

# Environmental Bulletin



Issued by the State of New Hampshire  
Department of Environmental Services  
6 Hazen Drive  
Concord, NH 03301

July 16, 2002

**Contacts:**

Stephanie Lindloff, Dept. of Environmental Services,  
(603-271-3406)  
Eric Aldrich, NH Fish and Game Dept. (603-271-3211)  
David Deen, Connecticut River Watershed Council  
(802-869-2792)  
Barbara Skuly, Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee  
(603-352-0987)

## **Winchester Dam to Be Removed:**

### ***Taking out small dam represents a big step in Ashuelot River restoration***

**Winchester, NH** – A diminutive structure by human standards but an impassable obstacle to many fish, the Winchester Dam on the Ashuelot River will soon be removed. This is the second dam in as many years to be removed from the Ashuelot River. The project is scheduled to begin the week of July 22<sup>nd</sup>, pending weather and river conditions. Last July, a downstream section of the Ashuelot was restored when the McGoldrick Dam in Hinsdale was removed.

Both dam removals are projects of the New Hampshire River Restoration Task Force, a collaborative public-private initiative with the goal of restoring rivers and eliminating safety hazards through selective dam removal. The N.H. Department of Environmental Services (DES) coordinates the work of the Task Force, only the second state agency in the country to create such a program.

“Rivers like the Ashuelot have worked hard for our benefit throughout New Hampshire’s history,” observed DES Assistant Commissioner Dana Bisbee. “Now, we’re returning the favor by restoring a significant stretch of this State-designated river to its natural state. By removing some dams that have simply outlived their usefulness, we’re also eliminating public safety hazards as well.” He said that DES’s dam maintenance crew will do the work of removing the dam, which is paid for through a combination of public and private grants. The estimated cost of removing the dam is \$33,000.

The Winchester Dam removal will restore approximately 15 miles of the Ashuelot River to free-flowing for the first time in about a century. This project is a significant part of a river-wide restoration plan to help bring back thousands of American shad, blueback herring, and Atlantic salmon to the Ashuelot River.

"The removal of the Winchester Dam moves us another step closer to restoring access to historic spawning habitat for migratory fish," noted Scott Decker, N.H. Fish and Game Department Fish Habitat Conservation Program Coordinator. "Removal of this small dam will help maintain the momentum generated last year with the removal of the McGoldrick Dam downstream in Hinsdale."

The Ashuelot is one of New Hampshire’s major tributary streams to the Connecticut River and an historically significant river for migratory fish. Increasing fish movement throughout the river will allow them to reach important spawning and nursery sites, resulting in healthier fish populations and improved opportunities for anglers.

The 3-foot high, 105-foot-long timber crib dam is owned by the Town of Winchester. It has deteriorated greatly since it was built around 1900. It no longer serves a function and is considered to be a hazard to anglers and paddlers. The dam once provided water storage for the New England Box Company located in Winchester and for the Sheridan Woolen Mills in Ashuelot Village. As part of the dam removal project, two millstones will be retrieved from the Ashuelot River for display at the Winchester Town Hall and the Winchester Historical Society.

“We have been involved in the discussions and planning for dam removals on the Ashuelot over the last few years, and look forward to the opening of the waterway in Winchester,” said Barbara Skuly, Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee member. “Many in the local community are in delighted anticipation of the removal of this hazard to boating and seeing the waters flow unobstructed once again.”

Anglers hope improvements in the river will improve recreational fishing on the Ashuelot, which could result in increased revenue to communities along the river. The N.H. Fish and Game Department has spearheaded efforts to restore anadromous fish to the Ashuelot, and it has been stocking about 200,000 Atlantic salmon fry each spring since 1995, 700 American shad each spring since 1998, and 80 river herring each spring since 1998.

"The effort to restore the Ashuelot River is a model for how public-private partnerships can benefit the Connecticut River itself, and the communities located within its four-state watershed," said David Deen of the Connecticut River Watershed Council, which is funding a large portion of the project in partnership with the NOAA Fisheries Restoration Center.

Additional parts of the plan to restore the Ashuelot River include the removal of the Homestead Woolen Mill Dam in West Swanzey and the installation of upstream fish passages on three hydropower dams located in the lower section of the river.

The project is made possible through financial and technical assistance from a number of groups, including: NOAA Fisheries Restoration Center, Connecticut River Watershed Council, American Sportfishing Association - FishAmerica Foundation, Wildlife Forever, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, N.H. Fish and Game Department, N.H. Department of Environmental Services, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The project has received valuable support from the Town of Winchester, Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee, the N.H. Division of Historical Resources, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The River Restoration Task Force has diverse representation. State governmental partners include: N.H. Dept. of Environmental Services, N.H. Fish and Game Dept., N.H. Division of Historical Resources, and N.H. Office of Emergency Management. Federal governmental partners include: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA Fisheries Restoration Center, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Geological Survey, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Organizational partners include: Connecticut River Watershed Council, Trout Unlimited, NH Rivers Council, American Rivers, Conservation Law Foundation, American Whitewater, Merrimack Valley Paddlers, Coldwater Fisheries Coalition, and Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee.

###