

French River Log

Volume 2 Number 1

March 1, 2007

Welcome to the second year of the French River Log, the newsletter of the French River Connection.

Good News

The IRS has approved our application for non-profit status. This means that we can seek grants without partnering with a fiscal agent, and that memberships and donations are tax deductible!

2006 in Review

Highlights of a busy year, our first full year of operation:

Completed and published the Riverfront Revitalization Study begun in 2005 by UCONN

Completed field work for Shoreline Survey

Made four posters for presentations

Developed a Quality Assurance Program Plan approved by DEP for water quality monitoring

Monitored 15 sites up to 11 times each and reported results

Assisted the Quinebaug-Shetucket National Heritage Corridor in establishing a pilot water quality monitoring program

Conducted three community river cleanups and two smaller ones, cleaning a mile of shoreline and removing tons of trash

Established several committees, developed by-laws and incorporated, and submitted a request for determination of non-profit status to the IRS

Started a membership program and ended the year with 36 members

Assisted The Oxford Open Space Committee in securing a grant to evaluate paddling access points, and advised UMASS in conducting the resulting study

Refined the conceptual route of the French River Greenway Trail system and engaged the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) in initial planning

Received a grant of technical assistance from the National Park Service for the Greenway. \$250,000 for planning is earmarked in the Massachusetts Community Capital Investment Program

Made presentations to the Dudley Planning Board, Dudley Grange, Tuesday Club, Midstate Trail Committee, Appalachian Mountain Club, CMRPC, and the Thompson Trails Committee

Received grants totaling \$6200 from the Greater Worcester Community Foundation, the Norcross Wildlife Foundation, the Webster Office of Community Development, and the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund.

Received substantial donations from JV Mechanical Contractors, Hope Realty, and Central Massachusetts Striders

Enjoyed the first French River Day picnic.

Many people and organizations helped us have such a successful year. Thanks to all!!

Solar Hot Water

By Peter Slota

We're all looking for ways to save energy and our hard earned dollars, and to do something for the environment as well. Among a great number of opportunities for savings, solar hot water rises to the top.

This is not to discourage all the avenues of simple savings, such as better home insulation, caulking and sealing windows and doors, and switching to compact fluorescent lights wherever possible. These

strategies generally involve little time, effort, or money. When you've taken as many practical measures as possible along these lines, and are looking at the next level, consider solar hot water. Immediate dollar savings, reduced dependence on foreign oil or coal fired power plants, and simple technologies are some of the immediate advantages. In addition, tax incentives up to \$3000 can help to defray the initial investment, and even come close to covering the initial cost of the equipment!

Solar collectors, mounted on a roof or an appropriate ground location, collect the sun's energy, and heat an antifreeze solution which is pumped to a solar storage tank. There the heat gained is used to pre-heat, or for a good portion of the year, completely heat enough water to meet domestic hot water needs, with little or no assistance from any 'backup' or existing hot water heating source. It's not unusual to save as much as 60-75% of domestic hot water costs, getting a payback for the initial investment in just a few short years. It's common to see 25 year old systems continuing to perform quite well, with little or no maintenance.

Worth looking into, it may not work for everyone. You must have a solar 'window' in order to collect that energy. But for the average

home, where a good deal of energy (and dollars!) is spent just to keep a tank of hot water at the ready, 24/7, it's an ideal way to be a part of the solution, and save money at the same time!

The Great Backyard Bird Count

Every year, the Great Backyard Bird Count is conducted all across North America on the internet by the Audubon Society and the University of Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. This year the count took place 16-19 February. The object is to identify large scale changes in bird population distribution.

These occur as the result of weather conditions which may affect food supply and mortality, competition for nesting sites, and the spread of non-native species, among other reasons. If global warming is occurring at an accelerating pace, we might expect it to be reflected in bird populations.

This year, over 71,000 reports identified 611 species, a total of almost 10 million birds.

It's easy to participate; observers can do as little as spend 15 minutes looking out the window, and entering their observations on the designated site. So what was seen in the French River communities of Oxford, Webster, Dudley, and Thompson? There were 20 reports submitted from the four towns, which does not mean 20 separate observers. Last year there were only eight. Webster, with 11 reports, was one of the most active towns in Massachusetts. Thirty-six species were observed in the

four towns. As one might expect, all the common winter birds frequenting our feeders, such as dark-eyed juncos and black-capped chickadees, were well represented, as were the less numerous but very familiar birds like northern cardinals and blue jays. Less often reported (twice at most) were the following: American black duck, cedar waxwing, common merganser, common raven, great black-backed gull, great blue heron, house finch, house sparrow, mute swan, northern mockingbird, red-bellied woodpecker, red-breasted merganser, red-tailed hawk, ring-necked pheasant, sharp-shinned hawk, song sparrow, and winter wren.

In future years if there is interest we might be able to organize a count in the French River and along its banks.

Annual Meeting

Our next meeting is April 11, and will be our first real annual meeting. Watch for the agenda coming soon.

Please Join Us

We have a lot going on, and we can use the help of anyone interested in the welfare of the French River as we work to make it a valuable community resource for our towns. If you lack the time but agree with our goals, please consider a tax deductible membership or donation.

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