

Friends of the Mad River: Annual Report to Watershed Towns – 2016

Friends of the Mad River (FMR) is a community-supported, non-profit organization committed to informed and active stewardship of the Mad River and its 144 square mile watershed. The river connects our Mad River Valley (MRV) community and its clean water is a measure of our success as stewards of the land.

More information is available at: FriendsoftheMadRiver.org and RidgetoRiver.org.

Resilience is the capacity of a system to change and adapt, to recover health after a stressor. Efforts to build resilient Mad River ecosystems and communities are a focus at FMR in response to predictions of a changing climate and our own local experiences with increasingly persistent flooding. We use several key strategies to help build resilience that safeguard our Mad River Valley quality of life. Our recent work has emphasized the value improved stormwater runoff management can have to help strengthen flood resilience and improve water quality.

In 2016, Friends of the Mad River worked to “slow, spread, and sink” stormwater runoff and build resilience by:

- Providing leadership to the Ridge to River taskforce, a 5-town coalition working toward flood resilience and clean water in the Mad River watershed. Formed in 2015 in response to a growing awareness of the role that runoff during rain and melt events plays in exacerbating flooding and impairing water quality, Ridge to River is working together across the watershed to figure out how our community can reduce its vulnerabilities. The taskforce includes members of each watershed town’s planning commission and selectboard, Sugarbush Resort, as well as other interested MRV residents. They are investigating innovative actions that municipalities, homeowners, property managers, businesses, and road crews can take to slow down rain and snowmelt and help it sink into the ground before it runs off so quickly into streams. In so doing, we can reduce the flashes of water that take out roads and culverts, enjoy cleaner swimholes, and reduce maintenance costs and the frequency of repairs. Stormwater runoff is a collective problem that calls for collective action, and Ridge to River is eager to engage the broad community in its work.
- Completing “stormwater master planning” at Harwood Union Middle/High School to recommend a suite of stormwater retrofits that dramatically reduce pollution and sedimentation from the school buildings and parking lots into Dowsville Brook. A school and community committee directed the process.
- Beginning stormwater master planning at Fayston and Warren Schools along Chase and Freeman Brooks.
- Co-hosting, with MRV Planning District, a community forum and resilience celebration to honor the Mad River Valley’s resilience progress since Irene and learn about critical actions for building a stronger future.

In 2016, Friends of the Mad River also worked to steward valued watershed resources by:

- Collaborating with Sugarbush Resort and agency and non-profit partners to retrofit Sugarbush’s snowmaking weir (a small dam to collect water for making snow) in Slide Brook so that it allows for fish and sediment movement during 3 seasons while continuing its important winter snowmaking function. This change improves wildlife habitat and reduces the stream’s erosive force.
- Engaging a research scientist to analyze historical Mad River Watch data, identify persistent water quality problems, and make recommendations for upgrading the program so that it is most useful to the community.
- Collecting 570 water samples from 32 sites across the watershed throughout the summer with the help of dedicated volunteers. We analyzed samples for E. coli presence as well as phosphorus, nitrogen, and turbidity levels, publishing results in the Valley Reporter and on signs at nine MRV swimming holes.
- Providing technical assistance to Mad River Valley Selectboards, conservation and planning commissions, road crews and individual landowners as they steward watershed resources.

Respectfully submitted,

Corrie Miller, Executive Director

Board of Directors: Jack Byrne, Richard Czaplinski, Ned Farquhar, Ann Hoogenboom, Ned Kelley, Sucosh Norton, Kinny Perot, Jeannie Sargent, Brian Shupe, Kate Sudhoff, Katie Sullivan, and Lindsey Vandal