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Contact:
Tim Dugan, 978-318-8264
timothy.j.dugan@usace.army.mil

Corps of Engineers awards two contracts to perform vegetation maintenance for the Woonsocket Flood Reduction Project

CONCORD, Mass. –The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District recently awarded two construction contracts to perform vegetation maintenance at the federally-owned Woonsocket Flood Damage Reduction Project in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. The first contract for the Lower Woonsocket section of the project was awarded in the amount of \$882,000 and the second contract for the Upper Woonsocket section of the project was awarded in the amount of \$571,200.

Vegetation maintenance work for both contracts will be accomplished by Jennifer M. Cook, Inc., of Upton, Mass., and will take about 6 or 7 months to complete. Work is expected to begin in early to mid-October 2010.

The vegetation maintenance contracts will be used to remove and dispose of heavy wooded vegetation along the side slopes and crests of earthen levees/dikes, along channel improvement slopes and adjacent to floodwalls along the Blackstone, Mill and Peters Rivers. All vegetation within 15 feet of the toe of the land and water sides of the levees/dikes, and the floodwalls will be cut and removed. Root balls of trees greater than 4 inches in diameter will be removed along the levees/dikes and the levees/dikes repaired accordingly. All vegetation along the channel improvement areas will be cut and removed to the top of the floodway. Herbicide spray will be employed to control vegetation.

The devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita has brought the issue of levee safety to the forefront of public debate in recent years. The findings of subsequent Corps investigations into the performance of the flood damage reduction systems such as those at Woonsocket clearly point to a need for a periodic, comprehensive and risk-informed approach to levee safety. The Corps has been working together with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide them findings of Corps of Engineers levee inspections and assessments for their use in making decisions in the National Flood Insurance Program.

The Corps and FEMA are working together to ensure that flood hazard maps clearly reflect the flood protection capabilities of the levees, and that the maps accurately represent the flood risks posed to those protected areas. The Woonsocket project was decertified under the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in May 2007 because the agency determined the project no longer provides protection from the base flood level. As a result, property owners behind the project are now paying flood insurance.

The Corps of Engineers has begun the process of rehabilitating this project in the hope that it can once again comply with the requirements of the FEMA NFIP certification program so that flood insurance would no

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longer be required. One step is to perform this one-time major vegetation maintenance followed up by an annual maintenance program to prevent the regrowth of vegetation. Another step is to perform repairs to the Woonsocket Falls Dam. Contract work has already begun to repair the dam. Other lesser steps have been identified that will also be addressed in future years to complete the rehabilitation process.

The Lower Woonsocket section consists of two independent units: (a) the Social District Unit along the Mill River, Peters River and Blackstone River consisting of six levees/dikes totaling about 5,000 linear feet, three concrete floodwalls totaling about 2,000 linear feet, two pressure conduits totaling about 2,200 linear feet, and the Social District pumping station; (b) the Hamlet District Unit along the Blackstone River consisting of three levees/dikes totaling about 2,800 linear feet, a 115 foot long concrete floodwall, and the Hamlet District pumping station. The Upper Woonsocket section consists of the following features: (a) 8,300 feet of channel improvement; (b) four levees/dikes totaling about 1,200 linear feet; (c) a 308-foot-long concrete floodwall; and (d) the Singleton Street Pump Station.

The Woonsocket Flood Damage Reduction Project protects industrial and commercial establishments and densely populated residential areas from flood flows on the Blackstone, Peters and Mill Rivers. It was constructed in response to flood damage that occurred due to heavy rains in August 1955 that caused \$22 million in damage. The project was constructed in two phases: construction of the Upper Woonsocket section along the Blackstone River was completed in 1960 at a cost of \$5.4 million, and construction of the Lower Woonsocket section along the Blackstone River and two of its tributaries, the Mill River and Peters River, was completed in 1967 at a cost of \$8.3 million.

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