Newsletter Fall 2021

25 Years as a National Wild and Scenic River

November 12, 1996:
The US Congress amended the National Wild and Scenic River Act of 1968 to include 11.5 miles of the Lamprey River in Lee, Durham, and Newmarket (PL 104-333). In May of 2000, twelve miles of the river in Epping were added to the Wild and Scenic designation. What is so easy to report today was the culmination of a sustained, sometimes contentious, effort by local people to protect the river they knew and enjoyed.

Was it worth the effort? We think so and we hope you will agree.

The full story of how the Lamprey River came to be Wild and Scenic can be found in our video, *Reflections on a River*: *Thirty Years of Lamprey River Protection*, available through www.LampreyRiver.org or at http://youtu.be/jrdu4FZ5Ce0 and in the History of Lamprey River Management and Protection section of *Twenty Years of Progress: 1996-2016*, also available on our website.

Wild and Scenic River designation and the attendant financial support from the National Park Service have enabled some significant accomplishments:

- uninterrupted volunteer water quality data beginning in 1990 and several long-term reports that track several key water quality indicators
- wildlife and ecological research projects
- permanent protection of 3743 acres along the river
- historical research and preservation of historical assets
- recreational maps and guides, improvements at public access points along the river
- guided family and school outings, comprehensive website, informational kiosks at parks and public access points, children's book, videos, presentations and workshops

Twenty-five years is a long time, but it is just the beginning. Much has been accomplished, but much work remains. With a growing population, more development of the landscape, and changing climate, new challenges await.

"Outstandingly Remarkable Values"

The rivers in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System represent a tiny fraction of the rivers and river miles in the United States and Puerto Rico. In fact, Wild and Scenic Rivers constitute less than one half of one percent (<0.5%) of the rivers. They all must be partially or mostly free-flowing and have good, clean water. Designation literally requires an act of congress and it is surely a big deal. Part of the process of designating a river as Wild and Scenic comes from defining what makes the river truly special. Many of the Wild and Scenic rivers out west are truly wild, with gorgeous, free-flowing runs through diverse, undeveloped landscapes. How can the Lamprey River compare to those rivers??

The Lamprey River is small, but it has three very important assets that set it apart from other rivers: its outstandingly remarkable values. In undertaking the assessment of resources in support of designation, researchers determined that the Lamprey offers the following: 1) richer and more intact ecological habitats than other nearby rivers, 2) unique archaeological and historic value, and 3) runs of river herring that are among the best in the country.

The Lamprey River flows through diverse forests, old towns, and farmland. Sometimes the flow is fast; sometimes it slows down and spreads out into a big marsh. The river is susceptible to floods, which makes human development difficult sometimes, but these floodplains provide awesome habitat to many rare animals. The river corridor is in a mostly natural state which allows animals to migrate safely to find resources.

The 23-mile Wild and Scenic section of the Lamprey River has two old dams (Wadleigh Falls in Lee and Wiswall Falls in Durham), but neither is used for hydroelectric power and all industrial uses ceased long ago. These sites, as well as the former Folsom Dam in Epping, have significant value as former mill sites. As interesting as these industrial remains are, the sites were also used by Indigenous peoples long before any dams were built. Archaeologists have unearthed evidence of human occupation dating back at least 8,000 years, among the oldest in New Hampshire.

Anadromous fish are species that spawn in freshwater but spend most of their lives at sea. The most well-known example is salmon. Wild salmon are no longer common in this area, but two species of anadromous fish are fighting to stay common: blue-back herring and alewife. Together, these species are called river herring. Each spring, they swim to the mouths of suitable rivers and try to get to their spawning grounds upstream. In the pre-industrial age, New England rivers would be choked by river herring swimming upstream every spring. Not now. Most times, the fish are stopped cold by dams that lack fish ladders. At sea, they face pressure from fishing, pollution, and a litany of other issues. These fish are on the verge of being listed as federally threatened; however, on the Lamprey, they successfully breed. This is important not just on a local level; the continued presence of these fish is crucial on a national level.

Outstanding! Remarkable! Values for all!

The Value of Partnerships

Much of what the Lamprey River Advisory Committee accomplishes is through successful partnerships. Partnerships join the assets and strengths of one group with different assets and strengths of another group for mutual benefit. Please meet some of our partners!

The National Park Service provides guidance on understanding National Wild and Scenic River System rules, technical support for projects that help to meet the goals defined in the River Management Plan, and, most importantly, funding to pay for the materials and work needed to protect our river.

The Southeast Land Trust (SELT) is an example of a partner that provides invaluable guidance and on-the-ground expertise to find and work with landowners who want to protect their large forests and farms in perpetuity against development. The LRAC has funding to support land protection, but by law we cannot own land. SELT is often the partner that agrees to be the guardian of conservation easements or outright owner of conservation land.

Towns are necessary and great partners. Conservation commissions and recreation departments have responsibility for town-owned land where people like to participate in outdoor recreational activities. The LRAC has worked with many of these groups to improve town-owned trails and boat launches, provide signage and kiosks, and co-host family-friendly events. Local libraries welcome our indoor programs. Municipalities generously allow us to meet in their public spaces so that the general public can attend and participate.

We also work with other volunteer groups to pursue goals that lead to mutual progress. The Lamprey River Watershed Association is our fiscal agent and is actively engaged in testing the water in the river to make sure it stays fishable and swimmable. They have undertaken several important studies that help us to focus our resources. The Pawtuckaway Lake Improvement Association has recently become our strong ally in the fight to keep invasive aquatic weeds out of the Lamprey River. In keeping pest plants out of the lake, water that flows from the lake to the river will be pest-free.

Without the support and expertise of our partners, the Lamprey River would probably be just another river. Through the hard work and vision of LRAC volunteers who have the creativity to find and work with talented partners, our river is truly special and will continue to be well into the future.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

--- Margaret Mead

The Lord of the Lamprey River:

Memories from Long-term LRAC Member, Dick Lord, Durham

When I was eleven years old in 1957, my parents and I moved to our new home beside the Lamprey River, just down from Packers Falls in Durham, NH. I spent my boyhood hopping on rocks across the stream, harassing bullfrogs, and otherwise getting to know and love all the creatures who made the river their home. While away for college and for a few years as an aerospace engineer, I was always drawn back to the Lamprey and subsequently made career choices that continued to let me live in my childhood home, now for more than six decades.

As a founding member of the Lamprey River Watershed Association in the early 1980s, I helped get the river designated first in 1990 as one of New Hampshire's first state protected rivers, and then in 1996 as one of the first rivers in the National Park Service's Wild & Scenic Partnership Rivers Program, and became one of the first members of the Lamprey River Advisory Committee, which serves for both state and national programs. As someone who gets to see the Lamprey every day as I look out my windows, I have felt a lifelong obligation to support the efforts to preserve and protect the natural beauty of the river.

Dick Lord and one of the kiosk panels at Wiswall Falls he helped to design

I am now in my 34th year of serving on the Lamprey Advisory Committee and am proud to see my contributions bear fruit helping to lead the development of informational kiosks at a number of sites, and actively participating in improving recreational access, developing maps and public information programs, wildlife inventory studies, archaeology surveys and the preservation of over 3,500 acres of land within the watershed. Our quarter-century partnership with the National Park Service has been very fruitful, indeed, and made many wonderful projects possible. It has been a joy to be part of this effort for over four decades, and I hope to continue to participate for as long as I am able.

Banking on Erosion Research

The rains this past July were welcome in alleviating the drought and helping to rebuild water storage in our aquifers. Flows in the Lamprey River increased without any undue flooding. Some other New Hampshire rivers were not so fortunate; for example, the Cold River in Ackworth experienced heavy damage, including a shift in its course. Although we were lucky this summer, the Lamprey River is susceptible to floods and the associated erosion. Knowing where erosion might take place and what factors might

mitigate or exacerbate such damage is important, especially in light of more extreme weather.

The US Geologic Survey did an analysis of erosion potential along the Lamprey River in 2011, but subtle details might not have been included and science is always asking new questions. The LRAC recently awarded a research grant that will help to address some of the details. Lauren Kaehler, a graduate student at UNH, will be studying river bank retreat over time and what effect, if any, invasive Japanese knotweed might play in making riverbanks more susceptible to erosion compared to riverbanks with native vegetation. She hopes to use her study to model predicted effects on other rivers.

riverbank erosion in Epping
photo by Jerry Monkman

The final report should be available in 2023.

Salt Marsh Serenade

Mathematically, salt marshes are a minor component of the Lamprey River, but in terms of importance, they rank high on the list of places to protect. They provide necessary services at the land-saltwater interface: critical habitat for many birds, nurseries for young fish, a sponge to collect pollution from the land, a soft area to lessen the damage from storm-generated waves, a natural way to remove excess nitrogen from the water, and a place of peace and quiet for recreation.

salt marsh overlook in Rye, NH photo by J.Martin

We were honored to introduce a small group of senior citizens from Newmarket to the wonders of salt marshes in September, first with a slide show and discussion inside and then a guided tour on a salt marsh in Rye. We hope to offer more of these presentations, so please let us know if your group might want to participate, info@LampreyRiver.org.

photo by RH Lord