

West Branch Restoration Project

There is a serious bank erosion problem on a portion of the West Branch of the Piscataqua River at River Point Conservation Area (see attached photo). 300-400 feet of bank is already seriously eroded and another 600-700 feet are threatened. Tons of eroded soil has had a very harmful impact on the aquatic habitat in the West and East Branches of the Piscataqua and down to the Presumpscot River. We are also losing a great deal of land in that area, land that includes two very rare plant species and valuable early successional habitat.

This is a problem that can be fixed in a way that retains the naturalness of the river (no concrete barriers or rip-rap) and thus would make an excellent candidate for a mitigation restoration grant (like the recent McDermott acquisition). Plans for that restoration work are proceeding. Both the Cumberland County Soil & Water Conservation District and the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife are partners in that effort.

Steps need to be taken now to prevent another 300-400 feet of stream bank damage this coming spring. An arborist needs to take down leaning trees that are likely to come down and tear out large chunks of the bank with their root balls attached. Felling and removing them now will keep the root balls intact and prevent additional erosion. The cost of doing that work is expected to be \$5-7,000.

A detailed restoration plan also needs to be developed to strengthen our grant proposal. That plan, essentially a detailed engineering document, can only be done by a fluvial geomorphologist and will cost \$2-\$3,000. These costs will not be reimbursable from future grant funds.

As it happens, the owner of the property on the other side of the river is interested in selling his property. The acquisition of that parcel could also be included in this grant. The total project cost is probably at least \$275,000, including land acquisition. Obtaining ownership of this property would add additional 38 acres to an existing block of conservation land along the East Branch and provide access to the West Branch area needing restoration.

Finally, River Point Conservation Area, though one of our most important conservation properties, is not protected by a conservation easement. We could provide a significant grant match by contributing the value of that easement to the overall project, thus enhancing our chances of grant funding.

Council Action: Authorize the town manager to spend up to \$10,000 in Open Space Acquisition funds to fund the preventive measure needed to stop further erosion of the West Branch.

Authorize the town manager to negotiate a Purchase Option with the owner of the adjacent property.



West Branch Erosion Damage