

ATTACHMENT A

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Summary of Grassland Habitat Values at On-Site Disposal Facility Sites

Three sites have been considered for potential use for on-site disposal facilities – the Woods Pond Site, Forest Street Site, and Rising Pond Site. At each of these sites, following completion of use, a grassland/open field habitat would be established and maintained in accordance with final detailed specifications that would ensure the integrity and stabilization of the site. Typically, the established cover would include a mixture of native warm-season grass and wildflower species, such as: little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), Virginia wild rye (*Elymus virginicus*), Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), creeping red fescue (*Festuca rubra*), switch grass (*Panicum virgatum*), partridge pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*), Canada wild rye (*Elymus canadensis*), common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), golden Alexanders (*Zizia aurea*), ox eye sunflower (*Heliopsis helianthoides*), black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), New England aster (*Aster novae-angliae*), wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*), tall white beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*), smooth blue aster (*Aster laevis*), evening primrose (*Oenothera biennis*), and New York ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*). Based on the operational footprint for a disposal facility that could handle approximately 1 million cubic yards of excavated sediments and soils, it is estimated that this grassland/open field habitat would cover approximately 30 acres at the Woods Pond Site, 95 acres at the Forest Street Site, or 49 acres at the Rising Pond Site.

Grassland/open field habitats have been in declining abundance in Massachusetts for more than the past 50 years, and this decline has generated concern for a number of species that are dependent upon these habitats. While several of these are state-listed species (e.g., grasshopper sparrow and upland sandpiper), the concern extends to many other species that are not state-listed, such as field sparrow, American kestrel, savannah sparrow, and eastern meadowlark. These species, many of which were once common in Massachusetts, are becoming increasingly uncommon and have been focal species in the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) (MADFW 2006) and in MassAudubon's State of the Birds Report (MassAudubon 2013). Establishment, preservation, and maintenance of grassland/open field habitat have therefore become a priority for many conservation agencies and organizations. While sites for such conservation purposes are ideally greater than 100 acres in size, grasslands/open field habitats in the range of 25 to 100 acres provide suitable conditions for many field-dependent species, as well as providing attractive complementary habitat for a wide range of other species that are drawn to the fields for food, nesting, resting and other life-cycle needs. In addition to the birds that are drawn to the fields for breeding, these open fields support a wide range of invertebrate life such as beetles, moths, and butterflies, as well as numerous species of small mammals. These in turn attract predators such as bats, hawks, owls, fox, mustelids (e.g., weasel family), and grazers such as deer and woodchuck.

The Woods Pond Site would particularly benefit due to the change in habitat from the present conditions to the grassland/open field habitat described above. Currently, the estimated operational footprint of a disposal facility at this site consists predominantly (~ 27 of 29.5 acres) of active and inactive portions of a sand and gravel facility. Further, there are no known Priority

Habitats of state-listed species mapped for this area. The establishment/preservation of approximately 30 acres of grassland habitat at this site would improve existing conditions and contribute to the overall wildlife habitat diversity of this area.

The estimated operational footprints for facilities at the Forest Street and Rising Pond Sites currently consist predominantly of upland forested land. No Priority Habitat for state-listed species would be affected at either site. A disposal facility would alter the suitability of these sites for forest-interior species. However, the current habitat would be replaced, following the use of the disposal facility, with grassland/open field habitat. The establishment of such habitat at one of these sites, covering approximately 95 acres at the Forest Street Site or 49 acres at the Rising Pond Site, has the potential to contribute to the overall habitat diversity of the area and attract field-dependent species that currently are not present on these sites.

References

- MADFW. 2006. Commonwealth of Massachusetts Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MA Department of Fish and Game).
- MassAudubon. 2013. State of the Birds. Massachusetts Breeding Birds: A Closer Look. MassAudubon Bird Conservation Program.