby protecting the extensive biological resources cited in the *Plan,* as well as protecting against loss of life or property damage downstream of the dam in the event of dam failure. *Plan Goal C.1*
- Consider removal of obsolete dams to restore valued habitat. *Plan Goal C.1.*

In addition, the Council's Invasive Plant Management subcommittee will assist with monitoring/treatment of invasive species during restoration. The Council recently approved a grant to the Groton Conservation Stewardship Committee to remove invasive plants in Carol Wheeler Park and the adjacent MBTA land next to the West Groton Dam impoundment. *Plan Goal A.7*

3. Chapter 4 of the *Plan* describes the outstanding recreation value of our rivers, and provides a 20-page Action Plan for protecting recreational opportunities. The existing dam presents a significant risk and liability to paddlers. This "low-head" dam spans the full river allowing water to continually flow over it. According to a 2026 American Rivers report, low-head dams like the West Groton Dam are dangerous as they are "hard to escape." (https://www.americanrivers.org/low-head-dam-safety/) Furthermore, removal of the dam will open additional downstream miles of the Squannacook River for safe paddling.

4. Chapter 4 of the *Plan* describes the cultural and historic values of our rivers, and provides an 8-page Action Plan for preserving and restoring those values. The existing dam is reported to be 150 years old. The far deeper history of the Squannacook River is that of a free-flowing waterway, known to indigenous peoples and early colonists as a place for fishing, as cited in point 2 above. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to return the river to its natural, free-flowing state. Historic aspects of the dam can be highlighted with signage as done by MassWildlife at the former Millie Turner Dam in Pepperell.

5. State-wide dam removal is a priority and funding sources for removal are readily available. The **MA Division of Ecological Restoration has already deemed removal of this dam a High Priority Project and has funded the feasibility study** for removal (currently posted on the Town's website). It is likely that state grants will cover most of the cost of removal of this dam. (www.mass.gov/river-restoration-dam-removal)

We encourage citizens of Groton to review the ecological, public safety, and potential financial benefits of removal over repair. Finally, should the Town Meeting vote against repair, the Council recommends allowing greater public review of the removal option, especially one that includes outreach to the residents and town officials of Shirley.

Thank you for considering our comments and please share them with the residents of Groton and Shirley.

Sincerely yours,

Lucy B. Wallace

Lucy B. Wallace, Chair
Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

For more information, visit the Wild and Scenic Rivers website: www.WildandScenicNashuaRivers.org

Copies:
Groton Herald
Shirley Local
Groton Conservation Commission
Groton Conservation Trust
Groton Historical Commission
Shirley Select Board
Shirley Conservation Commission
Shirley Historical Commission
NRWA
Squan-a-tissit Chapter of Trout Unlimited
MA Division of Ecological Restoration
    Director Beth Lambert
MassWildlife Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program
    Assistant Director Jesse Leddick
Senator Jamie Eldridge
Senator John Cronin
Representative Dan Sena
Representative Margaret Scarsdale

For more information, visit the Wild and Scenic Rivers website: www.WildandScenicNashuaRivers.org