

ROYAL RIVER
CONSERVATION TRUST

Currents

Conserving land for people, wildlife, clean water, and the future

Yarmouth Studies the Royal River and its Dams

Dam removal wasn't on the agenda.

Still, a large crowd filled Yarmouth's Log Cabin March 31 to learn more about the Royal River Restoration Study.

After three formal presentations and a question and answer period, it was clear that the study would pave the way for informed public discussion of many alternatives—including dam removal. But those discussions are well down the road.

The focal point of the 90-minute session was a presentation by Michael Chelminski, representing Stantec Consulting Services, contractor for the study. Chelminski said the goal is "to develop and assess options to restore fisheries and aquatic habitat."

Chelminski acknowledged that "what dams do is change habitat," but he made it clear that dam removal has multiple implications and the study is designed to research and evaluate many of them — including effects on the harbor, hydropower, groundwater, existing infrastructure, recreational and other uses, and on archaeological and historical (tribal) resources.

Even as he identified the existing elements of the work, Chelminski emphasized the need for feedback regarding future components.

Framing these remarks were presentations by Josh Royte, of the Yarmouth Parks and Public Lands Committee, and Landis Hudson, president of Maine Rivers.

Royte's topic was "Why We Are Studying the River." He cited the hundreds of miles of mapped wildlife habitat and the diverse recreational uses enjoyed by many in the audience.

Hudson spoke on "Why Rivers Matter." She highlighted the importance of the connectivity between fresh and salt water for wildlife of all varieties.

The question and answer period that followed was led by Chelminski but often included input from Eric Hutchins, representing the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), a principal source of funds for the initiative.

Hutchins noted that the work to date is "an extremely preliminary feasibility study" and that the outcomes will be entirely "community based."

Yarmouth Town Manager Nat Tupper closed the meeting emphasizing that this was "just the beginning of the conversation" and that getting the right information from research and citizens alike was essential to resolving inevitable

questions about resource and infrastructure management.

Stantec expects to issue a draft report to the public in May or June and plans to hold a public meeting on that draft to solicit comments and answer questions. A final report is likely in September and October.



Dams on the Royal River were built for various purposes including water storage and power generation. Photo by David Platt.

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Letter from the President

Since late January, the board has been developing a strategic plan for the Royal River Conservation Trust. The Land Trust Alliance supported this work by providing Deb Chapman, a consultant with the Maine Land Trust Network. Deb has very ably guided the RRCT board through this process. I was struck by how she characterized our organization.

“You are transitioning from a young to a mature organization. RRCT is like an adolescent,” she told us. With the last of three children nearly in college, I know this teen-age stage! Our “growth spurt,” merging with four land trusts over the past few years, has made us a little lanky and clumsy at times. And like most teen-agers, we want to do everything and go everywhere, but can’t possibly do it.

When we first talked about strategic planning, a few board members



outlined their work for the next couple of years and could use additional help fortifying their programs. Please call our office if you’d like to help us further conservation in our communities.

— Gro Flatebo, President RRCT

groaned. However, I think we have all seen the benefit of stepping back and shoring up our organization. It is helpful to define what we need to work on for the next few years.

Our strategic plan will focus our energy, build efforts toward land trust accreditation, and highlight areas where we need to grow. We are defining roles and expectations for our board, staff and volunteers — highlighting board needs and refocusing on volunteers. Several of our committees have



Deschampsia
Illustration by Amanda Devine

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RRCT to Fill Stewardship Position

Stewardship coordinator Amanda Devine left RRCT at the end of 2009 for a new position with Maine Coast Heritage Trust. We have missed her this winter, and now a board committee is moving ahead on the difficult task of finding a new person to fill this important job.

A job description and position announcement posted in February on the website of the Maine Land Trust Network brought in more than 20 resumes, many from very well qualified individuals. Working with director Henry Nichols the committee narrowed down the field to half a dozen. As of early April the committee was scheduling interviews in hopes of having a candidate on the job as early as possible in the field season.

The stewardship coordinator position at RRCT is half time. Under an arrangement worked out two years ago, the Town of Yarmouth contracts with RRCT for the other half of the coordinator’s week.

Bath Savings Institution and Norway Savings Bank both provide financial support to RRCT, which is gratefully acknowledged. Both banks make donations to our organization when someone opens a new account at their Yarmouth branches. Additionally, Norway Savings has generously provided RRCT with meeting space on several occasions over the past six months. We truly appreciate this terrific support from these two local, community-minded businesses.

Grant Helps RRCT Learn More About Local Farms



Preserving working landscapes is key to local food production. Photo by Henry Nichols.

Let's face it: the most delicious tomatoes are those that haven't had to travel far. The same can be said for most food. The more local it is, the better it tastes. That certainly was the case last fall when RRCT hosted a dinner prepared by well-known local chefs — using local food, exclusively. Proceeds from this event helped RRCT purchase a conservation easement on a farm in Durham. That farm is now producing local food.

The experience got us thinking. What is the future of farming in our region and where should we be directing our attention? Early discussions with the Maine Farmland Trust indicate that a joint farmland project might be in

our future. People looking to purchase existing farms and restrict future uses to agriculture have contacted RRCT. We knew we needed to learn more about farm resources in the Royal River region.

Thanks to a grant from a donor-advised fund managed by the Maine Community Foundation, RRCT will be gathering information about prime agricultural soils, working farms and opportunities for working with farmland owners this year. "We are optimistic that this strategic grant from MCF will help identify and launch our next great farm project," says Fred Fauver of RRCT's board of directors. "Given the pressure in our region

to convert working landscapes into suburban uses, we feel it is extremely important to protect these essential, local assets so they can continue to produce local food."

RRCT plans to update its region-wide conservation plan with new data on farmland and share information with our project partners. Before long we hope to help additional farmers who are interested in seeing their properties remain agricultural. That way, we can help protect these precious resources for future consumers of local produce. Don't forget: that local tomato is the best-tasting one you'll ever find.

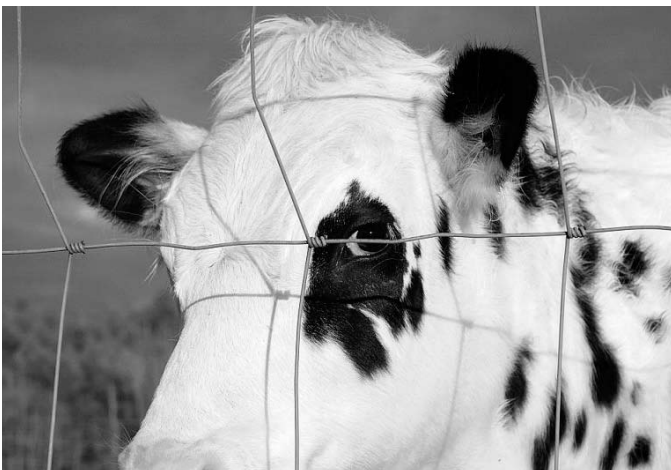


Photo by Duncan Chesley



Photo by Henry Nichols

Pisgah Hill: RRCT Reaches for the Heights

Months ago when we began working on the Pisgah Hill Project in New Gloucester, we were unaware that “Pisgah” was a biblical reference. Depending on the source, Pisgah is defined as a “high place” such as the top of a mountain or the “name of the mountain east of the River Jordan, whence Moses was allowed to view the Promised Land he could not enter.”

Regardless of its ancient meaning, today the Pisgah Hill Project represents an outstanding opportunity for a conservation area of regional and community significance. And while we can’t necessarily see the Promised Land from the top of Pisgah Hill, one can see Mt. Washington to the west and Casco Bay to the east.

Thanks to the generosity of several landowners, lead gifts from area

residents, and grants from the Land for Maine’s Future program, William P. Wharton Trust, Margaret Burnham Charitable Trust, and the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership — the Pisgah Hill Campaign Committee (PHCC) is closer to its goal of conserving over 200 acres around New Gloucester’s second highest point of land. Moreover, once conserved, the land surrounding Pisgah Hill will continue to shelter a wide variety of wildlife and provide an exciting link to the Bradbury-to-Pineland trail system.

PHCC has set a local goal of raising \$94,000 in private donations — as of this writing, RRCT has received pledges and contributions for a substantial portion of this amount. “At kitchen tables far and near from Pisgah Hill, we are meeting with families and asking them to invest in this once-in-a-lifetime community asset,” says Mark Power,

chair of the Pisgah Hill Campaign Committee. “We are so impressed by their generosity and understanding that this project will be part of our legacy to future generations.”

RRCT has options to purchase several of the key properties in this eight parcel project and is working with the remaining landowners to strike similar agreements. These options expire in August 2010, so the campaign committee is working hard to raise the funds necessary — so that Moses or anyone else will have access to these beautiful lands, later this year and forever.

With landowner permission, local conservationists are leading walks up and around Pisgah Hill this spring. Please see the Calendar of Events or call Henry Nichols at 847-9399 if you are interested.

Get Involved!

RRCT is all about appreciating the outdoors, and spring is a great time to get out on our preserves. Every year volunteers help us maintain our trails, trimming brush and clearing what winter has left behind. In addition, we’re organizing a canoe trip, a tree-planting project and several walks. For details on some of these opportunities, see page 5.

Thursday, April 8 Pisgah Hill Walk

Sunday, April 11 Pisgah Hill Walk

Sunday, April 18 Pisgah Hill Walk

Sat/Sun, April 24/25 Sabbathday to the Bay
Canoe/Kayak Adventure

Saturday, May 11 Trail building, Chandler Brook

Saturday, May 15 Trail building, New Gloucester
Intervale Preserve

Wednesday, May 19 NYA Community Service Volunteers
tree planting at Littlejohn Preserve

Thursday, June 17 RRCT Annual Meeting, site to be
announced.



Durham Conservation Commission led a walk showing people RRCT’s latest farm project on Davis Road in Durham. Photo by Russ Jabaut.

The Details...

Chandler Brook Trail. Help build a new section of trail connecting Tryon Fields with Snowfields along Chandler Brook, and clear winter debris from the existing trail. Picnic along the shady banks of the Chandler, in the brilliant spring sun under the red-budded oaks at the top of Tryon Fields, or with your feet dangling into the old feldspar quarries on near-by Tryon Mountain. Meeting place: Tryon Monument, Lawrence Road, Pownal, ca. one mile north of its intersection with Elmwood Road. Bring work gloves, pruning saws, lopping shears, picnic lunch. **Saturday, May 1, 10 a.m.** Really bad weather date: the following day, if the weather has improved. For more information call Fred Fauver, 688-6255.

It's mating time on the **New Gloucester Intervale Preserve!** The Town of New Gloucester hides a world-class birding destination in the marshy lowlands along the Royal River, and RRCT is lucky to be the custodian of some 40 acres of this. The task on this trail day is to clear a modest loop trail on the perimeter of the small finger of upland habitat that extends out into the marsh, as well as a couple of humble lookouts. Bring work gloves, pruning saws, lopping shears, picnic lunch. And binoculars — you never can tell what you might catch a glimpse of out there in the cattails!

Meeting place: The really wide spot in Route 231, $\frac{3}{4}$ mile south of its intersection with Cobb's Bridge Road. **Saturday, May 15, 10 a.m.** Really bad weather date: the following day, if the weather has improved. For more information, call Fred Fauver, 688-6255.

Pisgah Hill is New Gloucester's highest point. With the help of others, RRCT is leading a campaign to protect 200 acres around it. This spring, with landowner permission, local conservationists are leading walks up and around Pisgah Hill. Walks are planned for **Thursday, April 8, at 5 p.m., Sunday, April 11 at 1 p.m., and Sunday, April 18, at 1 p.m.** For more information contact Henry Nichols at the RRCT office,



847-9399. For details on RRCT's Pisgah Hill project, see page 4.

Be part of a canoe/kayak trip that will follow the entire course of the Royal River, from its birth at the headwaters of Sabbathday Lake, to the sea! The date is set: **Saturday, April 24, starting at 7 a.m.** We'll meet at the south end of Sabbathday Lake, parking in the

Sabbathday Grange lot. We will paddle down the lake to the outlet, and then proceed over the Outlet Road and on to the Royal River. Be prepared for some short portaging, flat water, quick water, and Class II whitewater.

Depending on conditions and energy level, we'll call it a day somewhere in New Gloucester, perhaps pulling out at Route 231 (Intervale Road). On Sunday we'll get up and continue the trip. Suitable craft include canoes or kayaks.

This should be a good time of year with plenty of water in the river making our trip more enjoyable, and a good chance to feel and experience our watershed firsthand as it awakens in early spring prior to emergence of black flies or mosquitoes. In case of flooding or poor weather, the trip will be postponed to May 1.

In addition to a canoe or kayak, all should bring food, water and a lifejacket with warm poly pro type clothing. Should you be unable to paddle, there may be some space to sit in a canoe and leave the paddling to others. A planning meeting is scheduled for April 8 at RRCT headquarters in Yarmouth. For details call the RRCT office, 847-9399, or check the RRCT website.

Work is continuing to improve public access and amenities at RRCT's **Littlejohn Island**

Preserve. A new sign will be placed at the parking lot, where a general upgrade is planned. In addition, volunteers are needed to continue bridging boggy areas on the preserve's trails and controlling invasive plants. For information contact the RRCT office, 847-9399.

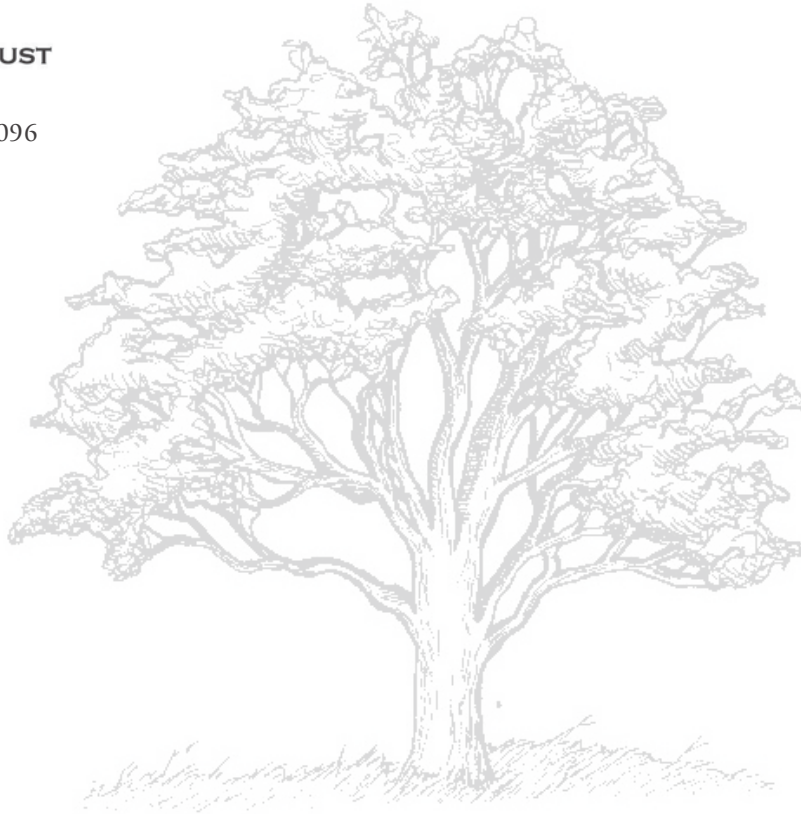


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RRCT will not share your information with anyone. **THANK YOU!!!**
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