



The HooRWA Report

The Newsletter of the Hoosic River Watershed Association
Spring 2005

Conference Includes More of the River Than Ever

Can a conference held on a hilltop in Vermont in a snowstorm be much of a success? Sure! People from three states gathered at Southern Vermont College on March 12 for HooRWA's annual State of the River Conference, and the trek through the blizzard was well worthwhile. Here are highlights:

Tribs and Troubles.

Dick Schlesinger and Elena Traister (below) reported on last summer's wa-



ter quality studies. Dick showed that tributary streams help a great deal in keeping the Hoosic mainstem clean and cool in Massachusetts, and that levels of *E. coli* in New York often exceeded acceptable levels for contact recreation. Elena showed that *E. coli* levels can vary considerably with weather and even with time of day. She suggested that sampling methods be designed to take this variation into account, to avoid getting false impressions about water quality. Dick also described HooRWA's intent to step up sampling of benthic macroinvertebrates in 2005. HooRWA has also begun a new project to identify stretches of river where attention from HooRWA's monitors might do the most good.

"Protect the Best, Restore the Rest"
Ethan Swift, a Watershed Coordinator

for VT DEC, described Vermont's Watershed Planning Initiative as a dynamic process whose major objective is restoring or maintaining water quality in the state. It was clear that while the DEC plays a leading role in the effort to "protect the best and restore the rest", it needs the help and collaboration of informed individual citizens, and partnership with many other groups, including watershed organizations. Ethan also noted that the specific challenges for the Hoosic basin in Vermont include areas of acid precipitation and elevated levels of methyl mercury.

Testimony from Bugs and Fish.

Heather Pembrook of VT ANR reported (in absentia) on how fish and macroinvertebrate communities indicate the river's health at certain locations in the Hoosic watershed. Result? Not perfect, but not bad. Macroinvertebrate assessments in Vermont yielded these ratings: Hoosic River improving, very good; Walloomsac River improved, good to very good; South Stream excellent; Roaring Branch, Walloomsac, good; Barney Brook, fair to good; Bickford Hollow, fair to good. Fish assessments yield these ratings: Walloomsac, very good; Roaring Branch good; South Stream, very good to excellent; Paran Creek good.



Heather's expert witnesses



Bank stabilization project

Don't Clutter the Corridor!

Barry Cahoon, VT State River Management Engineer, and Shannon Hill, River Resource Scientist, VT ANR, made a strong case for the importance of good physical management of river corridors. Over time, rivers writhe back and forth in their valleys. Constraining this action improperly can actually worsen flood damage, erosion damage, water quality, and habitat, and incur chronic expenses. On the other hand, proper river corridor management saves money, protects property, enhances water quality, and restores habitat. Barry pointed out cases, including the Roaring Branch on the Walloomsac, where an understanding of river dynamics, and a willingness to work with the river instead of fighting its movements, could have multiple benefits in the long run.

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HoorWA is dedicated to the restoration, conservation and enjoyment of the Hoosic River and its watershed, through education, research and advocacy.

From the President



As I take over the President's Chair I have been reflecting on what it means to be at the helm of a local watershed organization and what I can do to make an impact.

As a young engineering student in the early 80's I had to write a paper titled the "engineer's responsibility to the environment." At that time, I thought 'progress' was good, development necessary, growth inevitable, but that, yeah, sure, you don't want to mess up the environment any more than necessary while you are doing it.

My perspective has changed since then. Now I ask: *How close can we come to no environmental impact? Progress at what cost? Can we limit development? Can we contain it? Can we work harder to mitigate the environmental problems we have caused? Do we really understand the impact of all*

the decisions we make daily on our watershed, our nation, our world?

Living in our beautiful region, environmental concerns aren't always in the forefront of public consciousness. It is a pastoral, relatively underdeveloped area. We have other things on our minds - schools, hospitals, and housing to name but a few. But I would like to ask you to join me in reflecting on these questions:

- What are our responsibilities to the environment, as individuals, as citizens, as members of a watershed organization?
- Are there things we can do in our homes and our work that will make a difference?
- Do we have all the facts we need?

Then call, write or email your thoughts to us.

Stephanie Boyd

...State of the River, cont'd

...cont'd from Page 1

Wheels, Walks, Whitewater

On a lighter note, the afternoon presentations highlighted the Hoosic's recreational potential. HoorWA Vice President **Lauren Stevens** related progress made on the Mahican-Mohawk Trail in Massachusetts and plans for its extension from North Adams to Williamstown, and showed a promotional video from the Northern Berkshire Bike Path Council.

Ken Norris, of the **Pownal Recreation Committee**, supplied a report about planned recreation amenities on

the former Pownal tannery land in Vermont (now known as the Alan Strobridge Recreational Complex). They include better access for fishing, including access for those with disabilities; permission for establishing a canoe portage at the tannery dam, conditional on posting warning signs about PCB hazards; and establishment of walking trails near the river.

David Culligan, a compliance engineer for **Brascan Power**, described the hydropower company's recreational access sites. Of especial interest to paddlers is Brascan's practice of white-

water releases in Schaghticoke Gorge. Care is taken to change the flow rate gradually, which minimizes stress on river-dwelling organisms. The slides of whitewater kayaking were spectacular! (See sidebar, p. 5, for more on Brascan's whitewater releases.)

Finally, we would like to lead a loud cheer for **Southern Vermont College**, who provided a mansion (!) and staff at no charge; for all the speakers who donated their time, and for the HoorWA volunteers who always make things run smoothly. Bravo for making this event a success!



Spring Adventures



With HooRWA

Save this page!

April 9. Spring Herp Search, Hopkins Memorial Forest, 10AM to 1PM.

Back by popular demand! Don't miss this rite of spring -- first, a slide show introduction to the local reptiles and amphibians; and then, an excursion into the woods, streams and vernal pools to find them. Last year's walk yielded abundant frogs and salamanders, even a chilly snake. Led by Tom Tying, herpetologist, author of the *Stokes Guide to Amphibian and Reptile Behavior* and field naturalist extraordinaire. *Admission free. Children should bring adults and footwear that can get wet. Meet at the Rosenberg Center, at main entrance to Hopkins Forest on Northwest Hill Road (near junction with Bulkley Street). For more directions and more information about Hopkins Forest, go to <http://www.williams.edu/CES/hopkins/gettinghere.htm> Co-sponsored by Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation.*

April 30. Bird Walk and Turtle Ramble, 7 AM, Lower Linear Park, Williamstown. Fly a thousand miles, or just dunk yourself under a streambank— could any two ways of coping with winter be more different? This is a chance to get out on a spring morning to see migrants returning from distant places, and look for wood turtles emerging from the Green River. While strolling along, we'll learn the value of the river corridor for both birds and turtles. *Leaders: Leslie Reed-Evans, Eileen Fielding. Meet at the tennis courts on Linear Park Rd. on the north side of Rte 2, east of Water Street. Admission free. Dress for the weather and for damp ground. Co-sponsored by Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation.*

**April 16, 23, 30, and
May 7, 14, 21, 28**

Saturday Morning Raft Rides. See the Hoosic River from a duck's eye view! Join a guide on a 6-person raft for a free ride on the Hoosic River from the Ashton Ave. boat launch in North Adams to Lauren's Launch in Williamstown. Total time on the water 30 to 45 minutes, depending on river flow. Suitable for ages 4 and up; children under 40 lbs must bring their own life jackets. Inquiries from retirees are welcome. Trips leave at about 9:30 and 11:30 AM. *Pre-registration is required; call 413-458-2742 or e-mail hoorwa@berkshire.net; leave message and phone number. Don't delay, these trips fill up fast!*

May 21

Birding from Boats in Buskirk, 7:00 to 10:00 AM - This is a canoe trip to observe birds in wetland and riverine communities of the Hoosic River. The trip will end around 10:00 AM, though participants can explore further on their own. Meet at the canoe launch on the north side of the river, just west of the Buskirk Covered Bridge in the Town of Hoosick, New York. The trip will be on flat water and our progress will be relatively slow as we will stop or drift at different points to look for birds that have arrived and that are looking for nesting areas. Participants need to bring their own canoes, paddles, flotation vests, binoculars, and whatever else you may need for a few hours on the river, hopefully on a sunny day. We will go in light showers but not in steady or heavy rain. To sign up, contact the trip leader: Michael Batcher, at (518) 686-5868 or mbatcher@netheaven.com.

May 28

Paddler's Potluck Pownal Park Picnic. TENTATIVE. Please contact HooRWA after mid-April for more information.

June 11. Wild Edibles Walk, Pownal VT, 9AM-Noon. Join Russ Cohen, one of New England's most knowledgeable and experienced wild edibles experts, to taste the landscape! (To learn more about Russ and wild edibles, go to <http://users.rcn.com/eatwild/bio.htm>) The walk will be held on the former tannery property in Pownal, VT. *Admission is free, and children accompanied by adults are welcome. Contact HooRWA for directions. This walk is co-sponsored by the Pownal Recreation Committee and Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation.*

WHAT! No Riverfest?

May is the traditional time for **Riverfest**, our annual community celebration of the river. We are taking a one-year break from Riverfest in 2005. This allows us to concentrate on other initiatives this spring, and also allows us a long time to gear up for Riverfest 2006, which will mark HooRWA's 20th anniversary. Check it out next year, it will be fabulous!



Save the date!
For the 1st annual

HOOSIC RIVER RIDE

sponsored by



THE CAUSE

The inaugural Hoosic River Ride seeks to raise awareness of the Hoosic River and its environs, and raise money for the education and research programs of the Hoosic River Watershed Association.

THE ROUTE

We're offering two scenic loops of 31 or 62 miles (a metric century) that will traverse the highways and byways of three states (MA, VT and NY). Both will start with a challenging four-mile hill climb over the Taconic Crest, before a fun descent into the farmlands of the river valley. Rolling terrain follows, with a few more hills and a covered bridge for those who choose the metric century.

WHEN AND WHERE

Saturday, August 27, 2005 RAIN or SHINE. 8:30 start for metric, 9:00 start for 31 mi. loop. The ride will start and finish at Mt. Greylock Regional High School located at 1611 Cold Spring Rd. (Route 7) in picturesque Williamstown, MA.

REGISTRATION

Participants may register at www.active.com or www.bikereg.com; printable versions of the registration form are available at www.hoorwa.org. Prior to August 1, 2005, the fee for both loops is \$35. Entries after this date will be \$45. Entry fees are non-refundable. All participants registered prior to August 1 will receive a commemorative t-shirt. All riders will receive a water bottle along with an assortment of goodies. In addition, all participants are invited to the post-ride buffet once their workout is through! AND, riders who raise \$25 or more are eligible to win two nights for two at Steep Acres Farm Bed and Breakfast!

All riders are expected to follow local traffic rules. In addition, all participants must sign USCF waivers prior to participating in the event, and must be current USCF members. One-day USCF event membership may be purchased for \$5 at registration.

FOR MORE INFORMATION visit the HoorWA website at www.hoorwa.org



Rain, Rain, Don't Go Away!

In most of the Hoosic Valley, a raindrop hitting the ground can soak in. This is important. A raindrop doesn't always make a soft landing. It might hit a sidewalk, a parking lot, a roof, a patio, or, in other words, an "impervious surface." Then what? Instead of filtering into the ground, rain sheets across hard surface after hard surface, until it goes down a storm drain, bearing a load of sediments and pollution. It's contaminated, it's headed straight for a river instead of becoming groundwater, and it's often been warmed up by contact with a sunny surface. The result? More frequent floods, worse erosion, degraded water quality, altered water temperatures, and less groundwater for wells.

Luckily, most of our watershed isn't waterproof. If much more than 10% of a landscape is made impervious, there can be noticeable effects on water quality and flooding. By this standard, we are in pretty good shape, except for riverside towns. But we shouldn't get complacent. "Impervious surface" doesn't just mean some vast mall parking lot. Figures from an EPA study of satellite and aerial photos showed that 28% of impervious areas were roads,



29% buildings, 25% parking lots, and --- note this--- 14% were driveways, sidewalks, patios, and swimming pools.

This suggests that residential areas alone, with their attendant roads, can bring a region's impervious surface well over 10%, so even a fairly green suburban area alters local water quality. But it also suggests that wise decisions by individual homeowners can be of real help. For example, if water runs off your roof or patio, provide a place for it to hit the dirt and soak in instead of going down the driveway or street. Wet swales and "rain gardens" can help, and if properly landscaped and planted, are a pleasant addition to the yard. If stone or gravel can substitute for solid cement or asphalt, that too can help. Roof water can be collected in rain barrels and used for watering lawn and garden.

There's plenty of information for homeowners who want to work with their rainfall. Try these, for starters:

<http://clean-water.uwex.edu/pubs/raingarden>

http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1594/is_1_14/ai_96195510

http://ci.pierre.ed.us/images/NPS_Urban-facts_minal.pdf



Whitewater!

The next release of whitewater in Schaghticoke Gorge by Brascan Co. is planned for Saturday, April 16, 1 to 4 PM, conditions permitting.

Join HoorWA and help build a better Hoosic Watershed!

I want to be a part of HoorWA and work for a biologically healthy, economically vibrant, and ecologically sustainable Hoosic River watershed.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

I'm interested in volunteering for HoorWA projects.

Enclosed are my membership dues for the calendar year 2005.

- Student \$20
- Family \$35
- Kingfisher \$50
- Great Blue Heron \$100
- River Steward \$500
- Other amount _____

I enclose an additional _____ contribution.

Please return to HoorWA, P.O. Box 667, Williamstown, MA, 01267

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The HooRWA Report

Flotsam

Have slides, will travel

Are you in charge of finding speakers for your organization? A teacher with an environmental science class? If you need a presentation about river health, river issues, or results of water quality monitoring in the Hoosic and its tributaries, HooRWA may have the PowerPoint program you need. Our presentations have been used in college classes and teacher workshops, and are suitable for community organizations as well. Contact us at 413-458-2742 or hoorwa@berkshire.net to discuss the possibilities!

Williams Connections

HooRWA salutes **Blake Goebel, Ashlee Martinez, Keith McWhorter, and Katie Stevens** for working on a study of the Hoosic this spring. Watch for a summary of their results! HooRWA also welcomes our new Williams College summer intern, **Erin Blanchard**.

Have You Seen Me?



Have you seen a wood turtle? Wood turtles are found in or near rivers or streams, or in nearby woods and fields. We would like to know where wood turtles live along the Hoosic and its tributaries.

Identification

Wood turtles have brownish gray shells, often with many fine ridges, a jagged rear edge to the upper shell, orange markings on neck and legs, and yellow bottom shells, often with black blotches.

If you find one

Please note the EXACT location.

Take pictures of turtle, top and bottom, if you can.
Contact HooRWA (413-458-2742; hoorwa@berkshire.net) and Drew Jones, Hopkins Forest (413-597-4353).