

Former Contoocook Valley Paper Company, Henniker

Success in Brownfields Assessment Grant Program

Overview

In 2000 and 2002, the N. H. Department of Environmental Services (DES) performed environmental assessments at the former Contoocook Valley Paper Mill in Henniker. These studies identified the presence of buried paper mill sludge. During the summer and fall of 2003, approximately 1,500 tons of contaminated fill material and paper sludge was removed from the site. The town's board of selectmen established the Contoocook Valley Paper Mill Restoration Committee to determine what recommendations should be made for future reuse of the site. One of the options currently being considered is open green space with recreational trails and access to the Contoocook River.

At A Glance:

Site Location: West Henniker, N.H., on the Contoocook River

Site Profile: 12-acre former paper mill located in the former West Henniker Village District

Brownfields Financial Assistance: \$87,000 Brownfields Assessment Grant

EPA Financial Assistance: Approximately \$400,000 for site cleanup

History

The property, located at the intersection of Old Hillsboro Road and Western Avenue, was first developed as a gristmill and later converted into a paper mill facility, which operated from 1863 until 1987. The site consists of two parcels, which occupy approximately 12 acres of land. The main parcel is 10 acres and is bordered by Western Avenue to the east and south, the former Boston and Maine railroad grade to the west and Old Hillsboro Road to the northwest. A portion of the main parcel is located between the sluiceway and Old Hillsboro Road. The main parcel has approximately 1,700-foot frontage on the Contoocook River, and included the former West Henniker dam. The eastern parcel is about two acres and is bordered by the Contoocook River to the east, residential developed properties to the south, Western



Western

Avenue to the west, and the sluiceway to the north. The former mill and other related buildings were located on the main parcel, and the eastern parcel was utilized for material and equipment storage and paper sludge disposal. The property contained solid waste, machinery, containers of chemicals and buried paper sludge.

Environmental Assessment and Cleanup

Subsequent to an initial site investigation conducted by DES in 1990, DES requested assistance from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Emergency Removals Program to remove abandoned waste containers and petroleum aboveground storage tanks located on the main parcel in 1992 and 1993. In 1999, the town requested assistance from DES to gain further understanding of the environmental conditions at the site. DES agreed to assist by performing environmental assessments in 2000 and 2002. The assessment confirmed the presence of about 2,000 cubic yards of buried paper sludge on the eastern parcel, which was contaminated with heavy metals including cadmium, chromium, barium and lead.



Eastern parcel remediation complete.

It was also determined the mill site and the West Henniker village historic district meet the minimum requirements to be eligible for listing as a National Historic District and that any future remediation and/or redevelopment of the site would require consultation with the N.H. Division of Historical Services (DHR). After an onsite review by the DHR staff, it was determined that historical resources would not be affected. Since neither DES nor the town of Henniker had the financial resources to fund full-scale remediation of the site, DES requested assistance from EPA to remove the paper sludge and solid waste from the eastern parcel. This was completed in the fall of 2003.

A final cover of wildflower mix was seeded during the spring of 2004. Since all contamination was removed from the eastern parcel, the town now can move ahead with plans to redevelop the property without fear of encountering contamination.

Dam Removal

The 10-foot high, 137-foot long West Henniker Dam, which was located on the property, was removed during the summer of 2004 under the direction of DES. The town decided to remove the dam rather than perform required repairs to the structure. Removing the dam has reconnected 15 miles of the Contoocook River, providing increased fish range, restoring riverine habitat and eliminating a public safety hazard for recreationalists. The Contoocook River is one of New England's most popular rivers among whitewater enthusiasts and also provides for a quality trout fishing experience.



Former dry course, granite mill foundation.

Vision for the Future

With the restoration of the site complete and the dam hazard removed, the town can pursue their options for revitalizing this portion of the West Henniker village district for the enjoyment of residents and the public. Maintaining the mill's remaining, circa 1750s, dry course, granite foundation walls and sluiceway, to be used in combination with walking trails and

interpretative displays focused on the former village historic district is under consideration.



Contoocook River flows past site.

For further assistance please contact the
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