

French River Log

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

The French River Blueway

Last Spring, the Oxford Open Space Committee, with the French River Connection as a partner, submitted a grant proposal to the Quinebaug-Shetucket National Heritage Corridor to assess potential car-top access points for paddling on the French River. After all, there is not a single public access point between Hodges Village and the Connecticut border, a distance of nine miles. Paddlers and fishermen currently use a few informal launch points to enjoy the river, but these are not places that are legally open to the public, or that provide safe entry and return to a road, parking, or easy water access.

Following award of the grant, the University of Massachusetts Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning Department was contracted to conduct the assessment, which focuses

not only on the characteristics of each potential access point but also on the broader concept of a blueway or water trail, which takes into account how an access point contributes to an integrated vision of the French as a recreational resource. The students performing the assessment reviewed the river corridor and picked approximately ten potential access points for evaluation. They characterized these in terms of such items as access from public roads, space for parking, suitability of banks, proximity to the French River Greenway Trail or other potential recreational resources, land ownership and present use, and quality of the paddling experience offered from the site. From these, several promising sites will be chosen for top level designs, and a description developed of the resulting blueway, for which we can begin to seek public support and funding. The assessment will be completed in December.

Turtles and Their Shells

By Tom Ryzewski

A unique shell makes turtles fascinating and often misunderstood critters. What may appear to be a heavy and clumsy encumbrance in a freshwater turtle is more likely to be a lightweight and hydrodynamically efficient body form offering both speed and protection. Land tortoises may look like glacially slow

reptiles trapped in rounded cinder blocks, but again, a light, round shell offers the turtle a place to hide from a large jawed predator when speed is not an option. In their various environments, turtles have evolved, through natural selection, shells that have given them survival advantages that have worked for over 200 million years.

The turtle shell is actually an expanded backbone and rib cage covered with a very thin form of skin. The shoulder and pelvic bones have been tucked inside and the neck vertebrae have evolved a flexible 'S' shaped curve to allow the head to be withdrawn along with the legs. Those cartoons we watched as kids that showed a turtle crawling out of its shell and walking away were wrong. A turtle can no more wiggle out from its shell than we humans can jump out from our rib cages!

Our occasionally mistaken view of a turtle as slow and clumsy is usually one of a turtle out of its natural environment. A snapping turtle, *Chelydra serpentina*, is a swift and maneuverable swimmer but on the inhospitable land, we see a hulking, slow behemoth using its remaining weapon, a lightning fast pair of (over)

scissors-like jaws to survive. Surprisingly, an eastern box turtle, *Terrapene carolina*, dropped into deep water would sink and flounder almost helplessly and likely drown, its rounded shell and body evolved for the land where it has roamed safely for millenia. As long as the turtle remains in its natural world, where it has survived millions of years, that shell will offer protection and a safe little home.

National Park Service Technical Assistance

The National Park Service has selected our French River Greenway Trail planning project to receive technical support for a year beginning October 1. We will receive about one day a week from NPS staff member John Monroe, who will help us get the project off to a good start, focusing mostly on building support among landowners and abutters, officials and other trail interests, and the public. We are starting with the organization of an Advisory Committee and identification of all "stakeholders", while we await receipt of funds from the Massachusetts Community Investment Capital Program.

Done!

Three cleanups encompassing a mile of riverbank, as well as

several spot cleanups. Tons of trash and hundreds of tires, out of the river!

Eleven water quality monitoring days, of 15 sites each, more than 200 measurements and observations!

Data gathering for the shoreline survey, twelve half mile sections of river!

Many thanks to our hard-working volunteers and business supporters for making this possible.

It's not all work

French River Connection members, families, and friends gathered for a picnic at Hodges Village September 16 to celebrate the conclusion of a summer of work and progress. The weather was perfect and attendees enjoyed good food, good company, and paddling on Aggutback Pond.

French River Connection member Russ Cohen led a foraging walk at Hodges Village on October 6, which was attended by about 40 people, who enjoyed learning the menu that grows around us.

Meet the Board

The French River Connection is now incorporated in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Officers and Board members are:

President: Ken Parker, Webster
Treasurer: Sheila Veideman, Auburn
Clerk: Elaine Parker, Webster

Board Members:
Alan Dabrowski, Webster
John Grenier, Oxford
Janet Mielewski, Webster
Ed Bazinet, Dudley
Tom Ryzewski, Thompson

Join Us

If you haven't already done so, but would like to help us in our efforts, please consider joining the 36 other households and businesses that are supporting us financially. Annual membership dues are only \$20.00 for a family, and you will receive a spectacular French River Screensaver as a token of our appreciation. We're not yet an IRS-qualified 501(c)(3) organization, and cannot offer you a tax deduction, but we're in the process of preparing the necessary filings. Memberships forms can be found on our website. But whether you join as a member or not, we invite you to come to our meetings, share our vision, add your ideas, and have some fun. Our next meeting is at Dudley Town Hall room 210 on December 13 at 7pm. Or call Ken at (508) 943-2698.

Thank you

Thanks once again to all who have helped us, encouraged us, and advised us this year. May you enjoy all the blessings of the holiday season.

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