

News from the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services



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Merrimack Village Dam Removal Celebrated

DES, Pennichuck Water, Inc and other project partners gather

Merrimack, NH – The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services today joined Pennichuck Water Inc., the National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration (NOAA), and other project partners to celebrate the removal of the unused Merrimack Village Dam (MVD) at the mouth of the Souhegan where it empties into the Merrimack River. The event was hosted by the dam's current owner, Pennichuck Water Inc., at the Merrimack Fire Station adjacent to the Dam site.

“The removal of the Merrimack Village Dam will eliminate a barrier to migrating fish and improve the overall ecology of the Souhegan River,” stated DES Commissioner, Tom Burack. “The DES Dam Removal and River Restoration Program is very proud of the MVD removal project. It provides a visual demonstration of the success that the program and its broad list of partners and supporters have achieved in protecting, enhancing and restoring New Hampshire’s natural resources.”

According to Steve Densberger, Executive Vice President of Pennichuck Corporation, removal of the dam will restore 14 miles of the river to its natural condition. Ever since the 18th Century, when dams were constructed at the mouth of the river to power local industry, upstream fish passage to almost the entire length of the river has been effectively blocked. The dam being removed was constructed in various stages between 1880 and 1907.

Densberger also stated: “Back in 1964, when Pennichuck first acquired the dam, it was primarily to protect and control a source of drinking water supply for the region. However, the dam, originally constructed to power a gristmill, has outlived its usefulness. This community is best served by returning the river to its natural state for both the safety and environmental concerns of today. The removal of the dam constitutes an important milestone in our region’s history.”

The Souhegan is one of the most important rivers for the Merrimack Watershed Anadromous Fish Restoration Program, and one of the fourteen New Hampshire rivers designated for special protection under the DES Rivers Management and Protection Program. The Souhegan River Local Advisory Committee is currently writing a first-time management plan for the entire river. Removal of the dam constitutes the first and most important element of this plan.

“The Merrimack Village Dam removal project is a great example of how citizens, conservation groups and agencies can work together to successfully restore a river. Removing this outdated dam will provide community benefits as well as ecosystem restoration. Not only was \$590,000 committed to the project, a tremendous amount of time, expertise, cooperation and volunteerism went to further supplement costs and ensure the success of the project,” adds Eric Hutchins, Gulf

of Maine Habitat Restoration Coordinator of the National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration (NOAA), US Department of Commerce.

Efforts to remove the dam began in 2000, when state officials notified the dam's owner, Pennichuck Water, that the dam was structurally deficient and needed repairs. Pennichuck Water began exploring the possibility of removing the dam when its studies determined that the costs of repairing and maintaining the dam did not justify the benefits of keeping it.

Planning and impact studies for the project were contracted to Gomez and Sullivan Engineers, P.C., of Weare, NH and Utica, NY; and actual physical removal of the dam was carried out by Costello Dismantling, Inc., a Massachusetts firm. The work began on July 14 and is scheduled to be completed in September 2008.

Partners with Pennichuck Water in the project include: American Rivers; Conservation Law Foundation; Gomez and Sullivan Engineers; Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment; Manchester Fly Fishing Association; Merrimack Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited; New Hampshire Coastal Conservation Association; New Hampshire Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership; New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services; New Hampshire Fish and Game Department; National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration (NOAA); Restore America's Estuaries; Souhegan River Local Advisory Committee; Souhegan Watershed Association; Town of Merrimack and United States Fish & Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior.

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