Newsletter Winter 2024

A New Year for the Lamprey River Watershed

Protecting the Lamprey River is a big job, because protecting the river means protecting the land and related waterways. The water in the river comes from precipitation that falls directly onto open water, precipitation that falls onto the surrounding land and flows over the surface, and precipitation that soaks into the ground and reaches the river through groundwater. The Lamprey River also receives water from the tributary rivers and streams. All the water that ultimately reaches the Lamprey River comes from the Lamprey River watershed.

The Lamprey River watershed encompasses 214 square miles. Fourteen towns contribute at least some water to the main stem Lamprey River, the tributaries, or groundwater. The Lamprey River is one of five rivers that contribute freshwater to Great Bay and, in fact, the Lamprey River contributes the most freshwater to Great Bay. Protecting and improving Great Bay is not a big job; it is a monumental job.

Each of us can choose to make a positive difference for the river and Great Bay. Small acts do matter! Please consider making a New Year's resolution to adopt at least one of the small acts below:

- *Take good care of your septic system*. Get it inspected and pumped out every 2-3 years; don't dump grease, medicines, food, or chemicals down the drain; spread your laundry sessions out during the week; make sure that the land over the system's leach field remains free of trees, shrubs, or heavy equipment.
- *Conserve water*: Turn the tap off while you brush your teeth; take showers rather than baths; run the dishwasher only when you have a full load.
- *Leave as much natural vegetation as possible around streams and wetlands*. The wider the area of natural vegetation, the better. This will protect the soil, minimize erosion, provide habitat and travel corridors for wildlife, provide shade to keep the water cooler, and will help to keep the water clear.
- Find ways to *let stormwater soak into the ground* rather than run across it. Minimize pavement and other hard surfaces near your home; create a drip trench below the eaves of your house to capture rain; create berms to direct rainwater to a garden or lawn rather than to a storm drain.
- *Minimize or eliminate fertilizer to your lawn*. Excess fertilizer will not make your lawn greener or healthier; it just finds it way to the nearest body of water and causes a cascade of problems.
- *Make a donation to or volunteer with a land conservation group*. You don't need to give a big donation or put in lots of work; every dollar and hour matter.
- *Consider joining the LRAC*!

Welcome New LRAC Chair, Grace Levergood

Since joining the LRAC in April 2021, Grace has been a key participant in reviewing projects along the rivers that require a permit from the NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES). When the former chair decided that he had had served long enough, Grace first offered to lead the project review team and then agreed to lead the full committee. She was unanimously elected as chair in October 2023.

Grace Levergood, PE

Her abilities with project review and her knowledge of NHDES are no surprise. She is a licensed professional engineer who recently retired after 25 years with the NHDES Dam Bureau. In addition to her professional credentials, she also currently serves as the chair of the Northwood Conservation Commission. The LRAC is indeed fortunate to have her talents and leadership.

Bacterial Tracking 2023

Because the Lamprey River has no public beaches, the NH Department of Environmental Services does not conduct routine bacterial tests; however, the lack of public beaches does not mean that people are not getting in the water. They swim, they kayak, they fish, but they will not find bacterial test results for water safety on the NHDES website. For the third year, the LRAC commissioned monthly water quality tests at several recreational areas along the Lamprey River, from Raymond to Newmarket, to get a better idea of how the river is doing.

For the past two years, when rainfall was generally low, results showed that most recreational areas met state criteria for bacterial levels for most sampled dates. This year brought some new test conditions due to all the rain. Results this year were often discouraging. Some months, all sites had elevated fecal bacteria readings, because rain carries waste off the land into the water.

As in years past, one site almost consistently failed to meet safe bacterial levels, Schanda Park in Newmarket. At times, the level of fecal contamination was not just above acceptable level; it was many times over the acceptable limit. To make matters worse, in addition to dog, bird, or cow waste, one consistent source of that contamination was human. To try to hone in on the source of the bacterial source, samples were also taken from several sites upstream of Schanda Park. Upstream sites might be contributing to the problem at Schanda Park, but the outfall of Moonlight Brook at the park has the highest readings, suggesting that there might be a sewer main leak under downtown Newmarket.

New this year, a significant fecal bacterial issue was detected at Carroll Beach in Raymond in September and October. Extra tests were taken upstream of Carroll Beach, but no clear source was determined.

The full report will be shared with NHDES, all Lamprey River towns, and our Great Bay partners. It is available on the LRAC website at https://www.lampreyriver.org/download_file/646. You can also visit www.LampreyRiver.org and use the “documents and resources” tab and type in 2023 Bacterial Tracking Final report. Previous reports can also be found there.

The easiest way to help lower the amount of fecal bacteria going into the river is to pick up dog waste and dispose of it in the garbage. Per the report, “Dog contamination was consistently present at all sites in both 2022 and 2023.” Homeowners who have septic systems (That’s most of you!) can make sure their systems are checked and pumped out every 2-3 years. For more information about septic system care, please visit YOU AND YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM (nh.gov).

Robert Rix Family Forest, Part 2

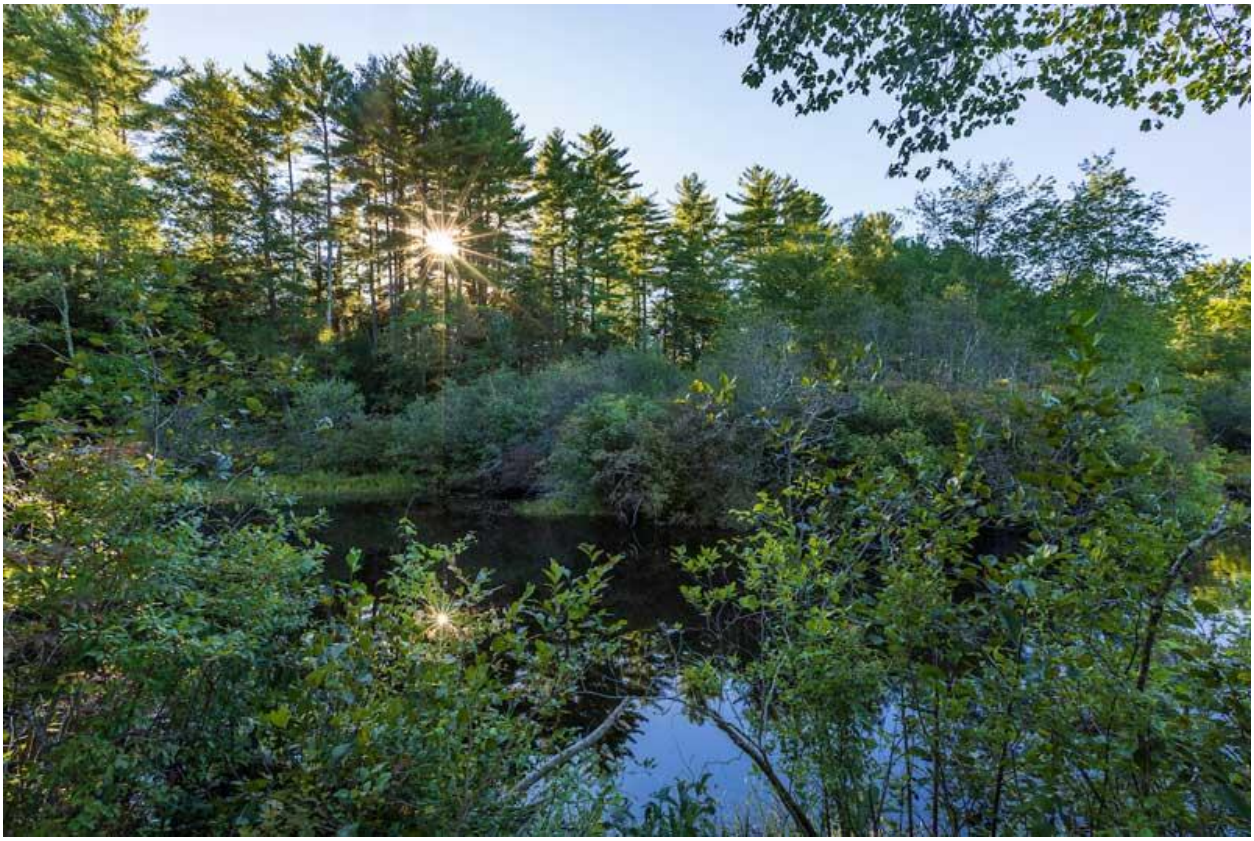

Photo courtesy of SELT

Last year, we were happy to report that the 76.3-acre Robert Rix Family Forest in Deerfield had been permanently protected, with the Southeast Land Trust (SELT) as the title holder and manager. This parcel has nearly a mile of frontage along the Lamprey River and a massive wetland system associated with the river which provides important flood storage, nutrient capture, and excellent wildlife habitat.

This year, we are happy to report that the Robert Rix Family Forest has expanded by another 4 acres and another 457 feet or river frontage thanks to another very generous donation by the Rix family in memory of their father. This new parcel has the same ecologically important assets as the 2023 donation. Although the land was donated, there are still project and long-term management costs that also must be considered. The LRAC supplied almost $50,000 toward the two projects. This was a good investment with long-lasting benefits of clean water and wildlife habitat for the river and the larger region.

With the completion of the Rix Family Forest conservation project, we are proud to report that the LRAC has helped to conserve 3843 acres and more than 19 miles of river frontage on the Lamprey River. Do you know of a project that could help us reach or surpass the 4000-acre mark?