

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Half-Mile of River Frontage Gets New Conservation Protection

An 8.57 acre strip of land in New Hampton with about 2800 feet of frontage on the Snake River has been acquired to help protect the water quality of Lake Waukewan. The protection follows more than two years of effort by the towns of Meredith and New Hampton and by the Waukewan Shoreowners Association (WSOA).

The New Hampton property was purchased from Jacqueline Spear, following numerous meetings and public hearings. The process sometimes resembled dogs eating spaghetti, including the involvement of at least five lawyers; multiple drafts of agreements, easements, and other documents; and various unexpected frustrations. Finally, there were no loose ends.

The end result of this perseverance is that a portion of a critical watershed is now protected in perpetuity. In addition to protecting the environment and property values in the lakeshore towns of Meredith, New Hampton, and Center Harbor, the acquisition helps protect Meredith's water supply, which comes from the lake. Lake Waukewan drains into Lake Winnepesaukee, which is the water supply for Laconia and thousands of private homes. While the shoreline of the lakes is covered by the state's Shoreland Protection Act, the provisions of that law do not currently apply to the Snake River.

The WSOA raised over half the purchase price, with the remainder coming from the conservation funds of New Hampton and Meredith, which are managed by their conservation commissions. The New Hampton Conservation Commission now owns the land. Meredith holds a conservation easement on the property, which places restrictions on land uses and development.

Before the purchase could be completed, truckloads of illegally dumped rubbish were removed by WSOA volunteers so an independent environmental assessment could conclude that there were no recognized adverse environmental conditions associated with the property. The entrance from Winona Road will be closed to motorized vehicles to control further abuse. The land, which runs between the river and the state-owned railroad tracks, will be open to the public for foot travel.

The purchase required not only negotiations with the seller's representative, but also public hearings by the conservation commissions and approval by the selectmen of both towns. Also involved were the Waukewan Watershed Advisory Committee, New Hampton Town Administrator Barbara Lucas, Meredith Town Manager Phil Warren, Meredith Community Development Director John Edgar, and many others.

In addition, Meredith had passed a warrant article at Town Meeting enabling it to spend money from their conservation fund outside of Meredith. Since critical natural resources do not stop at town boundaries, the New Hampshire legislature enabled this action with Senate Bill 381 passed in 2008, effective January 1, 2009. This joint effort by Meredith and New Hampton sets a precedent for the use of this new law.

Aside from spring runoff or flood events, the Snake River has very little current. It is choked with emergent vegetation that makes navigation difficult, but serves the critical function of filtering impurities from the water it receives from Lake Winona, Hawkins Pond, and other parts of the watershed. Wildlife is abundant, including nesting loons and other birds, as well as moose, deer, beaver, and other animals.

The New Hampton Conservation Commission expects to develop a natural resource inventory and management plan for the property. The WSOA and town officials in Meredith, New Hampton, and Center Harbor are seeking further protection of the river with similar projects and appropriate land use controls.