

French River Log

Volume 2 Number 4

December 1, 2007

Welcome to this edition of the French River Log, the newsletter of the French River Connection.

2007 in Review

Approaching the holiday season when it's difficult to make much more happen, this is a good time to review the goals set by the Board of Directors in January and see how well we achieved them.

We have increased the number of Oxford residents supporting our vision; starting the year with six members and ending with eight. Participation in meetings and events is up.

We continued Earth Day River cleanups in Dudley and Webster, although hampered by high water. In Webster, we cleaned the area around middle dam, and in Dudley, did the streets near the river. About 20 people participated in these events. Only small scale maintenance cleanups were done during the summer, encompassing both sides of the river from Hill Street to the Chase Avenue Bridge and a half-mile upstream from Perryville. From this we learned that daunting though an initial cleanup might be, taking upwards of 60 person-hours, a

maintenance cleanup a year later may take more like six hours, and even then, much of the haul is simply junk missed the first time. The most exciting part of our summer cleanup was the capture of a fugitive refrigerator which was first seen downtown last winter, eluded the posse on Dudley cleanup day, and was eventually surprised in its hideout just south of the wastewater treatment plant, from where it was escorted downriver to justice.

Speaking of justice, two small cleanups were required of illegal dumpers whom we were able to identify to the police by clues left in their trash piles.

With our review and encouragement, the University of Massachusetts completed the car-top access study performed under a grant to the Oxford Open Space Committee from the Quinebaug-Shetucket National Heritage Corridor. Voters in Oxford approved entering into an agreement with the Massachusetts Office of Fishing and Boating Access for construction of an access point at one of the recommended sites, the Oxford Dog Pound property. In addition, in partnership with the USACE, we began making improvements to launch sites at Hodges Village.

Our project to fence specimen trees to protect them from

beavers was piloted at Perryville, giving us an idea of how much fencing is required, and how much time and effort it takes. This will enable us to plan the project more accurately and provide guidance to volunteers.

Our Water Quality Monitoring program expanded substantially this year. We monitored a total of 22 sites, seven around Webster Lake being monitored by a Webster Lake Association team and the other 15 in three towns monitored by our team. In 2006 we did 15 total. This year we added temperature data logging at five sites, deploying devices that record the temperature every 15 minutes all summer, in the hope of demonstrating that they were cold water resources. Unfortunately, four of the five sites dried up, but in two cases, they were cold up until that point. New this year was the use of a TROLL 9500 sampling device purchased by the Quinebaug-Shetucket National Heritage Corridor under a MASS DEP grant, instead of a rented one. This meant that we had to learn how to calibrate and maintain it, but it also gives us scheduling flexibility. We also greatly expanded our nutrient monitoring

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program, from six sites to 16. All of these methods are included in a revised Quality Assurance Program Plan which was approved by MASS DEP in September through 2009. Unfortunately, low water curtailed our campaign at several sites.

We continued work on the Shoreline Survey report, with all the text being written, with only mapping remaining incomplete.

Our goal to establish a strong, active French River Greenway Advisory Committee was well met, as they promptly named themselves a Steering Committee and established subcommittees for landowner contacts, trail design, and outreach. Using grant funds from the Fields Pond Foundation, the committee contracted with CMRPC to develop a trail map and data base with all owner and abutter parcels. The committee developed two prospectus documents for use in landowner meetings, and initiated meetings with some owners. Several walks on portions of the proposed trails were held. The National Park Service Technical Assistance grant was extended for a year.

Finally, our goal to obtain 501(c)(3) status was actually met in 2006, although we didn't know it until 2007.

Rock Snot Nothing to Sneeze at

by Tom Ryzewski

A dangerous invasive algae called *Didymosphenia geminata* is emerging worldwide as an organism with an extraordinary capacity to impact stream ecosystems by forming persistent blooms of dense mucilaginous mats that can extend for several miles. These mats can destroy bottom dwelling invertebrates and therefore have a serious effect on other stream life. They can also dangerously lower dissolved oxygen levels, wiping out fish populations.

D. geminata, also known as 'didymo' and 'rock snot', attaches itself firmly to rocks and plants, forming thick brown layers that smother the stream bottom. Although it appears slimy, it feels like gritty, wet cotton wool. The mats often make boating next to impossible, and can make a once lovely river unsightly. Frighteningly, there is no known method of removing the algae.

Didymo was originally found as a harmless alga in cool clear waters of Europe and North America. Since the mid 1980's, for reasons poorly understood, a variety has evolved into an invasive species in its original range and is being found in new areas. It has begun to invade and seriously affect waters in Poland and New Zealand for example, threatening city water supplies. While it has not yet been found in Massachusetts, it has been found in Vermont's

White and Battenkill rivers and portions of the Connecticut river in Vermont and New Hampshire.

We all need to begin making serious efforts to avoid spreading rock snot. Scrupulous cleaning and drying of watercraft, boots, paddles and anything that touches the water must be done when moving from stream to stream in order to avoid introducing even the tiniest piece of didymo. Infection of our beautiful French River could result in an ecological catastrophe. More details, especially about cleaning methods can be found at <http://epa.gov/Region8/water/didymosphenia/> http://www.mass.gov/dcr/waterSupply/lakepond/hottopic/ht_didymo.pdf

Please Join Us

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.

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.