

2014 YEAR-END REPORT FOR SOUHEGAN RIVER LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SoRLAC)

SoRLAC provides local input to State and local permitting agencies regarding changes to the Souhegan River. SoRLAC was created in 2001 after the Souhegan River was designated as a protected river by the State of New Hampshire. SoRLAC is made up of members of the six corridor towns along the Souhegan: New Ipswich, Greenville, Wilton, Milford, Amherst, and Merrimack. Meetings are the third Thursday evening of each month in one of the corridor towns. Agendas and minutes are published at www.nashuarpc.org/about/related-organizations/sorlac where there is lots of additional information. Meetings are informal and everyone is welcome to attend.

SoRLAC works with the Souhegan Watershed Association (SWA) on a water quality monitoring program that has collected chemical and biological data on the river for the past 20 years. That information for the biweekly collections and for past data is available at www.souheganriver.org – and the program can always use volunteers.

Two studies on the river are available this year. Instream Flow rules have been put in place to prevent the river from drying up during periods of low flow. Several times this fall water was released through a dam on Waterloom Pond to augment the dangerously low flow. This is a procedure that will require more attention in the future to protect the wildlife and habitat that call the river home.

Also, an erosion study was done primarily to identify hazards that might be a safety problem in the future. One of the interesting facts to come out of this was the number of stretches of the river that were deemed to have been ‘straightened’ in the past. Apparently farmers in the past straightened the river to eliminate the many curves and oxbows to keep their fields from eroding.

This is major problem that is still causing problems in Milford and Amherst where the river meanders naturally back and forth, which is what it’s supposed to do. Two farmers in this area have now armored the riverbank with large rocks to prevent the meandering to continue. And we expect others will ask to do the same in the near future. We oppose this except where it’s absolutely necessary.

US Fish and Wildlife futilely spent 30 years trying to restore Atlantic salmon to the Merrimack River watershed. Thousands of hatchery-raised baby salmon were put into the Souhegan and other rivers with the hope that some of these would return as adults. This didn’t happen and so the program has ended. SWA sponsored an Adopt a Salmon program in local schools as an outreach to this program. Children raised baby salmon in their classrooms and then put them into the Souhegan as adolescent fish in the spring. We will be continuing this program for the next few years as long as we can get salmon eggs from the hatchery.

We have suggested that all river towns erect signs with ‘Souhegan River’ and the ‘protected river’ signs at all bridge crossings. We further suggest that all towns erect smaller signs at all brook crossings in the hope that identifying a stream will help protect it.

We continue with trail work in the watershed. SWA has named the river itself as a water trail for canoeing and published information at www.souheganriver.org.

Erosion at the river access at Seaverns Bridge in Merrimack is a considerable problem that we hope gets fixed in the near future. There are good access points all along the river but more are always better.

We are disappointed that Milford has decided to not accept the help and money to remove the two dams in the center of town. We believe that these dams will eventually have to be removed and so want the discussion to remain on the table.

The biggest concern at the time this is written is the Kinder Morgan pipeline and its affect on the river. Present plans call for a dangerously steep crossing in Greenville and back and forth crossings around the schools in Amherst. SoRLAC and other river groups will be following these plans closely and commenting.

One of the most iconic spots along the Souhegan is the Horseshoe in Wilton. We would like to see this as public conservation land. The property is for sale but funds need to be raised.

We have encouraged the police stations in all river towns to set up secure boxes to collect unused prescription and nonprescription drugs on a 24 hour basis in order to prevent them from being flushed down toilets and eventually ending up in the river. This is a problem that has negatively affected some of the river life. Frogs are showing up with abnormalities probably caused by drugs.

A new river crossing is being constructed on top of Highbridge at Routes 123 & 124 in New Ipswich. This is the largest dry stone bridge in NH and well worth a special trip to check it out.

Plans are underway to place guardrails along some of the dangerous spots on Route 31S in Wilton to prevent cars from sliding off the road and into the river as has happened in recent years. This is a beautiful scenic highway but we prefer to keep the cars on the road.

Respectfully submitted,

George May