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Secretary of Environmental Affairs Approves Great Marsh Area of Critical Environmental Concern Name Change

On March 6, 2007 Secretary of Environmental Affairs Ian Bowles announced the Great Marsh Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) as the official name for the previously state-designated Parker River/Essex Bay ACEC. By doing so he approved a written request from 15 citizens who represent the Eight Towns and the Bay Committee (the Upper North Shore local governance committee for the Massachusetts Bays Program) to rename the ACEC to a more recognized name. Their request letter dated January 18, 2007 was supported by local boards and commissions of all five ACEC communities: Essex, Gloucester, Ipswich, Newbury, and Rowley. The Parker River/Essex Bay ACEC was originally nominated in 1978 by the Essex Board of Selectmen and Conservation Commission; the Ipswich Conservation Commission; the Newbury Board of Selectmen, Planning Board and Conservation Commission; and the Rowley Conservation Commission.

By renaming the Great Marsh ACEC with a name used locally for over 20 years, the state designation can further unite and strengthen conservation efforts as well as raise additional awareness and support for this internationally significant natural and cultural resource area that provides wildlife habitat, flood protection, commercial fishery nurseries and shellfish habitat, and many historical, educational, and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors to the North Shore. The Great Marsh ACEC includes over 25,500 acres of salt marsh, tidal creeks and rivers, barrier beaches, dunes, and protected uplands. The Great Marsh Coalition, a group of representatives from non-profit, state, regional, and federal agencies, has worked for 10 years to promote preservation, restoration, and stewardship of the Great Marsh area through a coordinated approach to education, research, protection, and management.

ACECs are places in Massachusetts that receive special recognition because of their natural and cultural resources of regional, state, or national importance. There are currently 28 ACECs encompassing approximately 241,000 acres in 73 municipalities across the state. The Department of Conservation and Recreation administers the ACEC Program on behalf of the Secretary. For more information about the ACEC Program, please visit the website www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/acec or contact Elizabeth Sorenson, ACEC Program Director, at 617-626-1394 or Elizabeth.Sorenson@state.ma.us. For more information about the Great Marsh ACEC, the Great Marsh Coalition, and other coastal ACECs contact the Coastal ACEC Coordinator, Lisa Berry Engler at 617-626-1435 or Lisa.Engler@state.ma.us.