

Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition
December 3, 2009
3:00 – 5:00 p.m.
@USM Wishcamper Center, Room 211

2010 Upcoming Meetings of the PRWC Board

January 28, 2010 Location TBD
March 25, 2010
(see the agenda for other 2010 meeting dates)

In attendance: Matt Craig - CBEP, Will Plumley - FOPR, Jeff Varricchione - DEP, Diane Gould – EPA, Richard Curtis – PRLT, Heather True – CCSWCD, Molly Casto – Portland Planning, Michele Windsor – DEP, Jim Gooch – TPL, Karen Wilson – USM Environmental Science

1. Introductions: Will led a round of introductions and reviewed the agenda.

2. Presumpscot Watershed Initiative: Will noted that the celebration of the completion of the Presumpscot Watershed Initiative would be postponed because some the key players couldn't make the meeting. Matt briefly described the project for the newer members present. Four years ago the PRWC and Casco Bay Estuary Partnership were awarded \$739,400 from EPA to address and mitigate cumulative impacts. The work of this major effort was done by multiple partners including Friends of Casco Bay, Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District, Casco Bay Estuary Partnership and 11 farms, 20 – 25 students through the YCC, SAPPI and multiple towns and land trusts. Will noted that three years ago, he and Matt went to a national meeting of Targeted Watershed Grant recipients in Albuquerque and met the other 11 new projects as well as representatives of ongoing projects. Matt is working on the final report, which will describe project accomplishments including planting of over 5,000 trees, problems addressed at 48 stream crossings, and 18 months of water quality data collected using 5 sondes, enhancing our knowledge of the river. Will noted the project “put us on the map.”

3. Fish Passage Prescription for Cumberland Mills: Will described the two days of hearings in Westbrook. He noted that Cumberland Mills is the first dam on the river and is not a hydro dam so it does not need a FERC license. Fish passage at Cumberland Mills would trigger fish passage for the dams upstream as required in the FERC licenses for those dams. After the FERC licenses were settled 3 years ago, FOPR requested that IF&W order SAPPI to install fish passage at Cumberland Mills, based on a 19th century Maine law that had never been invoked. After a delay during which SAPPI agreed to take down the dam then backed away from that agreement, in June of 2009 IF&W ordered fish passage to be installed. The next step was to determine the type, timetable, effectiveness and implementation plan for the fish passage.

At the two-day hearing two weeks ago SAPPI presented a proposal for one fish passage and a group consisting of FOPR, American Rivers, DMR, and USF&W proposed an alternative two-passage design (using both the freshet and the original channels). No closure was reached because late on day one, SAPPI engineering consultant Ball proposed a third approach involving mechanical flash boards and an inflatable bladder controlled by a computer which would drive most of the flow down the main channel so fish wouldn't use it and would use the freshet channel only, where the fish passage would

be installed. The hearing was extended until 1/20 so FOPR and others can review this new proposal. Hopefully, a decision will be made after that hearing. Will mentioned the strength of Gail Wipplehauser's (DMR) testimony on the potential for fish restoration in the river. In response to a question from Jim about whether PRWC should act as an intervener at this point, Will said he felt that could slow the process down. He noted that the passage would serve all indigenous sea run species. It wasn't clear whether eels would need a special passage.

Jim questioned whether public pressure could influence SAPPI's position. Will noted that SAPPI has benefited from the state-designated Pine Tree Development Zone but there is no quid pro quo.

Matt mentioned that with Smelt Hill Dam gone, Cumberland Mills is key in restoring the fish runs on the river. The bank restoration work at Smelt Hill is doing well, although boulders left by the ACOE are causing back eddy erosion at the dam removal site.

4. Look Ahead to 2010:

Sebago to the Sea Trail – Richard reported that the Sebago to the Sea group has laid out the trail at Sebago Lake following old roads through PWD land to the Mountain Division trail in Standish into Westbrook, then routing on public roads. They are looking at options to get to the sea, including a trail along the southern shore of the Presumpscot to East End Beach. The trails are 2/3 viable or in place with the rest being worked on. Three successful public meetings were held and the reception was very positive. One exception is a group concerned that the rail and trail can't co-exist due to lack of room. They were a small minority. The fundraising is going well. Julie Isbill has been facilitating the public meetings and has signed on for another year. Healthy Maine Partnerships joined and brought money to the project.

Matt asked whether anyone has asked the city to provide trail access at Riverside Golf Course. They were looking at Audubon Certification. Molly offered to look into the trail question.

While primarily a trail project, there will likely be some land conservation benefit as well (like the PWD easement). Richard noted that the organizations along the route of the trail would acquire land and easements, not the Sebago to the Sea group. Karen suggested that it would be good for fundraising to know how much usage the trail is getting. Molly mentioned that involving the police in trail design is helpful from a public safety perspective. Site plan standards are being adjusted to be consistent with plans supported by the city, like Portland Trails.

Land Conservation Vision, Values and Priorities- Will noted that this is a watershed-wide project to bring together stakeholders, towns, land trusts and others to create a shared vision and priorities. The first meeting was held with the Steering Committee in the spring. Matt and Will are managing the process. The Environmental Funder's Network has awarded PRWC (through CBEP) a grant to proceed with this effort. Two approaches proposed were the TPL Green Printing Process or a more organic process. The Steering Committee has agreed to use the more organic approach. Will is contracting with a facilitator to convene the stakeholders. Maine Center for GIS will work with them.

Jim noted that Green Printing is going forward in the Lakes Region (Loon Echo Land Trust and towns). Everyone agreed that the two projects should dovetail their efforts. Will noted that the Presumpscot River starts at White's Bridge.

Matt mentioned that working with the PRLT is an opportunity for synergy, taking advantage of the planning effort going on within PRLT. It is a nice feeder for the bigger project. Will mentioned that Rebecca Schaffner-Tousignant (GPCOG) is now also on the Steering Committee for the PRWC project.

Jim noted that need for an "organization to organize organizations." Grow Smart Maine used to do a summit. Perhaps Maine Land Trust Network could serve that role.

Lower River Reclassification – This is a 3-year effort. If successful, in 2012 the state will reclassify the lower river from C to B. In parallel, FOCB is working to get the estuary reclassified from SC to SB. There is no formal project team as yet other than the Executive Committee. Karen's class did a project in the spring to help lay out the DEP process and requirements. In May the class did a presentation for the PRWC. Dave Courtemanch from DEP attended and further clarified DEP's expectations. Matt noted that we will be redeploying the sondes and working with FOCB and USM to pull together the needed data. Will mentioned that the Westbrook POTW uses primary treatment only and perhaps we could galvanize support for higher standards.

FB Environmental is developing the Quality Assurance Project Plan for the project and will also develop the monitoring plan for the sondes. Karen noted that the approach being used to anchor buoys in the Penobscot might be useable for the sondes. FB Environmental will also train us to use the sondes so we can partner with USM and involve students in the project.

5. Open Forum – Matt mentioned that CBEP will receive an additional \$200,000 in 2010 and is looking for project ideas. He suggested that we ask for additional funds for the reclassification project.

Jeff mentioned that he is completing a report on a rapid habitat survey on the Presumpscot River. The report will include some potential restoration sites. He also reminded the group of the Suva property, which has serious erosion issues and noted that his study of geology maps suggests that the property is on an end moraine, explaining the tendency to erode.

Heather is preparing a s.319 proposal for the Pleasant River, focusing on bank failures and farm issues. She noted that there is a site where IF&W has identified erosion impacts on endangered freshwater mussels. Will said PRWC will write a letter of support for the 319 proposal.

Jim noted that the voters in Windham did not support the ballot initiative for a \$1 million dollar bond to purchase Clark Farm for preservation. TPL still hopes to salvage half the land.

Karen alerted us to the fact that the USM Dept. of Environmental Science requires students to do projects for a minimum of 120 hours (typically paid \$9.50 – \$10.50 an hour). The students are trained in planning, policy and aquatic science. We should take advantage of them.

6. Meeting Adjourned/Next meeting-The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 PM. The next PRWC meeting will be January 28th, 3 – 5 PM, location to be announced.