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Thank you!

NEWS • FORR

Friends of the Royal River

Volume 1, No. 1 Summer, 2003

FORR FINDS A HOME!

After ten years operating out of boxes and living rooms, Friends of the Royal River has opened offices beside its favorite river. Overlooking the Royal River in Yarmouth for over a century, the Sparhawk Mill offers spectacular views and wonderful white noise. Originally a cotton mill, the historic structure now houses light industry, several offices, a therapeutic massage studio, and an architectural firm. FORR has sublet two offices and access to a conference room in the rear of the former mill. Henry Nichols, Executive Director, occupies one office, while Benson Hyde, a summer intern, and volunteers use the other office. The Friends expect to be in the Sparhawk Mill for at least the next five years. We thank a very good friend for helping to provide this wonderful, newly renovated space.

After several hectic weeks improving the space, FORR hosted a reception in May to christen the new offices. Board members and friends pitched in to paint, hammer, clean and lay carpet. Generous donations have tastefully furnished and equipped the office, however, we are still in need of a small refrigerator, a copy machine, and a large conference table.

Friends of Royal River incorporated 10 years ago; this is the organization's first formal office space. An even more significant step was the hiring last winter of the organization's first executive director, Henry G. Nichols, who comes to the Friends with a Master's degree from Tufts University in Planning and Environmental Policy. He worked for the State of Maine for a dozen years gaining experience with land conservation. Having a full-time executive director has transformed FORR, allowing it to grow and become more active in looking for and responding to conservation opportunities.

Come by and visit! The office is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The offices are in the rear of the mill on the second floor. Henry Nichols can be reached at Royal@Maine.rr.com, or 847-9399.

Conservation Plan will encourage community participation

For the past several months, Friends of the Royal River (FORR) has been preparing a region-wide conservation plan for the Royal River watershed. This document will guide the organization's conservation activities for the foreseeable future. It is also an expression of FORR's commitment to protecting some of the area's special places and a realization that FORR needs to apply its limited resources to protecting land that has multiple values.

FORR is adapting a planning process developed by The Nature Conservancy for evaluating and planning conservation over large areas. The process includes identifying key conservation targets (values), developing goals to protect the targets, and preparing strategies for achieving the goals. FORR has been receiving help from people in the watershed's communities who are knowledgeable about local resources and eager to multiply their efforts to conserve important lands. Over the next two months the organization will be reaching out to other people and organizations to test ideas and gain (*cont'd, next page*)

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Friends of the Royal River

Conservation Plan

At the top of Friends of the Royal River's list of current projects is its conservation plan. "It's an effort to guide the organization's conservation actions in the foreseeable future," says director Henry Nichols. "Working with towns and other organizations in the area, we will identify values in the watershed that should be protected, along with goals and strategies for protecting them."

Public access and wildlife habitat, for example, might be preserved or enhanced by towns, private owners or organizations such as local land trusts or conservation commissions. The plan will identify strategies for protecting both. A committee of the board of directors is at work on the plan, which is scheduled to be complete by the end of 2003. (See related article.)

Easements

As a regional land trust, FORR stresses conservation easements as a tool for protecting land. This year, the organization has negotiated several easements in the watershed.

In May, FORR was granted a conservation easement on 29 acres near the Royal River in North Yarmouth. The easement preserves open space in connection with a development. FORR worked with the town, its conservation commission and planning board on this project, which protects future trail access. The easement allows no development but permits some forest management.

Also this year, FORR negotiated two easements on adjacent properties in the interval section of New Gloucester as part of a wetlands mitigation effort by the Maine Department of Transportation. One easement restricts uses on a privately owned 15-acre parcel; the other on 11 acres owned by a different individual. The easements allow no development and preserve a "forever wild" corridor along the Royal River.

In Yarmouth, FORR holds a pair of conservation easements covering two contiguous parcels of six acres and 55 acres on the historic Groves farm on Gilman Road. Maine Coast Heritage Trust and a neighborhood group helped the Town of Yarmouth purchase the properties and

(cont'd next page)

RIVER VIEW

by **Henry Nichols**, Executive Director FORR



Dear Friends,

Since coming to work for the Friends of the Royal River, I've met many wonderful people who are passionate about the Royal River watershed and its special places. One of those people is **Mary Holman** of North Yarmouth. Together with other river enthusiasts, Mary built this organization starting in 1992, and the members of the group quickly became water quality experts. At Mary's retirement from the Board of Directors last winter, the Friends honored her with an award for her years of service: an inscribed wooden canoe paddle. Because of Mary and many others, the Friends of the Royal River is regarded as a credible source of water quality information and a solid advocate for the river.

Today, the Friends of the Royal River (FORR) is blessed with a new group of dedicated, volunteer directors. In a short period of time, they have molded the organization into one that responds to water quality issues throughout the watershed, conserves wildlife habitat so important to the area's ecology, and works with the region's communities to help balance growth with strategic conservation.

We have much to be grateful for. A key supporter allowed us to open our first professional office this spring. Government, foundation and individual contributions have been instrumental in raising FORR's capacity to respond to conservation opportunities. Over the past 10 months, several landowners have granted FORR conservation easements on their property by donation. We now boast many new members and a growing volunteer base. These are the cornerstones of a successful organization. I thank each and every person who has contributed to our recent successes. Together, we will make a positive difference in our region's growth.

We are in the process of redesigning some of our mainstay communication pieces. Look for changes in the Friends newsletter and in our website (<http://develop.nmdg.com/virtualhosts/communities/royal/royal.htm>).

Thank you for your support and patience as we assemble these building blocks.

Regards,

Henry G. Nichols

HENRY NICHOLS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Plan (cont'd)

additional information. FORR is most grateful for the support received from the Davis Conservation Foundation and the Maine Community Foundation to help prepare this important plan. By this fall, the region will have an important tool that reflects the best thinking of its communities for conservation on a broad scale. Moreover, it will focus FORR's quest to conserve land and habitat, allowing the Royal River watershed to continue to function as a healthy system for years to come.



FORR Conservation Easement: Fields at Groves Farm off Gilman Road in Yarmouth. (photo: Chris Ayres)

DEP responds to oil spill in watershed

Last winter vandals opened valves on several locomotives parked on the St. Lawrence-Atlantic Railway track in Danville Junction, Auburn, allowing approximately 300 gallons of lubricating oil to spill into the gully that runs along the tracks.

This oil then seeped through the woods and into the neighboring wetlands, affecting the area between Turkey Brook and Moose Brook, headwater tributaries of the Royal River. The spill was not reported until the last week of May.

The Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) began efforts to mitigate the spill immediately. DEP's Greg O'Brien in Portland, the lead respondent dealing with this case, said that "as of today, the remediation of this property is predominantly complete and it is my belief that the Royal River is in no jeopardy." He also said that, despite the spill, "native flora and fauna have maintained natural behavior."

Cleanup crews clear-cut and removed approximately one-third of an acre during this remediation process. DEP has contacted local wetland specialists to discuss how best to revegetate the area. O'Brien reports that the specialists were very optimistic about the outcome of the revegetation process, saying that the "cleanup was performed such that encroachment (of non-native species) should not be an issue. In addition, they are going to seed with an indigenous sensitive fern that was predominantly present before. Given the resilient nature of the area, I don't see why there would be any evidence of this incident after a season or two."

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(Easements, cont'd) restrict the future use of each with conservation easements. Yarmouth manages the larger parcel for "passive" recreation such as hiking and cross-country skiing while a new landowner is restoring the farmhouse and barns on the smaller parcel.

Guiding Development

In early July, FORR provided extensive written comments to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on Morin Brick Company's application to extend its Auburn clay-mining operation. The site is within the Royal River watershed and affects water quality in Moose Brook, a tributary. In written comments, Henry Nichols expressed concern about the potential destruction of wetlands and the need to compensate for their loss. He also urged that regulatory agencies insist on adequate monitoring "so they can assure the public that the Moose Brook and its riparian corridor are functioning at a level equal to or greater than current conditions."

If you haven't already, please JOIN US to make a difference in the communities of the Royal River watershed!

Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution:

- Founding Friend: \$500
 Sustaining Friend: \$250
 Royal Friend: \$100
 Best Friend: \$50
 Friend: \$25

Name _____

Address _____

Town _____

State & Zip _____

Phone _____

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I'd like to volunteer. Please contact me!

THANK YOU!

Please make checks payable to: **FORR**, and send to: PO Box 90 Yarmouth, ME 04096