



Courses of Change

The Economics of Natural Systems

By Dennis Finn

Upon finding employment as a new graduate in natural resource management, my workforce duties often confronted me with questions relevant to the financial value of the natural resources I had spent years researching. Studying the academic side of natural resource economics may have armed me with vocabulary and case studies, but did little to prepare me for the politics, big and small, along with the rippling impacts of improper resource use at the ecologic or community scale. Community leaders and residents, recreation managers, wildlife biologists, ecologists and the whole spectrum of decision makers that must factor the costs of air, water, wetlands or wildlife into their daily work must answer the question “what is our environment worth”?

Here at the Saco River Corridor Commission, we look primarily at water, but must also address the other resources found in the Corridor along the rivers. Is it even possible to place a monetary value on natural resources? How does one value a tree, or a robin, blue sky, a clean, spring rain? Human beings rarely consider those imponderables, and in fact, we usually take all of the wonderful attributes of our natural world for granted. But for those of us that pay attention to our surroundings and voice our concerns we all know the drill. If you mention how fantastic you find a naturally occurring event, or bring up the subject of pollution to anybody other than your friends (who probably share your views) it is as likely that you’ll have to endure the label of tree hugger, or you’ll have to listen to a comment intentionally derogatory about how green you are. As for placing value on a resource, just how does a town, for example, place a monetary value on clean water? What variables must be considered? Replacement value is a start, but to replace a stream, or river habitat, or for that matter, to replace the value of a natural system that may be hundreds or thousands of years old is costly beyond measure. It’s not unusual to find these issues perplexing and as for me, I do not believe our precious resources can be replicated.

Our society is familiar with assigning values to manufactured goods, or services. A spread sheet showing cost, time, materials and labor establish a particular value, but it is only when we use a biocentric philosophy that we can begin to see nature beyond what society has called a “free good”. A biocentric view point establishes that there is value in all life, not just human life. At the risk of being painted green, isn’t it time that we ask ourselves what is really at stake when we miscalculate, or underestimate the worth of our natural resources. Although we may have been unprepared to address the topic of natural resource value as new graduates, one of the issues that we did study as graduate students so long ago was the intimate connection between our resources and our quality of life. Perhaps that’s one lesson that should be taught in grade school - long before we have to grapple with the issues later on as adults. After all, it isn’t about vocabulary or even about methodology. Today, it is more about understanding the importance of our natural world and its connection to our lives.

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Courses of Change is a bi-annual publication of the Saco River Corridor Commission. We encourage our readers to submit ideas for publication in future issues. The deadline for submission in our Vol. 6, Issue 1, edition is September 30, 2010.

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Mission Statement

The Saco River Corridor Commission is committed to protect public health, safety, and the quality of life for the State of Maine through the regulation of land and water uses, protection and conservation of the region's unique and exceptional natural resources, and through the prevention of impacts caused by incompatible development.



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Executive Director's Column...

Maybe we should just look the other way.

It has become far too easy for us to feel emotionally and physically powerless when it comes to protecting those things in our life that matter. We recognize the problems and the missed opportunities when they happen, but we can not seem to do anything to prevent them. Take the newsworthy and gut wrenching oil rig explosion off the Gulf Coast and consequent oil leak. Loss of human life will undoubtedly be accompanied by millions of wildlife species lost as the oil spreads over an ever increasing area. The untold and unfinished story will likely document the economic loss as well as entire marine related industries collapse with the ecological collapse. Everybody is disgusted with the magnitude of the crisis and wonders aloud why it happened, how could it happen, but overcoming the inertia to do anything but complain is just too great. Fortunately, these big catastrophies are rare, however smaller, less noteworthy events happen regularly.

We realize that in a down economy every penny counts. Ways to save, to cut costs and reduce our monetary outlay are all necessary in order to stay in business and keep the business, any business from going under. But in saving these expenses are we placing those values we hold dear in jeopardy. The Gulf Coast accident is little more than an example. This type of accident, happens in an almost seemingly spontaneous way, whether through a cost saving measure or simple careless-

ness. Although there seems to be little that the average person can do to alleviate the problems, this environmental trauma should serve as a reminder for how quickly disaster can happen and how complete the disaster can be to quality of life for all species.

Here in our own corner of the planet our issues regarding resource protection are no less pressing. The magnitude of a traumatic event may not be global in extent, but the impacts can be difficult to recover from and costly none-the-less. A leaking above ground home heating oil tank, an overboard discharge poorly maintained or a spill into the Saco River can all lead to damage that wastes precious natural resources. You don't need to be an environmentalist to be concerned about resource damage. You need only be awake to understand that carelessness, arrogance or a complete disdain of your neighbors and community are required to cause irreversible damage to our way of life.

Water and Air, the two essential fluids on which all life depends, have become global garbage cans.

Jacques Cousteau
 (1910-1997)

11th Annual Canoe-A-Thon and Coastal Cleanup

DATE: Saturday, June 5, 2010
 (raindate - Sunday, June 6th)
 TIME: 8:30 a.m. Coffee and Registration
 at Front Street Public Boat
 Launch
 9:30 a.m. Canoe Launch and
 Coastal Clean-Up

This two-hour trip will involve pulling garbage, tires, boots, and other interesting surprises from the river. All trash collected will be hauled out at the boat launch in Camp Ellis. Shuttle service will be available to bring paddlers back to their cars up river. Afterwards, enjoy a barbeque lunch at the Ferry Beach Ecology School Campus on Route 9.

Not only will you be cleaning up the Saco River, but you'll be raising money for the Ferry Beach Ecology School Program Fund. Register for the event and you'll receive a pledge sheet. The money you collect will provide scholarship opportunities for children and adults to participate in Ferry Beach Ecology School residential environmental education programs.



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Prizes will be awarded for the person with the most money collected and for the person who gets the most number of pledges. Colorful costumes and attire are encouraged, but not required. Craziest costume will also be awarded a prize.

Grab your canoe, kayak or skiff and join the staff of Ferry Beach Ecology School to help clean up the Saco River! On Saturday, June 5th, we'll kick off the day at 8:30 a.m. at the Front Street Public Boat Launch * in Saco and paddle with the tide south to Camp Ellis.

*Front Street Public Boat Launch is just south of Pepperil Square, past the train overpass bridge.

Sustaining the Saco Workshop

By Ben Tripp

On April 29, 2010 we attended the Sustaining the Saco Workshop at the University of New England representing the SRCC. Sponsored by the Center for Sustainable Communities, Department of Environmental Studies, this workshop brought together individuals and groups (UNE students and faculty, various area Land Trust representatives, riverfront property owners, SRCC, and Saco Bay Trails) with the common interest in preserving the Saco River for future generations.

The long term goals in sustaining the natural systems and rich biodiversity of the Saco Estuary region in order to support a vibrant economy and desirable quality of life for this and future generations.

The Objectives of the Workshop:

1. To bring together the people who live, work and play in the Saco Estuary region and who care about and are responsible for sustaining the Saco Estuary.
2. To identify important qualities of the Saco Estuary region that can be conserved or restored as the region responds to change.
3. To understand the participants' concerns for the future of the Saco Estuary and the challenges people, communities and groups are facing in their work to sustain the estuary and its watershed.

There were five excellent, informative student presentations on Ecosystem Serv-

ices, Water, Biodiversity, Wetlands and Climate relating to the Saco River Estuary. While the initial efforts are centered on the Saco River Estuary, UNE has plans to expand their efforts to encompass the entire river and the Saco Watershed.



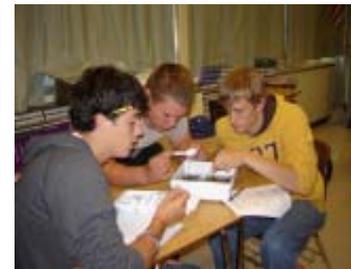
Water Quality 101

By Corey Lane

The Saco River Corridor Commission was recently awarded a grant from the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund. Over the next year SRCC will use video as a medium to capture the importance of surface waters and the importance of water quality to every community's quality of life. This video will provide curriculum based information for school group teachings in the natural and earth sciences. SRCC will walk students, conservation groups and others through a water quality monitor-

ing program with instruction on methods, relationships and cause and effect. We hope to give communities an opportunity to see what is involved in protecting the surface waters that we all depend on. SRCC will be working with Saco River Community Television, which is a public access station located in Hollis. With their skills and equipment we will create a high quality video which will be of interest to people of all

ages. When completed, SRCTV will air this video in five towns (Hollis, Buxton, Limerick, Limington, Standish and Waterboro), all of which are located in the Saco River Corridor. It will also be distributed to the schools in the twenty towns that are located within the Corridor and available upon request to anyone who is interested. If you have any questions about this project or others that we are working on, please call Corey at SRCC at 207-625-8123.



SRCC's 10th Season of Water Quality Monitoring By Corey Lane

On May 17th, SRCC's dedicated volunteers will be back on the river (some for many years) in the wee hours of the morning, rain or shine, testing our waters and getting mauled by mosquitos. Every other week until the end of September they will set off on their mission of gathering data and recording observations, all before 9:00 a.m. Without our volunteers giving of their valuable time, SRCC would not be able to collect this data which is important to everyone living in the Saco River Watershed. At



the end of this testing season we will have accumulated ten years worth of baseline data of our water quality monitoring program. Data will be available on the web site. SRCC is extremely grateful for these dedicated souls who continue to make this program possible. If you have interest in becoming a water quality monitoring and/or invasive plan mapping volunteer (our last summer to gather data for this project), please give us a call at 207-625-8123.

Ossipee Watershed students test well water with Get Wet!

“Yes, I don’t have nitrates!” Not something you hear often in the classroom, but this is not a normal school day. Students travel from table to table with their own well water, stopping at each station to test for pH, conductivity, nitrates, iron, sodium chloride, and hardness. As part of the Groundwater Education Through Water Evaluation and Testing (GETWET!) Program, based out of the University of Maine Senator George J. Mitchell Center for Environmental and Watershed Research, students are collecting important water quality data that will help create a long-term groundwater quality database for the towns of Effingham, Freedom, Madison, Ossipee, Sandwich, and Tamworth that share the Ossipee Aquifer as a drinking water source.

Green Mountain Conservation Group (GMCC) has partnered with Teresa Thornton, GETWET! coordinator, to bring this incredible hands-on educational program to New Hampshire and the Ossipee Watershed. During April, over 120 well water samples were tested with the participation of Tamworth Learning Circles, Ossipee Central School, Kenneth A. Brett School, and Madison Elementary School. Students will analyze the data and research groundwater issues to create a presentation that will be given to the community during an evening event in May or June.

With a majority of residents in the Ossipee Watershed getting their drinking water from groundwater and an extremely vulnerable aquifer, the GETWET! program gives students

the opportunity to conduct meaningful research and help monitor this important resource. GMCC will offer GETWET! to local schools on a yearly basis and over time the testing results completed by students will be a resource that the community can use to determine the best strategies for protecting present and future drinking water supplies. GETWET! will be one of the activities included in the Ossipee Watershed Workbook, a resource for teachers that would like to implement watershed-specific educational programs in local schools. To learn more about the GETWET! program, visit: <http://www.umaine.edu/waterresearch/outreach/GetWet/index.htm>.

Funding for this project was provided by the Lakes Region Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation and the Dorr Foundation.



In Memoriam

We recently learned of the passing of another old acquaintance in the Saco River Corridor. Carl Laws, the Saco River Corridor Commission’s first Executive Director died in an accident while abroad. I did not know Carl, but over the years, I have spoken to many people who knew him well. It was his energy working synergistically with other concerned citizens in the Corridor that helped to pull the Saco River Corridor Act and subsequently, the Commission together. Carl was an avid outdoors person who seemed to truly have a zest for life and community. He was involved in many pursuits here in the Saco Valley, including a healthy and vibrant involvement with the Ossipee Valley Fair Association and the fairgrounds. Carl also helped write the original View From The Valley, a comprehensive plan that identified the importance of the natural resources in the Saco Basin and a proposal to help protect those resources. A region can have many residents that live and work in the area. But it is the exception to have a person live and work in an area who truly makes a difference for the greater good. I believe Carl was such a person and his energy, his enthusiasm and his ability to see the bigger picture all led to projects and outcomes that have had a wonderful impact on this area we call home. Carl will be missed by many folks, and while I did not know him personally, I, and all the people who love this area are fortunate to be the beneficiaries of his work.

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- Our newsletter is available on the web at www.srcc-maine.org. If you would like to receive this publication electronically, please send us your e-mail address.

- Has your address changed? If so please let us know!

Our next newsletter will include a variety of different photos from all over the Saco River Watershed. We would love to save paper (and funds) by sending our newsletter to you via e-mail. When sent this way, all photos will be in color. If you would like to convert the delivery of Courses of Change to e-mail, please give us a call at 625-8123 or e-mail to srcc@srcc-maine.org. Thank you!

The Opossum

By Joy Chasse

On one of my recent pre-dawn runs, I met with a surprise - a small animal I had never seen before - startling him as much as myself. We stared at each other for a moment, he hissed at me for good measure, and turned and waddled away as fast as his short legs would carry him. After a bit of research, I learned the animal I had seen that early April morning was an Opossum.

The reason I have probably not seen an opossum (or possum) before, is because they are solitary and nocturnal. They have made their way northward and are the only North American marsupial (female with a pouch). They carry their young in their pouch until they are two to three months old, then carry them on their back for one to two months. They are adaptable creatures and

can live where they can find water, food and shelter. An opossum is typically 15-20 inches and weighs 9-13 pounds. They have long hairless tails that can carry small objects and help them balance in trees, they have 50 teeth and opposable clawless thumbs on their rear feet.

The opossum is omnivorous, eating insects, berries, rodents, overripe fruit, grasses, leaves and carrion, which leads them to the roadways and are often killed by cars.

I learned that although the opossum I saw growled at me, they prefer to be left alone, avoid confrontation and are gentle and placid in nature. They have many predators - humans, dogs, owls and larger wildlife - and as a form of protection may play "possum", which is playing dead, an involuntary act and triggered by extreme fear.

An opossum has a short life, usually 2-4 years. If you see an opossum during the day it may be because they are foraging for food or their den has been disturbed. Although some people may not be as excited as I was to see one, if you have one in your yard, give it some space - opossum's eat harmful, unwanted pests such as slugs, spiders, cockroaches, rats and mice - sit back and enjoy nature at its finest.

