

2008 Riverfest Review



A Report by

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General Synopsis of Event

The 2008 Presumpscot Riverfest was organized to celebrate the Presumpscot River, as well as increase public awareness about the efforts of the Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition and its member organizations. It was held on the morning of July 19th at the Riverbank Park in Westbrook. An Americorps volunteer at the DEP and a USM student-intern organized the event. This report contains a review of the day's accomplishments and shortcomings, along with recommendations for any subsequent River Festivals that might be held. Many of the opinions and observations within the report are based upon surveys distributed to member organizations after the Riverfest, and also from a discussion of the event at a PRWC meeting following the event.

Riverfest 2008 provided a robust perspective on what a dedicated group of people can offer to their community, as well as how difficult it can be to enlist sufficient support and funding for such an event. At the Riverfest there were many wonderful organizations who shared their missions and work with the public. Community members who attended the event gained a greater understanding of what PRWC is doing and why. The shortcoming, however, was that there were not as many community members nor member organizations at the event as had been hoped for. The tables and information that were offered were both attractive and inclusive, though they represented less than half of PRWC's organizational make-up. Similarly, though we accomplished our goal of just over 200 people attending, this was not enough to make the event feel full, nor to make the tablers feel that they reached a significant portion of the community. The greatest success of the day was surely the children's activity tent, which remained busy all morning. While this area could have used more and better-prepared volunteers, those who were there provided a fun and educational morning.

The most needed and difficult to enlist resources for an event such as this are money and people's time. Both of these things were lacking in the planning of the 2008 Riverfest. With increased funds the day would have run more smoothly and would have

~General Synopsis~

potentially drawn a larger crowd through increased advertising. Few organizations had man-hours to contribute to planning or taking part in the day's activities. Overall, the day was technically a success, which was executed with virtually no significant failings. However, it seems that the general feeling of many PRWC members who took part was of some degree of disappointment. Because events such as this tend to increase in popularity with successive implementation, we should hope that if the event is to take place next year it will only be a greater success. However, should the event be planned for 2009, PRWC must assure that there is at least one full time person dedicated to planning, that planning duties are more equitably distributed among the member organizations, and that planning and advertising are begun immediately.

[Tables contain opinions and statements offered in response to surveys and at PRWC meetings. See Attachment A for a transcript of this meeting]

~General Synopsis~

Educational Activities

Most educational activities were focused on children and held in the "Kids Tent." These included the building of rainsticks, fish prints of a real flounder, seed planting in recycled news paper pots, fishing for laminated native warm and cold water fish, and examining composting red worms. There were two guided walks, one directed toward children and focused on native and invasive plants along the river, and the other directed toward adults and relating to the theme of natural history along the river. There was an ongoing demonstration of how to fly-fish. The Youth Conservation Corps demonstrated a riparian buffer planting on the riverbank.



Exploring Composting Worms

<u>Educational Activities</u>	
Positive Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good environmental theme. • Kids tent was packed the whole time.
Points of Concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No attendance of guided walks. • No real interaction with the river. • YCC planting should have been more accessible. • Volunteers had no base or initial knowledge of activities, so they were not able to fully teach the activity.
Next Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get people on the water. • Make theme more tied to the river. • Have an organized race or walk along the river, or a sponsored paddle. • Have a self-guided walk. Creating this would be a resource that could be used outside of the Riverfest setting. • Have specific volunteers assigned to activities to encourage better organization and more educational emphasis.

~Educational Activities~

The children's activity tent was considered to be the big success of the day at Riverfest. The tent was full all day long, the kids had a wonderful time, and the activities were deemed to have a good environmental theme and were "not tacky." There was a lack of informed volunteers present in the children's tent, however, minimizing the educational platform. Ideally each activity would be staffed by one or more volunteers (rather than several activities run by one volunteer) who have a dynamic understanding of the themes that should be imparted. In many ways the activities were simply completed, rather than taught or discussed.

The guided walks were completely unattended. For next year, one suggested solution to this issue was to create a self-guided walk along the river that includes land-use and natural history, geography, and so on. This would allow Riverfest attendees to complete the walk when they have a free moment in the day. Additionally, this would be a resource that could be used outside of the Riverfest setting.

One concern that repeatedly came up was the complete lack of interaction with the river. The YCC buffer planting was the only opportunity to get close to the river. Because of the site that was chosen, this activity was very minimally attended. It was felt that the planting should have been more centrally located so that it was more prominent and attracted a large audience. It was strongly felt that there should have been some activities that got people down to the water. Some suggested ideas were a foot race along the river, or a sponsored paddle. This would increase the attendance at the festival as well by pulling in those members of the community who are interested in being involved in running/walking or boating events.

Member-Organization Festival Presentations

There were eleven organizations that attended Riverfest to present informational tables. These included Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition, Friends of Presumpscot River, Presumpscot River Watch, Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Youth Conservation Corps, The National Weather Service (in correlation with the NOAA Fisheries Service), Presumpscot Regional Land Trust and The Sebago to the Sea Initiative, The US Environmental Protection Agency, The Department of Environmental Protection, and the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership. All the tables were considered to be very attractive and informative. Those who manned the tables felt that the event was a great opportunity to interact not only with the public, but also with representatives of the other groups.



Fred Dillon at the PRW Display

<u>Festival Presentations</u>	
Positive Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very attractive.
Points of Concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More would have been good.
Next Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase member organization involvement in planning of event to potentially improve each group's investment, increasing the likelihood that they will participate by tabling.

While eleven groups attended the event, twelve member groups did not attend. It would have been beneficial to have a greater proportion of organizations take part. Most groups who did not attend reported that the primary reason they did not was because of a lack of volunteers to staff the tables. It was suggested that by delegating specific areas of event planning to member organizations would increase each group's investment in the event as well as relieve some of the planning demands from the single group doing the primary planning (this year, the DEP).

Entertainment

The entertainment at this year's Riverfest included four musical acts, one storyteller and several speakers. The Mary Bastioni and Tom Redmann Band started off the day with cover tunes that were nicely tied to the conservation theme. This act was followed by a Keynote address by PRWC Chair, Will Plumley, regarding the progress of the Presumpscot River since the inception of the Coalition. Up next was storyteller Pat Gardner, who told tales of animals, rivers, and the environment. Local singer/songwriter Ben Kilcollins was the entertainment highlight of the day for many, though the Sam Anderson band was a great rival. Rob Sanford, Professor of Environmental Science and Policy at USM spoke late in the day about the significance of the Presumpscot to the local culture and ecosystems, as well as Friends of the Presumpscot's efforts to publish a book about the river. The last act of the day was a Samba Marching Band that got everyone's feet moving



Rob Sanford Speaking at the Riverfest

<u>Entertainment</u>	
Positive Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music was fabulous, many songs tied to a conservation theme. • Good pace. • Giveaway items were great, “good names” who made donations.
Points of Concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give away was unorganized, with no clear point. • Need an announcer. • Designated PA system was needed, couldn't hear the beginning of the event.
Next Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More focus on the river topic, balanced by entertainment, discussion of river issues. • Include a PA in the planning budget. • Have a designated announcer or “master of ceremonies. • Include a discussion panel and/or a “big name” speaker to draw in a larger and more specific crowd.

~Entertainment~

While the music and entertainment was fabulous by all accounts, there were several shortcomings in this area of the event that should be taken into consideration by the next planning crew. One failing that was recognized was the PA system. Participating bands provided the two systems used throughout the day. The system used early in the morning was neither loud nor clear. The storyteller and first speaker (Will Plumley) were almost inaudible, except by those immediately in front of the stage. This problem was primarily rooted in an issue that had many repercussions at the event: Funding. With extremely limited funding, many corners needed to be trimmed. While renting a sound system was contemplated as a way to save money, we decided against it when two of the bands offered to share their equipment. This limited our ability to ensure that the sound would be consistent and sufficient to fill the location.

An additional weak-spot noted regarding the entertainment was the lack of a designated announcer. This lent a significant degree of disorganization and confusion to the stage. One speaker (Will Plumley) was not introduced at all and the bands and storyteller all got differing and inequitable degrees of introduction and promotion. Another factor implicated in the need for a designated announcer was the complete lack of organization around the distribution of the door prizes. While it was decided that it was best, with the time available, to use donated items for a door prize give-away rather than a raffle, the process was referred to by some announcers as a raffle and by others as a give away. While the prizes were considered to be wonderful and very applicable to the river theme, the overall process was disorganized and confusing. Many thought that with an announcer the process and purpose of the give away could have been made clear, offering the entire situation a greater degree of efficiency.

Finally, it was suggested that in coming years the entertainment be more balanced with increased discussion of river issues and a larger focus on river and conservation/restoration efforts. A panel discussion or a question and answer period with an interested crowd would be very beneficial to the Coalition. Including a “big name” speaker could also attract a larger and potentially more niche audience.

~Entertainment~

Volunteers

Volunteers at the event included YCC crewmembers, Americorps workers, DEP staff (and staff family), and a PRWC intern. Volunteers ran the children's tent, the information table, and helped to do all fo the set up and take down at the event.



Volunteer Fred Gallant Demonstrating Fly Fishing

Volunteers	
Positive Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YCC involvement was great.
Points of Concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YCC rescued us by helping with the tent setup. • Volunteer food tent needs to be set up in more of an exclusive manner.
Next Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More of them!

Resourcing volunteers was a major impediment that we came up against in the planning of this event. We would have liked to have many more hands to help with all aspects of the event, but simply could not find them. Additionally, the primary reason given by member organizations for not being involved by tabling at the event, was that they did not have a volunteer who had time to attend.

The Youth Conservation Crew members who came to do the Riparian Buffer Planting came early to the event and helped to set up. Without this assistance, it would have been virtually impossible to do all of the set up (erecting tents, moving tables, etc.) that was required. For the set up we had 7-9 people and, still, it was a scramble to complete everything in 2 hours. For improved organization of lay-out, information, and activities there should be significantly more volunteers available.

One idea to increase access to volunteers was to plan the event earlier in the summer and use the local high schools as a resource.

~Volunteers~

Promotion

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A great deal of effort was put into promoting this event. Fliers were spread all over the cities of Portland, Westbrook, and Gorham, in coffee shops, restaurants, grocery stores, on bulletin boards and light poles and any where else that was available. There were several 'blurbs' in the Portland Press Herald, including one in the summer events insert. The event was posted on the online events calendar of many groups. A large Riverfest banner was displayed at Riverbank Park for the week before the event, and posted on a flashing road sign during the event.

~Promotion~

Promotion	
Positive Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flashing signs were good • Good representation in the Portland Press Herald
Points of Concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needed to be more promotion • Too much of a family emphasis • Need PRCW banner on the stage • Little identification of event to passers by
Next Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a media sponsor, have them at the event with a radio remote station

Many felt that the event was not promoted well enough, because there was a relatively low turn-out. Some considerations were that the event was promoted too much as a family event, rather than a public informational occasion, and that the promotional poster should have been larger and more professional. Again, the poster was on standard letter paper and printed simply because printing at the DEP was a free resource, so it was used in light of limited funds.

One idea that was presented to alleviate these problems next year is to find a media sponsor. This way the event would be repeatedly mentioned publicly, and there would be the opportunity to have a remote radio station at the event, drawing people in.

Promotion of PRWC at the event was also seen to be somewhat lacking. I was felt that passers by would not be able to identify the event and so would not drop in. The stage had no banner posting the event's information, so any photos or videos taken by the media would not clearly express what the event was.

~Promotion~
Other Issues

<u>Other Issues</u>	
Positive Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good location.
Points of Concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needed to start later in the day. • Tents too far apart. • Sparse attendance. • Equipment (tables/chairs) were not available enough –should rent next time. • Budget too tight. • Liability insurance was a problem.
Next Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheduling of event: Consider Partnering with Together Days or scheduling in June, just after school is out- this would potentially enable both promotion through the schools as well as accessing student volunteers (Westbrook schools have a community involvement requirement). • Distribute organizational responsibilities better throughout the member organizations. • Ensure plenty of parking. • Have food vendors. • Involve local farms- CCSWCD, Local Sprouts.

- Attendance and Resource Concerns

The two root issues that were repeatedly mentioned by those who took part in the event were the lack of attendance and the lack of particular resources that could not be accessed because of funding concerns.

Some felt that the event was poorly attended because it was not at the best time of day (9am- 1pm) and should have started later. Other ideas were to schedule the event early in the summer so that it could be promoted in the schools before they let out. Or to partner the Riverfest with the Westbrook together days to piggyback on their publicity.

The event was teetering on the possibility of being cancelled only days before taking place because of the uncertainty of who was going to provide liability insurance. This imperative could not simply be purchased by PRWC because there were not enough funds to do so. Set up of the event was slowed by the lack of access to tables and chairs that the VFW had donated use of. Having rented them could have alleviated this issue.

~Other Issues~

Similarly, setting up the tents was an intensive and time-consuming chore that could have been by-passed if the funds were available to professionally erect them. The issue of funding was a major impediment to many aspects of planning and promoting this event. If the event is to take place again, this should be taken into consideration.

- Food

Food was a concern that was repeatedly voiced throughout the planning process. While all agreed that it would have been ideal to have some sort of food vendor at the event, it proved to be difficult to implement. The City of Westbrook requires a relatively expensive permit for any sort of street vending, and only one dealer held one at the time of the festival. This hot-dog cart had agreed to attend, then did not show up. Other ideas were to have a bake sale, BBQ, or other form of non-profit group fund-raiser, but no organization expressed interest. We also attempted to involve farms within the watershed to see if a farmer's market could be formed. Nearly one dozen were contacted, but with no response. One idea for next year was to contact the newly formed Local Sprouts organization to see if they would 'cater' the event. This group is a non-profit that does BBQs and catering, using only local food and gives all proceeds to efforts attempting to get local food into school lunches.

- Planning

One final consideration for next years planning was to more evenly distribute the planning duties throughout the member organizations. This would not only relieve some of the heavy burden that was felt at the DEP (who's Americorps worker did most of the event planning), but also perhaps improve involvement at the event by member organizations, because they would have more invested.

~Other Issues~
Attachment A

Riverfest Flip Charts from July 24, 2008 PRWC meeting

Transcribed by Diane Gould

What Worked

Kids setup - Events, personnel, environmental theme, quality fantastic
- Tent was packed the whole time

Giveaway and prizes were good

- Many sponsors stepped up, with big names

YCC involvement

Music

Pacing of the event

Booths were great – 9 or 10

YCC saved us by helping with setup

Lee and Margaret did an excellent job

Beverly smoothed the process and made it work

Location was fantastic

Flashing signs

What Didn't Work

Guided walks (no attendance)

Timing – Start later

No real interaction with the river (except planting)

Wasn't a raffle (call it what it is)

Giving out prizes was unorganized, with no clear purpose

Needs an announcer

Tents too far apart (a bit)

YCC planting was too far away

PA system- Couldn't hear during early part of festival

Sparse attendance

Jeff didn't announce Will

Wish more PRWC groups had booths

Tables were not available to extent promised

Tight budget (?)

Was "Family" emphasis too strong?

Liability insurance was a hassle

No PRWC signage on stage

Little identity to passersby

Volunteers Food Tent – out in the open [public wandered in]

~Attachment A~

Ideas for 09

Get people onto the water

Have a sound system for speakers (our own system)

Plan with the YCC and assign roles and why [connect each activity with the river]

Have an organized race/walk along the river

More focus on river and topic – balanced with entertainment

Radio remote and promo (WCLZ)

-Media sponsor

Reconsider partnering with Together Days

Need more volunteers to work the festival

Consider scheduling in June (end of school) – just before Together days

Sponsored paddle

Who is the lead organization for 09?

-Distribute the labor more

Info sheet for self-guided walk

Do more organized approach to publicity

Make sure there is enough parking

Mid-day with food vendors? – Don's Lunch

Involve local farmers –“Local Sprouts”

Need an announcer

~Attachment A~
Attachment B

PARTICIPANT SURVEY

ORGANIZATION AND NAME & TITLE OF REPRESENTATIVE:

ACTIVITIES AND INFORMATION OFFERED AT EVENT:

PLEASE RATE YOUR SATISFACTION WITH THE FOLLOWING:

ONE (1) BEING VERY DISSATISFIED. FIVE (5) AS VERY SATISFIED.

The overall Riverfest event:

1 2 3 4 5

The quality/applicability of the educational activities:

1 2 3 4 5

Availability of information about the event to your group:

1 2 3 4 5

Event's organization:

1 2 3 4 5

Accomplishment of the event's mission to increase public awareness about the efforts of PRWC:

1 2 3 4 5

The promotion of the event to the public:

1 2 3 4 5

Quality/applicability of the speakers:

1 2 3 4 5

What is the likelihood that your group will be involved in this event again?

1 2 3 4 5

What aspects of the event did you find to be the most beneficial to you, your organization, and/or the public?

What aspects were the least beneficial/appropriate?

Is there anything you feel should be added to next year's Riverfest?

Anything that should be done differently or not included?

Any additional comments?

~Attachment B~

Attachment C

2008 Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition
Riverfest 2008

Schedule of Events

- 9:15 **Mary Bastoni and
Tom Rebmann Band**
- 9:55 **Keynote Address: Will Plumley,**
 Chair of PRWC
 "The Progress of the Presumpscot"
- 10:05 **Storyteller, Pat Gardner**
- 10:05 **Riparian Buffer Planting**
 Demonstration with
 CCS&WCD /Youth Conservation Corps
 **Located along the river's edge
- 10:45 **Ben Kilcollins, Singer/Songwriter**
- 11:00 **Children's Nature Walk &
Scavenger Hunt**
 "Native and Exotic Plants"
 **Meet at Information Booth
- 11:35 **The Sam Anderson Band**
- 12:15 **Rob Sanford, USM Professor of**
 Environmental Science and Policy
 "Significance of the Presumpscot"
- 12:25 **Nature Walk**
 with Rob Sanford (see above)
 *"Reading the River: Landscape History
 along the Shoreline."*
 **Meet at Information Booth
- 12:25 **Samba Marching Band**

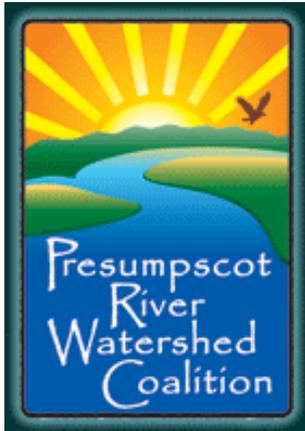
Ongoing Activities

Fly Fishing Demo: With Fred Gallant

KIDS! Watershed Passport: Please visit the
Information Booth to get your passport.
Complete three activities today and enter the drawing to win
fun prizes like a day pass to Aquaboggin or Funtown USA!

~Attachment C~

Attachment D



**Join Presumpscot River
Watershed Coalition for the
first annual
River Fest!**

Dear Members and Friends of PRWC:

The Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition is hosting the First Annual River Fest this summer. On July 19th from 9am-1pm we will be at Riverbank Park in Westbrook celebrating the Presumpscot River! This is going to be a family oriented event that includes live music, food, speakers, guided walks, children's activities, educational booths, demonstrations, and a raffle. Bring your family, friends, and neighbors together to learn about what is going on in the surrounding area to promote the recovery and long-term health of the Presumpscot River and its tributaries.

If this event is to be a success, we need your help! One of our goals for the River Fest is to increase the public's awareness of the many efforts underway to restore and protect the Presumpscot watershed. With your organization's involvement, your hard work will be recognized and promoted. This will be a great way to attract new members, promote your current programs and services, and, of course, enjoy a day beside the Presumpscot. Please consider including your organization in the day by providing an informational table and/or activity.

Thanks!

Margaret & Lee

**WE ENCOURAGE ALL MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS
TO RESERVE A TABLE FOR THIS EVENT!**

~Attachment D~
Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition
River Fest, 2008

Please fill out the following information and return to the address below by June 27th.

Organization/group _____

Contact Person _____

E-mail _____ Phone
Number _____

Whole or half table needed? _____ (tables are 8 feet)



ACTIVITIES:

Can your group lead a demonstration, speaker, or children's activity? Y/N

Would you prefer:

_____ To be in charge of an already planned activity (contact Margaret for a list.)

_____ Or can you provide your own? If providing your own, please describe below:

VENDING:

If you are a registered non-profit, this event is a wonderful opportunity to raise money by selling food and drink. A bake sale, popcorn machine, cake walk...be creative! If you are interested please indicate here what you could provide, and we will contact you.

DONATIONS:

Can your group make a donation of a free membership for our raffle? Y/N

~Attachment D~