**Saco Watershed Collaborative Meeting and Tour at River Bend Farm**

**1230pm to 330pm**

**April 30th, 2018**

**Minutes by Emily Greene**

**Attendees (19)**

Bob Hamblen, City of Saco, bhamblen@sacomaine.org

Bonnie Pothier, Senator Angus King’s Office, bonita\_pothier@king.senate.gov

Christine Feurt, University of New England, cfeurt@une.edu

Dalyn Houser, Saco River Corridor Commission, dalyn@srcc-maine.org;

Dennis Finn, Saco River Corridor Commission (retired), sacorivercorridor@gmail.com

Drew Dumsch, The Ecology School, drew@theecologyschool.org

Emily Greene, University of New England, egreene@une.edu

Galen Cunning, Belstar Cider, belstarcider@gmail.com

Karl Honkonen, US Forest Service, karlwhonkonen@fs.fed.us

Mark Dubois, Poland Spring, dubois6789@yahoo.com

Mary Jane Dillingham, Maine Water Company, mdillingham@mainewater.com

Michael Robinson, Saco River Corridor Commission, winmar1@hotmail.com

Norm Labbe, Kennebunk/Kennebunkport Water District, nlabbe@kkw.org

Pam Morgan, University of New England, pmorgan@une.edu

Rick Knowlton, Maine Water Company, rknowlton@mainewater.com

Sean Tarpey, Rumery’s Boat Yard, starpey@rumerys.com

Sophia Scott, Maine CDC Drinking Water Program, Sophia.scott@maine.gov

Toni Carros, Saco River Corridor Commission, tcarros@roadrunner.com

Wayne Munroe, Natural Resources Conservation Services, wayne.munroe@me.usda.gov

**Agenda**

*12:30 – 2:00 Meeting*

Welcome – Chris Feurt, UNE

*Introductions*

Saco River Corridor Commission Update

Welcome to Dalyn Houser the new Executive Director of the Saco River Corridor Commission

Thank you to Dennis Finn current Executive Director of the Saco River Corridor Commission

*Updates*

Water Quality Monitoring update – Pam Morgan, UNE

Steering Committee – Chris Feurt, UNE

Outreach and Education Field Trips Chris Feurt, UNE

*Pending topics as of April 11:*

Update on Thatcher Brook Watershed Management Plan Implementation Whitney Baker York County Soil and Water Conservation District

Update on the development of Saco Island – Bob Hamblen Saco Planner

Update on NRCS work in the watershed – Wayne Munroe, NRCS

*2:00 – 3:30 Field Trip*

Education in the Saco Watershed – The Ecology School past, present and future, Drew Dumsch

*3:30 Adjourn*

Chris: The purpose of this Collaborative is to look for ways to work together in the watershed. To be transparent, the funding that we receive from Maine Water and Poland, came to UNE and asked us to remain as a neutral facilitator to bring people together. The amount we received this year is the same as last year in the amount of $70,000. I normally put the tasks of the SWC on Basecamp for our own viewing. UNE is responsible for delivering the tasks. This year, the Action Plan for the SWC was our lists of tasks. One of the things that we are doing is working with water quality data. There are many people collecting data throughout the watershed. Pam will be giving an update on that. I have a class of nineteen students and every one of them prepares a capstone project. The project is linked to the SWC, they have prepared to present for the end of the semester. The goal was to use the communication skills to create real world products. We have an intern that is putting together a literacy review that is a collection of all the papers that have been written about the Saco River and its research that will be at one place at UNE that can be available for viewing.

Dalyn House is the new Executive Director for the Saco River Corridor Commission. Dalyn, can you please give us a brief history of your background for those of us who haven’t met you yet?

Dalyn: I’ve been in this field for thirteen years. I went to Smith College, then went to Florida to work for…. And I directed public policy campaigns for them, on issues such as food safety, public transportation, government transparency, and other issues. I went to a law firm in Atlanta and was a consultant to local and state governments. I also worked…related to community relations. I have a lot of background in policy, research, writing. I’m excited to be here.

Chris: Thanks, Dalyn. Pam Morgan from UNE is going to give you an update on the water quality information that she has gathered in the Saco Watershed since our last meeting at the Annual Conference in January.

Pam: This semester there has been a student that has been working with the water quality data, mostly trying to organize and make the information presentable in a format that is more accessible to people. He started with the data from New Hampshire. NH has an amazing database for water quality. It all goes into a central database for them. Our intern worked with that primarily. We also got data from the Saco River Corridor Commission. In Maine, there has been other data and we are hoping to get more than what we have from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). With all of this information, we realized that we had to organize this somehow. We have the latitudes and longitudes from all the places people have sampled. Our intern worked with myself and Steve Zeeman at UNE, to come up with how to organize all of this. They decided to organize the data by parameters that have been sampled already. Now when you look at all these colored dots *(*[*www.wellsreserve.org*](http://www.wellsreserve.org) *Projects Page – Saco Watershed Collaborative)*, there are other layers that you can look at in the watershed. Each dot is a sample point, when you click on it, they will be color coded so all the oxygen data is one color coordinated point, and etc. There are different categories and you can tell who did the sampling, when, and where. Right now, the data is still in excel and GIS format. About 90% of the work so far has just been compiling the data, and we have recently been inputting data onto the Story Map that we have created through GIS. When you have the story map, there are tabs across the top that you can view. With all the GIS information, the story map allows all of this data to be stored publicly and displayed in a way that is user friendly. So that is the project so far. If people have other suggestions about what will be useful, please let me know. The goal is to help make the data more accessible and user friendly. Steve Zeeman and I have talked with the SRCC so that we can become the transitional partners in helping them collect water quality data and to be helpful in any way we can. The SRCC is really the one organization in the watershed collecting data, and in some of the sub-watersheds displayed in the story map online. Eventually, we want to find a master’s student to summarize the data.

Wayne: New Hampshire as you see has quite a few breakouts on indicators of metals and nonpoint source pollution, bacteria, etc. Can the Maine data also be broken out into these different categories as well?

Pam: Yes, because those categories will be very important for putting on the website. A lot of these things are what the SRCC has already. All the bacteria data and basic water parameters are what we want to include.

Karl: Would a goal be to synthesize this data so that you can maybe have a watershed map that is color coded, where different colors mean different parameters.

Pam: Yes. The Green Mountain Conservation Group created a report like that which has charts and that would be one of our goals too. It’s just finding someone who has the time to work on that in a future grant or a consultant.

Dennis: The University of New Hampshire did a lot of the lab work and did similar things like that.

Pam: Even if it’s a status report of the last 15 years and what has been happening, that would be great. The SRCC stated that from the data collected over the years, rivers are looking good overall.

Dennis: At least most of the data shows that the rivers are in pretty good shape, other than a few trouble spots. We anticipated a lot of issues with recreational use. I tried to catch it at times when it would be a true problem.

Pam: having this info with sea level rise (SLR) and climate change will become increasingly important. There were some god ideas from the annual meeting back in January that can be put on Basecamp, but we need more help to do what people are suggesting. We need to get more coordinated about monitoring and being more consistent. Through supporting the SRCC, there will be some coordination. Long-term, we should really make sure that the monitoring is coordinated and that we are gathering high quality long term data that can be put on Basecamp.

Chris: Another thing that my class worked on this spring, was the Saco Drinking Water Resiliency Project, that was funded through National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, to the Greater Portland Council of Governments, to help the Southern Maine Planning and Developing Commission, to look at the Saco River in Maine. This study looked for places of potential contaminants that would travel or be seen during floods. They mapped and located all potential sources, and then some distance away. They completed the report, but the report wasn’t accessible. My students for their projects took that information and tried to move that information out for the decision makers and towns. But, we couldn’t find it easily. When we did find the report, we realized that it still wasn’t fully finished. The students came up with a proposal to use a town with the suggestions that the model they are creating, other towns could do it as well. The first task was getting to the data from the report. We need to make sure that our reports are accessible to the public so that towns can also use it.

Rick: It’s a valuable first step in an assessment for us to reach out to the towns.

Chris: We will see what the students come up with. But the grant was written after the cases in West Virginia and Elk River, we already know about the flash floods of the Saco. Another grant would be required to finish the report for the Southern Maine Drinking Water Resiliency Project. The outreach piece wasn’t really built in for the report on that project. Any other questions about water quality?

Bob Hamblen: “The Waters” is a development project in Saco. It’s on the east side of Saco Island. In a lot of ways, it’s the second part of a project that we started two years ago. If you’re going down York Hill toward Biddeford, the west side is what Mattheson began developing. He brought us Run of the Mill in Saco. Our mill buildings have been turned into 150 mill apartments. The bottom story is given to offices and a few other commercial uses right across from the Amtrak station. Approvals are all null in void at this point. About a year ago, a developer put the east side under contract. It’s just about 6-acre parcel. Part of the submission is kind of fun, historic and contains current site photographs. Some of the historic photos are very cool to think about what this island was used for 150 years ago. Sean Tarpey would have been looking across the channel at industrial scale shipping up and down the river. It’s always just been trees along the bank. Recently, a $40 million dollar project developed, 92 condo units in the mills. There is a boutique hotel planning to go in as well. Jim Brady, he did the Press Hotel up in Portland. He is a solid developer. There is another hotel that hopefully will gain support from the UNE community for students. On May 15th, there will be a Saco planning meeting on what is proposed for a fifth development project. They mayor is excited about this because of the added value. Traffic will be an interesting subject to talk about later.

Chris: Any info amount of impervious cover?

Karl: Yes, it’s in the report here.

Chris: Any rain gardens or sustainable development with the infrastructure?

Bob: Yes.

Karl: In the report that Bob provided, it says that there will be 3.15 acres of impervious surface, out of 6.9 acres.

Bob: They are being careful of a 300-foot buffer of the Saco River.

Chris: That office near Brookfield Energy’s dam, what will happen to that property?

Bob: CMP wants to do about 120 parking spaces. Our projects are not water quality oriented, but we are interested in knowing how they will handle pedestrian traffic and waste. Near the Cataract Station on the west side, there is a sidewalk. On the east side, there is a cow path, but there is no sidewalk. The created path is about 800 feet. There has been talk about having a pedestrian bridge underneath the bridge like in Lewiston/Auburn’s River Walk. We look forward to incorporating this idea into a part of the Saco Island development. Storm water management and erosion control will be looked at very carefully.

Pam: What will happen where they cut all those trees? Does the regulation permit require them to replant?

Dennis: The commission is working on a … The one who cut down the trees will have to meet with the commission.

Toni: In one area of the Saco across from Run of the Mill, this developer cut every tree in this area down on the water. There were a few trees left over, but everything else got cut. The newspaper made is sound like only a few trees got cut. However, this project has the potential to be an award-winning design for landscape buffers. Especially because of its location and primarily because of the violation, it’s important that they take an opportunity to use all these low-impact development (LID) strategies. With all the research we know about buffers and the River Walk, this could be an award-winning project.

Bob: In addition, there will definitely be a marina here. Buyers from the condo units will have first dibs. There will be a public component to this as well. There will be potential for a kayak and canoe launch. An acre will be put aside as public space. We have talked about green spaces and access to the canoe and kayak launch. It’s a better plan than the plan proposed 12 years ago – it was going to be a gated community. So there are definitely improvements here that are happening.

Wayne: Hopefully there will be restoration here as well. The regulator will have a good aerial interpretation about what was once there. Hopefully they will understand the riparian buffers. The buffers are important for cooling of the river when the infrastructure heats up. It’s not easy task, that additional 3 acres of open space will most likely be part of the storm water design. The storm water design will function well until a 100 year storm event shows up. I also advocate the development team called Bushy, perhaps they get a hold of the SWC plans so that they realize the sensitivity of the ecology there.

Bob: We have as much professional help as we need. We regulate sub-out, to qualified professionals. Anything the SRCC wants to add, we are open to whatever you have. The Maine DEP felt that they had better review the project themselves. They will be discussing today, holding onto the .. or the city. So the development plans will get a thorough review. That’s all I can say for now. If there are any ideas or suggestions, please shoot Chris an email or email me.

Chris: Thank you so much for the update, Bob. Is the report online? The pictures are great, and my students do history projects, so this is something of interest to them.

Bob: I don’t know for sure. Talk with Bob Schumacher to see what he is doing with the Mount Agamenticus folks.

Chris: We do have another update from the York County Soil and Water Conservation District (YCSWCD). Whitney Baker is the new person at the YCSWCD. She is the project manager of the Thatcher Brook Watershed Restoration Working Group. She was not able to come and give us an update, as she is still familiarizing herself with the project and partners. The Working Group will have a meeting next Monday. The Thatcher Brook Watershed is the only portion in Maine that is under the 319 grant, where the money is used to clean up polluted water bodies. The Thatcher Brook as of 2015 has a watershed management plan that is being implemented. Next meeting, we will get an update from Whitney. Wayne, what kinds of things will be going on this summer with Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS)?

Wayne: Last week, I spent about 10 hours in the watershed, 2 of those hours flying over the watershed. It was the perfect view scape and it’s good to look from a different view of where we work. There were a lot of conservation projects. One of our biggest potato fields (250 acres) is in Limington, Maine. The trees were converted to prime farmland potato fields. On Thursday, I drove to the US Forest Service in Campton, NH. That was all through the Saco watershed. There is this piece of security called Link Pass. You can get yours renewed and have access to Bar Harbor, Campton, or Boston. It was a great day to go to Campton’s Forest. It’s interesting because there are still piles of snow melting. As I got closer to the Ossipee watershed, the water level was high. You could see the sediment loads being carried downstream. There were some areas that were flooded. But it wasn’t really out of channel. The more you realize how much forest cover type there is, and the closer you get you see more improved water, it was not as sediment loaded. There are probably more agriculture fields near the base elevations. On the way home, I went through the Kangamangas. There are significant amounts of snow there still. Going across that area, the stream water quality was clean. You couldn’t see sediment, but what you could see was from last fall. There was a lot of downed trees. Which could cause sediment problems. The stream was definitely flowing out of bank. But the amount of water was decent coming out of that watershed. It makes you take a really good look at conservation in the watershed.

Historically, we used to map the soils with the National Cooperative Soil Survey Program all over the country. This is a tool for all natural resource management. The Soil Survey’s were a one-time publication. Now you would go to Web Soil survey or Soil Web on your phone. Anywhere on your phone, you can use GPS to see all the soil that is under your feet. We are administrators of US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Bill programs. We have a lot of different programs that we deliver financial and technical assistance for. Under the last farm bill, it was captured as the “Swiss Army knife.” We had so many programs under the Obama administration, but we are now at the end of the farm bill from 2014. It’s being updated and debated in Washington. USDA anticipates some consolidation of programs with the new farm bill authorization. We are sure of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program “EQIP” to apply conservation practices with environmental benefits on private working lands in America. Farm and forest private working lands receive conservation on the land treating high priority environmental concerns. Each eligible EQIP application is ranked according to environmental benefits and receives a score. The general formula is known as SWAPA+HEP, soil, water, air, plants, animals, human, energy and pollinators. River Bend Farm used to be a livestock farm, they probably had sheep or beef here. We may have a historical conservation plan on file for this farm. We have historical records from the 1930’s. Conservation practices have life spans.

How Maine receives the farm bill dollars is through annual appropriations and then National NRCS allocations go to States for annual project funding. From there, there is a NRCS state technical committee. It is made of many partners and the public can attend as well. We try to figure out what are the resource priorities in this state? It’s an open forum though consensus-building to see where these dollars should go. Then there are state level initiatives. Maine NRCS on average receives $12 million dollars to allocate annually. We have gone as high as $20 million. We deliver all the plans, engineering and work with the producers to get these practices on the ground. Local Work Groups that are usually at the conservation district and federal district level manage the financial and technical assistance programs for private working landowners that submit program applications for various conservation practices. My group is Cumberland and York Counties. It’s about one-million acres. We have a unique situation here. We have more than 50% of population in the southern part of the state. There is a tremendous influx of young farms that are trying to buy and produce locally. We also have a strong farm network and community agricultural systems. Some of the beginning farmers came from Wall Street jobs where they were tired of their business and headed to Maine for a change in lifestyle. They make it very productive agriculture. USDA is recognizing the focus on production systems with conservation benefits. We have high tunnels. Ground crops that would allow you to grow in January and early spring. Congresswoman Chellie Pingree has been an advocate on these projects for a while. That short growing season puts the pressure on these farm producers. You can’t afford a drought for more than 4 to 6 weeks. We do a lot of irrigation work here. Historically, efficiency was 55%. With the help of NRCS, we can convert them into higher efficiency (greater than 90 %) irrigation systems. Most farms will save at least 50% in water and fuel with these new center pivot and micro irrigation systems. We do a lot of forest management and wildlife management as well. We go in and have forest management plans to help implement and move these plans forward. We also do the inventory for all the work and wildlife. The forest owner will allow us to come in and develop quality forest management plans that can be implemented with EQIP. This is important because lots of owners do not know what they have in their forests. We do a lot of work with the New England cottontail rabbit and other wildlife species of concern. We just did the summary of partnerships dollars ($44 million over ten years) investment in habitat which resulted in the NEC not being federally listed as an endangered species.

Galen: Do you see a shift in production to conservation?

Wayne: Yes.

Chris: When you shared the soil survey, I met someone named Matt Dorman, a NRCS Soil Scientist, he is tasked with doing new soils mapping. The whole state is being done. He is looking for soil managers who need areas mapped. If you are a consumer of soil information, then you want to talk with Matt. Now we will hear from Drew as we get ready to go out for the tour.

Drew: I founded The Ecology School twenty years ago. Founded in field ecology to use the experience to practice sustainability. We have been renting from the Ferry Beach Park Association which is a conference center. What we do is work with elementary high school students. Our goal is to get the kids learning outside all the time. In our multi-year programming, we use ecosystem based-skills. I actually have a background in an English literature not in science, so the idea of literacy is very compelling to me. We teach the “ABC’s of ecology.” Those are the mental file folders we start with our students. Then they apply them with local ecosystems.

Then we built a green building and followed that with food systems. I really wanted to up the ante on local and organic food we were serving to our stuents. Currently, we have over 150 species of plants that we use. Lots of lasagna beds and composting techniques. And of course we do seaweed composting as well. We have been modeling organic food systems. We love to have people join us for a meal and see how the meals are prepped in action. We do living and learning education. We have a whole class of students. We finally have some 5th graders coming for our 3-day program. We get a lot of people from New England. We have worked with over 175,000 people. We average about 12,000 students a year right now. May 12th, will be River Bend Farm Day. May 12th was when River Bend Farm was put up for sale. Tom Merrill was the guy you met in the parking lot helping to direct parking, he was the guy who sold us the property. The farm originally was a hay farm that also raised Arabian horses since the 1950’s. Tom is now on the Board of Directors for The Ecology School. The original holder of the land was the Saco Valley Land Trust. They were not happy about this project.

Eight acres are not under easement. The other ninety acres are under easement. We are currently on Maine Farm Link, and a part of Maine Farm Land Trust. Agroecology is one of our food models that we follow. What is cool now is that we get to start doing some research with the students. We look at this 105-acre property as a living laboratory. What I want is a long-term view of how we can increase sustainable projects on the land.