

Appendix B. Progress since 1997

In 1997, the *Connecticut River Corridor Management Plan* reported that the State of Vermont, based in part upon the results of biological sampling of the river bottom community, considered that the uses and values of the Wantastiquet river segment that depend upon high quality water are somewhat impaired, due partly to the operation of dams on the river. Additional discharges to the Vernon impoundment, with its reduced capacity for mixing and re-oxygenation, could encourage algal growth, depress oxygen levels, and result in reduced water quality in spite of the increased flow from tributaries in the region. The State of New Hampshire conducted chemical sampling at four locations and through this identified no water quality problems along the mainstem in this area associated with the impoundments.

Since 1997, much progress has been made. The State of New Hampshire has applied the protections of the Comprehensive Shoreland Protection Act to the New Hampshire side of the Connecticut River and to the Cold River, establishing a new local advisory committee for this tributary. In early 2007, Vermont's citizen-based basin planning program completed its draft basin plan for the West and Saxtons Rivers in Vermont. Some local governments have enacted stronger water quality protection for their shorelines.

In response to this *Plan*, the Federal Emergency Management Agency revised and updated flood insurance rate maps in the entire Wantastiquet Region, and the county conservation districts have completed erosion inventories for the mainstem. Water quality monitoring programs have begun on the Cold and Ashuelot Rivers, and there is now a record of data for both rivers since 2001. On the Ashuelot River, two dams have been removed, and the Army Corps of Engineers is working with The Nature Conservancy to improve management of flood control dams here and on the West River for the benefit of water quality and aquatic habitat. Communications about flow in the major tributaries from the US Army Corps of Engineers to the hydro power company managing mainstem dams have improved, allowing better management of Connecticut River flows.

A hazardous waste spill of organics, oil, and grease in Whetstone Brook was cleaned up and the brook is being evaluated for potential sources of high bacteria. Trout populations are recovering following a chlorine spill in this Brattleboro tributary. The Brattleboro landfill was capped in 1996, the Walpole landfill in 2000, and the Hinsdale landfill in 2003. Most farms are now required to have nutrient management plans and are no longer using as much fertilizer that could leach into waterways. Emergency management plans are being developed.

Both states have greatly improved public access to water quality information in the last several years, through their web sites. Vermont's regional planning commissions have made significant contributions by conducting bridge and culvert surveys for their communities, and seeking and applying hundreds of thousands of dollars to assess brownfields sites in Putney and Brattleboro, putting them on the path to redevelopment.

Perhaps even more encouraging is the energetic volunteerism of watershed groups on a number of the tributaries, including the Cold River Local Advisory Committee, Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee, and the West River Watershed Alliance. In a first of its kind effort, The Nature Conservancy and Ashuelot Valley Environmental Observatory mustered volunteers to conduct a comprehensive survey of aquatic habitat connectivity in the Ashuelot River Watershed.

There have also been setbacks since publication of the 1997 Plan. Two isolated heavy rainstorms in the Westmoreland, NH area in 2003, considered 500-year storms, caused severe erosion and flooding in Mill Brook and nearby small streams, sending enough debris into the Connecticut River mainstem to alter the river's flow and erode the opposite Vermont bank. In October, 2005, the Cold River watershed received 17 inches of rain in 24 hours, causing a road washout and a devastating loss of lives and homes, and declaration of a federal disaster area. The Cold River Local Advisory Committee rose to the challenge, providing information and advice as the communities in its region, and the agencies assisting them, struggled to move forward in its wake.