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Lamprey and Oyster River Watersheds River Stewardship Program

A Final Report to
The New Hampshire Estuaries Project

Submitted by
Margaret Watkins
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2002

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Executive Summary

This project was designed for riverfront landowners and local land use decision-makers to fill a critical gap in shoreland protection: land management by individual riparian landowners. By working directly with individuals in a hands-on venue, we intended to build a more informed public, knowledgeable about the value of riparian buffers. A better appreciation of the value of buffers not only improves stewardship of individual properties, but also is likely to inspire stronger support for regulatory approaches to shoreland protection. The project addressed several NHEP goals.

The approach was to hold a series of public workshops, lead by specialists in water quality, nonpoint source pollution, and wildlife/ecology. One general, evening workshop designed to “set the stage” was followed by workshops held at specific types of riverfront land: urban, rural, forested, and agricultural. Due to the similarity of issues and low interest in urban lots, the urban and rural workshops were combined. Workshop participants received stewardship workbooks with general information and information specific to their type of property (urban/rural, forested, or agricultural).

Publicity for the workshops included:

- ✓ A direct mailing to Oyster and Lamprey riverfront landowners in Lee, Durham, Madbury, Epping, and Newmarket (298 letters and brochures)
- ✓ A “save the date” card sent to all Oyster River Watershed Association mailing recipients (127 individuals)
- ✓ A direct mailing to people expressing interest in the EQIP/the Farm Bill and to heads of agricultural groups, e.g., NH Horse Council
- ✓ Press release (sent to Foster’s, Seacoast Newspapers, Rochester/Dover Times, UNG News Bureau, WENH – TV Channel 11, WOKQ radio, WTSN radio)
- ✓ Newsletter coverage in the Strafford RPC’s newsletter (mailed to 913 public officials, municipal leaders, state agencies), in the Strafford County Conservation District’s newsletter (mailed to 735 residents and public officials), and in the Oyster River Watershed Association’s agendas, March – July
- ✓ Strafford RPC website posting
- ✓ Flyers posted at post offices and libraries in Oyster and Lamprey River towns
- ✓ Personal communication with neighbors and other prospective attendees
- ✓ E-mail to 400 NH DES employees
- ✓ Insert in all inquiries to Strafford County Conservation District during the project period.

Although turnout was low (averaging 6 people), the evaluations were favorable. Six of the 10 people who completed evaluations expressed interest in follow up work with a resource specialist at their particular properties. Changes projected by participants as a result of the workshops included: adding plants along the river, leaving the banks more or less alone, avoiding invasive species, cutting less, considering late season grasses to support field nesting species.

We identified several reasons for the low turnout, which may be less a reflection of interest than of timing, publicity, or other issues. In the future, before repeating or expanding upon this program, we would recommend a needs assessment be conducted. For the present, the project resulted in an excellent slide show, which has been duplicated for use in presentations at meetings of community groups.

Introduction

This project grew out of discussions among members of the Lamprey River Advisory Committee, the Lamprey River Watershed Association, and the Oyster River Watershed Association who were interested in inspiring a stronger sense of responsibility on the part of riverfront landowners for their riverfront lands. Several options were reviewed, including at the most complex end of the spectrum a long-term stewardship program similar to the Tree Farm Program through which riverfront landowners would be recognized for implementing appropriate riverfront practices. The approach selected was a one-time introductory evening meeting followed by on-site workshops geared towards owners of different kinds of riverfront lands. Not only would landowners learn from visiting another property similar to their own, they would also meet resource specialists who could later visit their land, if desired.

The project Steering Committee, consisting of representatives from the sponsoring nonprofits, as well as the Strafford Regional Planning Commission, Strafford Conservation District, the National Park Service, and the NH Department of Environmental Services, was responsible for project planning, publicity, and evaluation. Resource professionals were enlisted to teach the field sessions, which included wildlife and ecological concerns as well as water quality.

Project Goals and Objectives

The goals of this project were:

- To improve land management practices by individual riverfront landowners; and
- To build public support for regulations to protect shorelands through understanding of the rationale behind them.

These goals were met by creating two different opportunities for landowners to learn about shoreland properties: indoor workshop format with slide presentation and informal discussion and outdoor field sessions on properties selected to be similar to those a landowner might own – small urban or suburban lot, forested lot of sufficient size to manage for timber production, and agricultural lot.

Management practices discussed at all venues focused on water quality protection, habitat protection and enhancement, and threats from such sources as invasive exotic species and conversion of land to non-open space uses.

Methods

A Steering Committee guided all activities in connection with this project. It included representatives from the Lamprey and Oyster River watershed associations, the Lamprey River Advisory Committee, the Strafford Regional Planning Commission, the Strafford Conservation District, the National Park Service, and the NH Department of Environmental Services. Occasionally other people attended as well, including Laura Morton from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, who contributed information for the workbook and informational packets.

A variety of techniques, including targeted mailings, general press, and personal contact, were used to publicize the project.

1. Information on the workshop was posted on the agenda of the March, April, May, June, and July Oyster River Watershed Association meetings. The agenda is sent to 127 people. In addition, a “Save the Date” card was sent to the Oyster River Watershed Association mailing list in April.
2. A brochure of complete information about the workshops was sent with a letter from the chairs of the Oyster Watershed Association and the Lamprey River Advisory Committee on 4/15/02 to 298 landowners on the Oyster River in Madbury, Lee, and Durham and the Lamprey River in Newmarket, Durham, Lee and Epping.
3. An article about the workshops was published in the April and May editions of the Strafford Regional Planning Commission newsletter, which is mailed to 913 people, including members of Planning Boards, Conservation Commissions, Zoning Boards of Appeals, and Chambers of Commerce and municipal offices/leaders in the 17 communities in the SRPC planning region; local and state conservation groups, agricultural interest groups, and transportation interest groups; the Office of State Planning; State departments of Environmental Services and Transportation, and other interested parties. Articles also appeared in the Strafford County Conservation District’s newsletter *Conservation News*, and SeaGrant’s *Docent Doings*.
4. Flyers were posted at post offices and libraries of the towns in the Oyster and Lamprey River watersheds.
5. Flyers were sent to leaders in the agricultural community and individuals who had expressed interest in EQIP to NRCS.
6. A press release was sent to the following media sources:

- a. Foster's Daily Democrat
 - b. Seacoast Newspapers (Herald)
 - c. Rochester/Dover Times
 - d. UNG News Bureau
 - e. WENH -TV Channel 11
 - f. WOKQ Radio
 - g. WTSN radio
7. Steering committee members called and visited people whom they thought would be interested in attending field sessions.
 8. All NH DES employees received an email about the workshops.
 9. Workshop information was posted on the Strafford RPC's webpage.

The opening session was held the evening of May 1. This session was designed to give people an overview of stewardship issues. The keynote speaker, Dennis Meadows, discussed his reasons for and process of putting a portion of his land into permanent conservation by means of an easement. Judith Spang followed his remarks with a slide show on shoreland values and threats. There was then a break for participants to talk informally with representatives from NH Fish & Game, the NH DES Shoreland Protection and Nonpoint Source programs, and the Oyster and Lamprey river groups. Refreshments were a part of the break, after which the group reconvened for a facilitated discussion with specialists. This turned into an animated discussion about how to get the general public/people to care about being informed about environmental stewardship issues and what they can do. The discussion was started by a teacher in the audience wondering about neighbors who might care but are not informed, or people who don't want to know what they are doing wrong and would do better next time if it they knew how easy it was.

Follow-up workshops were held on two Saturday mornings, 9-11, May 18 and June 1, and a Wednesday evening, 7-9, July 24. The "urban" and "rural" lot workshops were combined due to similarity of issues and lack of interest in the "urban" session.

Resource professionals trained in water quality/nonpoint source pollution issues and in wildlife were present at each of the three workshops to comment on the property and answer questions. Eric Williams, Barbara McMillan, both of NH DES, and Tom Lee, UNH ecologist, were the specialists at the urban/rural field session. Rob Brown, biology teacher, and Don Black, UNH Cooperative Extension Forestry Educator were presenters at the forestry field session. Sue Hoey of NRCS and Matt Tarr, UNH Cooperative Extension Educator, lead the agricultural field session.

Every workshop participant received a notebook of information collected from various sources. The notebook contained information on: Buffers/River Banks; Contacts; Composting; Household Hazardous Materials; Invasive/Native Species; Lakes; Landowner Stewardship; Septic Systems; Shoreland Protection; Soil Testing;

Water Conservation; Water Cycle; Watersheds; Water Quality; and Wildlife. Packets of information specific to each type of site were distributed at the appropriate workshop.

Project evaluation occurred at the Steering Committee's final meeting August 6.

Results and Discussion

Our goals were to improve land management practices by individual riverfront landowners; and to build public support for regulations to protect shorelands through understanding of the rationale behind them. Twenty landowners attended the opening session. Sixteen people registered for the urban/rural field session, but only seven actually attended due to severe spring weather. Eight attended the forested land field session, and two the agricultural field session. This was a smaller turnout than sponsors had hoped. However, statements the evening of May 1 and evaluations from the field sessions indicate that those who did attend felt positive about the sessions and what they learned from them.

More than half of the people who attended field sessions indicated that they would like to have someone visit their properties to advise them about specific management practices. Six came away with specific actions they were contemplating taking to improve management of their shoreland properties. These reactions are very heartening and suggest that hands-on learning can help inspire people to make changes/improvements to their land. Improved land management practices was one of our primary goals for this project. Several participants recommended specific topics for follow-up workshops or seminars, suggesting a desire to learn more.

All those who attended the opening session met and talked with Gary Springs of NH DES about state shoreland ordinances. Water quality and buffers, major elements of shoreland ordinances, were discussed at the field sessions as well. Although it is difficult to know whether enhanced understanding of the rationale for regulation will translate into greater support, some of the ideas suggested for future workshops, such as minimizing lawns or eliminating use of pesticides and fertilizers, indicate an appreciation of the issues behind regulations.

We discussed reasons for the lower than expected turnout. Perhaps the idea of someone coming onto one's land was threatening to some people. Although we tried to avoid jargon in the publicity, perhaps some people were put off by it, or didn't understand it. Even the term "stewardship" may be unclear. We needed more flyers and posters around town, to interest people and to reinforce what they may have seen in the paper or through mailings. Although press releases were sent to radio stations, they were not formatted for radio use.

It is unclear whether the time or day of sessions made any difference. We tried both morning and evening venues. Possibly providing for child care at the field sessions or re-orienting the content to accommodate people of all ages would have improved

attendance. In the future, evaluations should ask people whether they would be more likely to come to similar events if there were child care. One participant suggested holding workshops at a different time of year.

Conclusions

The Steering Committee worked hard to create a program that provided several different ways of learning – a class room setting with oral presentations, one-on-one discussions, a slide show, and displays, field sessions with one-on-one and group discussions, and written materials. Several of the people who attended were already knowledgeable about the stewardship issues the project addressed.

Recommendations (for future work)

One immediate outcome of the workshops was agreement among Steering Committee members that the slide show offers a relatively easy way to keep the information people learned through this project alive and in circulation. The Committee recommended that the Oyster River and Lamprey River organizations hold a joint meeting to view the slide show and discuss how it can be used in other community settings.

The Committee also agreed that there should be a needs assessment before plans to modify or expand the project are made. Is backyard stewardship relevant to busy lives? Can it be made relevant?

Appendices

Appendix A contains copies of publicity.

Appendix B contains a summary of workshop evaluations.

Appendix C contains the Final Project Budget.

Also submitted with this report is a workbook with participant packets from each of the three workshops.