

Bay Coalition Moves to Restore Sippican River

May 2011

Earlier this month, the Buzzards Bay Coalition purchased a 9 acre property off of Marion Road in Rochester that contains the failing Hathaway Pond Dam. The purchase was made possible with financial support from the Rochester Land Trust and the Sippican Lands Trust. After considerable study and consultation the Bay Coalition is now moving forward with removing the dam and restoring this section of the Sippican River, an important tributary of the bay.



This project now enters the engineering design and permitting stage, a process that is expected to take one to two years. Removal of the dam will have a variety of benefits including allowing river herring and other migratory fish to freely access upstream habitat. A restored river will have great potential to once again support fisheries that have been lost due to the impounding of the river, including sea-run brook trout. Finally, taking down the dam will improve water quality and overall ecosystem health in the Sippican by allowing the free-flowing river to maintain healthy temperature, oxygen and sediment levels, as opposed to the warm stagnant waters of Hathaway Pond.

Additionally, the location of the dam and this property will create a critical link in a protected network of conservation lands from Route 105 to Eastover Farm,. There will be a new public entrance to these lands, and with the dam removed, a footbridge will be built across the river to allow walkers and horseback riders to access miles of trails and the river. Finally, this effort will remove an unnecessary hazard created by the crumbling structure. Where today the dangerous Hathaway Dam is something to be avoided, tomorrow this property and this section of the river will be open for public use and enjoyment.

A few years ago, with the deteriorated dam under an order from the state for being structurally unsound, the previous owner's efforts to sell the property were met with little interest. The Bay Coalition, initially drawn to this project for land conservation purposes, developed an interest in the possibility of restoring the river and improving the passage of fish around the dam.

In 2010, the Bay Coalition hired a specialized engineering firm to conduct a study which indicated that repairing the dam would be cost prohibitive but taking it down was a feasible

alternative. Such a choice would have trade-offs, such as loss of the open water of the pond for both aesthetics and as supply water to the cranberry operation that draws water from the pond.

This winter as the Bay Coalition worked with cranberry and fisheries stakeholders to identify a workable solution, routine safety inspections uncovered more serious problems with the dam than previously expected. The pond, drawn down for the latest inspection was deemed unsafe to refill by the engineers evaluating the dam.

The Bay Coalition's engineering consultant is now in the process of developing the appropriate method for removing the dam and we will soon seek the permits necessary to do that work. The property is currently closed to public access due to the instability of the dam. The Buzzards Bay Coalition is excited for the day, not too far off, when the Sippican returns to a free flowing river for migrating fish, and the area is open to people interested in exploring the river and the miles of trails beyond.