Eastern Hellbender Survey Report for the SCI-823-0.00-6.81 (PID 19415) Preferred Alternative for the Portsmouth Bypass over the Little Scioto River, Scioto County, Ohio

Eastern Hellbender Survey Report for the SCI-823-0.00-6.81 (PID 19415) Preferred Alternative for the Portsmouth Bypass over the Little Scioto River, Scioto County, Ohio

Submitted By:
ASC Group, Inc.
800 Freeway Drive North, Suite 101
Columbus, Ohio 43229
614.268.2514

Submitted To:
Mike Pettegrew
Office of Environmental Services
Ecological Unit
1980 West Broad Street, 3rd Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43223

Lead Agency: Ohio Department of Transportation

August 22, 2011

GREGORY LIPPS, LLC
1473 County Road 5-2 | Delta, Ohio |43515 | Phone: 419.376.3441 | GregLipps@gmail.com | GregLipps.com

August 21, 2011

Jason M. Earley
Senior Environmental Specialist
ASC Group, Inc.
800 Freeway Drive North, Suite 101
Columbus, Ohio 43229

Re: Potential habitat determination for the Eastern Hellbender at the proposed bridge crossing on the Little Scioto River (SCI-823.00).

Dear Mr. Earley:

This letter provides the findings of an investigation of habitat suitability for the Eastern Hellbender at a proposed bridge crossing over the Little Scioto River in Scioto County, Harrison Township. The survey has been requested by the Ohio Department of Transportation as part of the Federally Endangered Species coordination for the SCI-823.00 Portsmouth Bypass Project. The site is located just south of SR 335 and near the town of Highland Bend (N 38.77421, W 82.87311).

The Eastern Hellbender (*Cryptobranchus a. alleganiensis*) is one of the world's largest amphibian species, reaching a total length of up to 24 inches. This completely aquatic salamander inhabits well-oxygenated flowing waters where large rocks are available for shelter and nesting. In Ohio, hellbenders are found only within the Ohio River drainage.

Hellbenders appear to be declining throughout their range, due in part to stream modifications (e.g., dams), collecting, excess siltation, introduced game fish, and pollution. The Eastern Hellbender is listed as Endangered by the Ohio Division of Wildlife, and is currently undergoing a listing assessment for federal listing by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

On 16 August 2011, the project area was visited to determine the suitability of the habitat for Eastern Hellbenders. The site was accessed from the Slocum Ave. (CR 31) bridge, downstream of the proposed bridge area. The area examined is shown in Figure 1.

The only slab rock that could potentially provide habitat for the hellbender was encountered just under the Slocum Avenue bridge and appeared to be remnants of

a previous bridge. Upon further examination, however, these slabs were found to be completely embedded and unusable by aquatic organisms.

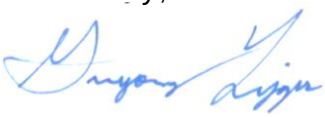
The remainder of the Little Scioto River examined was found to have a substrate comprised almost entirely of mud, silt, and fine sand (Figs. 2 & 3). Within the creek, large amounts of filamentous algae were noted, as was several dozen discarded tires and other refuse (Fig. 4). No slab rock capable of providing refuge for hellbenders was found at or near the proposed bridge site.

The Eastern Hellbender is known from the Little Scioto River with an individual being captured as recently as 2009. While the proposed bridge site is located along a steep hillside which is providing slab rock habitat for the river, the rocks are apparently being completely buried by excessive amounts of silt, mud, and fine sand once they enter the river.

This portion of the Little Scioto River does not contain suitable habitat for the Eastern Hellbender, and the construction of the proposed bridge at this site is expected to have no direct impact on the species.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide my services to The ASC Group. Please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail (GregLipps@gmail.com) or by phone (419-376-3441) should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Gregory Lipps, LLC

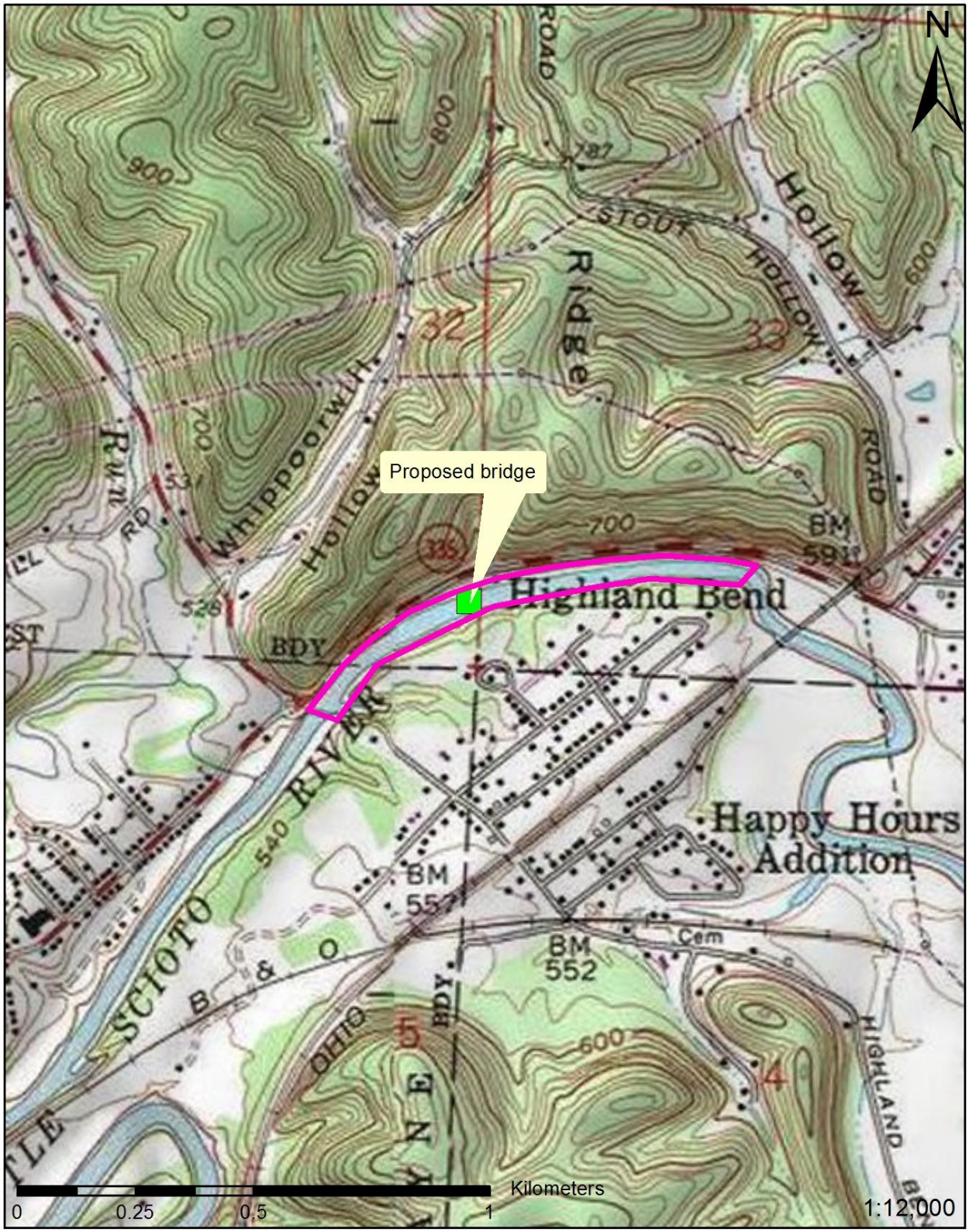


Figure 1. Location of the proposed bridge crossing over the Little Scioto River. The outline indicates the area examined for potentially suitable Eastern Hellbender habitat.

Figure 2. View of the Little Scioto River looking upstream near the location of the proposed bridge crossing.

Figure 3. View of the Little Scioto River looking downstream near the proposed bridge crossing.

Figure 4. Several dozen discarded tires and a large amount of filamentous algae were encountered in the area near the proposed bridge crossing on the Little Scioto River.