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Exeter River Local Advisory Committee

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A Final Report to
The New Hampshire Estuaries Project

Submitted by the

Exeter River Local Advisory Committee
c/o Rockingham Planning Commission
156 Water Street
Exeter, NH 03833

January 28, 2005

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2004 Alewife Festival

Executive Summary

On June 5, 2004, the Exeter River Local Advisory Committee (ERLAC) held the 4th Annual Exeter River Alewife Festival along the banks of the Squamscott River in downtown Exeter. Over three dozen organizations exhibited at the Festival and event organizers estimate approximately 750 people, including many children, attended the event. The purpose of the Festival was to increase awareness of the Exeter River watershed and the role it plays in the Great Bay ecosystem, as well as its role in providing drinking water, wildlife habitat, and scenic, historic and recreational resources for residents in the ten watershed towns. Funding provided by the New Hampshire Estuaries Project enabled ERLAC to print posters, banners, and newspaper advertisements announcing the event.

Introduction

On June 5, 2004, the Exeter River Local Advisory Committee (ERLAC) held the 4th Annual Exeter River Alewife Festival along the banks of the Squamscott River in downtown Exeter. Over three dozen organizations exhibited at the Festival and event organizers estimate approximately 750 people, including many children, attended the event.

Project Goals

The goal of the Annual Exeter River Alewife Festival is to increase awareness of the Exeter River watershed and the role it plays in the Great Bay ecosystem, as well as its role in providing drinking water, wildlife habitat, and scenic, historic and recreational resources for residents in the ten watershed towns. These communities are some of the fastest growing in New Hampshire and the increasing population is threatening natural resources in the region.

Activities

The Festival Planning Committee, comprised of volunteers from ERLAC, watershed Conservation Commissions and historical associations, and representatives from the Seacoast Artists Association, met eight times during the contract period to establish a list of Festival participants, set the schedule of events, and work with a graphic artist to prepare publicity materials. In addition, ERLAC members researched and wrote articles to submit to area newspapers and town newsletters promoting ERLAC and committee activities such as the Festival and workshops on vernal pools and wildlife habitat. Finally, members of ERLAC and their families volunteered their time on Festival day to ensure the success of the event.

Results

The 2004 Exeter River Alewife Festival was an enormous success for ERLAC, with dozens of exhibitors and estimates of 750 attendees. Attendees could receive information specifically related to the NHEP Management Plan, including; options for voluntary land protection, the importance of protecting shoreland buffers from development, the relationship between the Exeter River and the Great Bay, tips on septic system maintenance, identification of storm drains and the role drains play in protection of water quality, and protection of backyard wildlife habitat.

Feedback from Festival exhibitors and attendees was very positive and will be used by ERLAC to develop additional outreach programs and plan the next Festival. ERLAC has received several inquiries from watershed residents interested in learning more about the Committee specifically and the watershed in general. Three new members have joined ERLAC since the Festival.

ERLAC had less success with continuing a newspaper column with area newspapers. The purpose of this project was to provide ERLAC with an opportunity to educate residents about issues concerning the river, including

events such as the Festival as well as articles on local history and watershed wildlife. ERLAC volunteers met with editors of Seacoast Newspapers to discuss Festival publicity, which the Committee felt was adequate, as well as the printing of articles submitted by ERLAC on a monthly basis. Despite research, writing and submitting several articles, area newspapers only printed three of the articles.

Conclusion

ERLAC will continue to host the Annual Exeter River Alewife Festival in an effort to educate residents about the need to protect water quality and quantity in the watershed. The partnerships ERLAC has created with various agencies and organization have strengthened the Committee's ability to be an advocate for the river at the local and regional level.

Recommendations

ERLAC and the Festival Planning Committee meet shortly after the event each year to review the day and make recommendations for the next Festival and other outreach projects. The following recommendations are a result of this meeting:

- Encourage the press to interview the recipient of the annual Exeter River Steward Award to increase awareness of the activities of that individual or group;
- Provide watershed Conservation Commissions with their own tent so they can promote their projects;
- Videotape presentations made at the Festival as well as the other ERLAC workshops, for distribution to local cable access channels in the watershed;
- Contact editors of town newsletters in the watershed to discuss the printing of monthly articles about ERLAC and river issues.