



## **Woloski Park, Middleborough**

**Who:** The Town of Middleborough, The Nature Conservancy, FEMA

**What:** Woloski Park is a small residential neighborhood located in the northern part of Middleborough. This low-lying neighborhood is bounded on the north by the Taunton River, on the west by Purchase Brook, and to the east by the Nemasket River, which flows into the Taunton just upstream. The neighborhood is accessed off Plymouth Street via a 1500-foot long unpaved private way.

The ten homes at Woloski Park were built from approximately 1920 to 1960, on low-lying land along the banks of the Taunton River, prior to the town's participation in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The entire neighborhood is located below the 25-foot contour line, within Flood Zone AE, according to the National Flood Insurance Rate Map.

The structures, ranging in size from 300 - 1200 square feet, are wood frame construction on slabs or on block foundations with small crawl spaces. This neighborhood has experienced flood losses on multiple occasions in recent decades. Significant flood damage from storms on March 17th and April 1st, 2010 occurred when flood levels peaked above the 100-year flood level, at 25.5 feet. Emergency evacuations, property losses, loss of use, and interruption of utility services all resulted in significant costs to neighborhood residents and the Town of Middleborough. Only two of these properties were covered by flood insurance. Since 2010, some of the homes have been or are in the process of being repaired, while others remain vacant pending either repair, replacement, or acquisition.

Flooding of the sole access route to this isolated neighborhood is a perennial problem. The base elevation for the road at the point where it crosses Purchase Brook is 18.0 feet – more than 3 feet lower than the 10-year flood level. As a result, the neighborhood's only access/egress route floods nearly every year, sometimes multiple times, requiring residents to access their properties by canoe, small boat or chest waders for a week or more at a time.

**When:** With TNC's assistance, the town applied to FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) in late 2010 for a 75% cost share grant. The program helps municipalities buy-out properties in flood prone areas and relocates the owners to higher ground. Before an award can be made, the town must complete a Hazard Mitigation Plan. In this case, securing FEMA approval for the Middleborough's plan took nearly five years. With the plan's certification and HMGP award in hand, the town is ready to re-engage the landowners, pursue negotiations, and acquire the properties.

**Where:** Middleborough, near the confluence of the Taunton River, where the Nemasket River meets Purchase Brook, in the Taunton River Watershed.

**Why:** Most of the area surrounding Woloski Park lies within TNC Tier 1 Portfolio area and the Taunton River Wild & Scenic corridor. BioMap2 Core Habitat covers virtually the entire property. The area between Purchase Brook, the Nemasket River and Taunton River is potential habitat for Blanding's and Eastern Box turtles. Conservation of the property would protect significant riparian habitat, maintain water quality within Purchase Brook, a cold-water stream, and connect MA Department of Fish & Game (DFG) conservation land. DFG owns a 15-acre parcel along the Taunton River and expects to add a 37-acre surplus MCI property. In 2013, MA DFG also acquired the 16-acre Lakey-Ames property with frontage on Plymouth Street suitable for a parking area. The project will restore the natural scenic beauty of this stretch of the Taunton River and Purchase Brook by removing privately owned houses in poor condition and putting the area into permanent conservation protection with public access.

**How:** The Town of Middleborough submitted the grant application to FEMA and updated its Hazard Mitigation Plan. TNC would be the lead negotiator with the landowners and contribute non-federal match to the FEMA grant of \$752,824. If all of the Woloski Park homes are included in the project (*participation is strictly voluntary, and only 9 of the 10 properties have signed on, to date*), the land costs would be \$1,000,000 and the match would exceed \$250,000 inclusive of all project costs. MA DFG has expressed interest in purchasing the parcels from the town following demolition of the homes. The cost to the town of developing the grant proposal and updates to the hazard mitigation plan is estimated at \$100,000.

**Benefits:** The project will remove up to 10 houses from a frequently-flooded area, eliminating that health and safety risk as well as the costs associated with repetitive loss properties. The project will also restore riparian floodplain habitat and connect existing conservation lands in a priority area of the Wild & Scenic Taunton River watershed.

