

French River Log

Volume 1 Number 2

June 1, 2006

Welcome to the second edition of the French River Log, the newsletter of the French River Connection. We plan to publish this newsletter quarterly to keep our communities current on our activities. We hope you find it useful.

Earth Day(s)

The French River Connection celebrated two Earth Days this year, on April 22 in Dudley and April 29 in Webster. With help from the Dudley Conservation Land Trust, Webster-Dudley Rotary, Webster Lake Association, Nichols College Rotoract Club, Positive Changes Fitness Center, and the Worcester County Sheriff's Department, sixty volunteers removed 22 truckloads of trash from both sides of the river south of the Chase Avenue bridge. These cleanups were in conjunction with town-wide events organized by the Dudley Board of Health and the Webster Recycling Commission. Thanks for helping are due Dunkin' Donuts, Alumi-nex, Dick's Sporting Goods, Pete's Tires, and Pratt Trucking.

Yes, the Natural Beauty of the French River!

By Sandy Peterson

It was one of those clear, bright afternoons last summer

with emerald green foliage contrasted against blue sky, when I embarked on my first kayak trip on the French River. Getting down the steep embankment at Perryville was a bit of a challenge, requiring some assistance, but once launched I was transported into a world away from traffic sounds towards the cheery songs of Red-winged Black Birds and Wood Thrush. As I rounded the first bend, I was momentarily startled by three deer, bounding away from the riverbank into the thicket, flashing their white tails. Where the river next became narrow, the banks were dark with small caverns created by the gnarled tree roots, a perfect spot for any "Wind in the Willows" creature to make its home. No sooner had I imagined Toad of Toad Hall making his way along the banks, when I actually spotted a beaver crossing the river, carrying a sizeable branch. The beaver did not seem vexed by my presence and quietly submerged without any tail thwapping. Overhead the green canopy offered cool relief, and glancing upward, I could just make out a hawk gliding in circles far above the canopy. Paddling into a cove where the calm water allowed a clear view of the sandy river bottom, I spotted minnows, bass, and brim darting about, avoiding my presence. As the river widened, I emerged from the green canopy and out into the warm sunlight, and observed two

turtles sunning themselves on a nearby log, seemingly undaunted by my quiet presence. Further up the river, I could just make out an old railroad bridge and I began to think back to the days when the mills and railroads were in full operation, a time when this river was turned into different colors depending on the dyes and chemicals being emitting from the mills, a time when no birds, fish, beavers, or deer could survive here, and a time when kids were forbidden to go near the French River. As I passed the Webster Sewage Treatment Plant and observed the clean water being flushed into the river, I was heartened to think that Nature and people have been working together to rejuvenate this precious waterway. It made me hopeful that those children who once only knew the French River as a "smelly and dead place" might come to now know it, as I have, as a place of revived natural beauty for all creatures to enjoy.

Sandy Peterson is President of the Dudley Conservation Land Trust

Water Quality Monitoring

The season has begun, with a plan to monitor 15 sites on streams that enter either the French River or Webster Lake. This year in addition to the TROLL 9500 electronic monitoring device from the

Webster Lake Association, we will pilot use of a colorimeter from Nichols College to monitor nitrate and phosphate levels. The Quinebaug Shetucket National Heritage Corridor has begun a program which is planned to expand corridor-wide similar to what is done in the Blackstone Corridor. A bi-state pilot program for the French River basin has been initiated, coordinating the programs of the Webster Lake Association, the French River Connection, and a new program starting in Thompson.

We monitor on alternate Fridays, with the next occasion on June 9. If you would like to help out, please get in touch.

Sightings

In recent weeks, a red-eared slider turtle (once painted and sold in dime stores) was seen near Perryville. There may be other populations in Oxford, but this was the first sighting in this area. Importantly, a pied-billed grebe, an endangered species, was photographed in Oxford and reported to the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species program. One of the best ways to protect the riverine environment is to document rare species inhabiting it.

Activism

What can one do with the knowledge that a dam operator is proposing to lower the river

6-10 feet to make repairs, without revealing that this will drain more than two miles of headpond? That's what Ware River Power proposed for the North Village Dam, a procedure that would damage the best fish and wildlife habitat on the French River for years to come. Thanks to intense lobbying of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, US Fish and Wildlife, and the Webster Conservation Commission, it now seems likely that the operator will be directed to use a different approach.

Grant Scorecard

In addition to the \$1700 previously received from the Greater Worcester Community Foundation Land and Water Stewardship Fund, we have received the following:

From the New England Grassroots Environment Fund, \$1000 for this newsletter, brochures, and a computer projector.

From the Webster Redevelopment Authority, \$1000 to help defray the cost of obtaining IRS non-profit status.

From the Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor, as a partner of the Oxford Open Space Committee, \$5000 for a Water Trail Assessment Study. This study will identify and prioritize 3-5 sites suitable for public paddling access.

Meeting Schedule

The French River Connection meets at 7pm on the second Wednesday of every month at rotating locations. Here is the schedule for 2006:

Dudley Town Hall Rm 210:
Jun 14, Sep 13, Dec 13

Hodges Village Dam, Oxford
Oct 10 (July meeting cancelled)

Point Breeze, Webster
Aug 9, Nov 8

We need your help

If you would like to help us with our work, come to a meeting, call us at (508) 943-2698, or email frenchriver@charter.net. Everyone is welcome.

If you're reading this newsletter, it's probably because at some point you've expressed interest in, and support for, what we're trying to achieve. Although we've been successful with some of our grant proposals, they never cover all the expenses we have. We are hoping that if you haven't already, you'll join eighteen other households and businesses as a dues-paying member. You'll receive a beautiful French River Screensaver, and you'll be helping to keep the river looking that way.

Visit us on the web at <http://frenchrivernconnection.homestead.com>