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Lakes Region Conservation Trust Completes Mill City Park Conservation Project In Franklin



Along the Winnepesaukee River from the Winnepesaukee River Trail – Photo by Karin Nelson

This spring the Lakes Region Conservation Trust (LRCT) completed a conservation easement and management plan to protect 17 acres of land along the Winnepesaukee River in Franklin adjacent to the new Mill City Park. This conservation easement, conveyed to LRCT by the City of Franklin, is an integral part of the Mill City Park project, which combines opportunities for recreation and enjoyment of the City's riverfront. LRCT is proud to be able to play a role in this important downtown project and to work with the City in conserving valuable habitat and open space along the River.

Three rivers run through Franklin—the Pemigewasset and the Winnepesaukee join in the City to form the mighty Merrimack, which then makes its way toward Manchester, Lowell, and Lawrence, legendary mill cities. These three rivers also made Franklin a mill city. There is a stretch where water from Lake Winnepesaukee seems in a particular hurry to get to the ocean, and on this stretch many mills were built over many decades. The last of these mills closed in the 1970s and is now home to a brewery and restaurants and shops, a new future for old mills.

Mill City Park will tap the energy of that rushing water for a whitewater park, for the enjoyment of boaters and spectators, with new whitewater features and viewing areas on the shore. The same rivers

that powered the mills will now power a new vision for Franklin, driven by enthusiasm for adventure and recreation.

And this is where LRCT comes in. As part of the project, the City needed to include a conservation component and needed an experienced partner to help in accomplishing that. The City owns four parcels of undeveloped river-flanked land just upstream from the new park, and it has partnered with LRCT to permanently conserve this land. In addition to being classified by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department as highest ranked habitat in the state—undisturbed woods, habitat for wildlife—the land offers opportunities for passive recreation, and it will even preserve remnants of two of the mills that are part of Franklin’s industrial heritage.

Over the next several years, City staff and volunteers will improve the conserved land by removing debris and trying to manage invasive species, and constructing a recreational trail on the track of an historic road that once served the old mills. As conservation easement holder, LRCT is the long-term steward of the property and has oversight responsibilities and a perpetual duty to monitor the property and ensure that its conservation values are protected.

This innovative project for the City of Franklin is also a first for LRCT—LRCT’s first conserved land in Franklin and first as part of a visionary economic development initiative. LRCT’s role in the project demonstrates, once again, that LRCT is a recognized leader in the region when it comes to land conservation and stewardship. LRCT looks forward to a fruitful partnership with the City in caring for this important riverfront land.

The Lakes Region Conservation Trust, founded in 1979, has conserved over 28,000 acres of land throughout the Lakes Region. LRCT’s land conservation work preserves community character, conserves critical wildlife habitat and diverse ecosystems, protects natural landmarks and scenic landscapes, and provides recreational opportunities for people of all ages. To learn more about LRCT, please visit www.lrct.org or call 603-253-3301.



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