



US Army Corps
of Engineers ®
New England District

Fact Sheet

Merrimack River Comprehensive Watershed Study

Section 729 WRDA 1986 as amended

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Background:

The Merrimack River is formed by the confluence of the Pemigewasset and Winipesauke Rivers at Franklin, New Hampshire and discharges to the Atlantic Ocean near Newburyport, Massachusetts. The main stem is about 116 miles in length with about 74 miles in New Hampshire and 42 miles in Massachusetts. The lower 22 miles of the river are tidal.

Over the past several decades significant improvements have been made to the overall water quality of the Merrimack River due to Federal, state, local community, and private investment in water pollution control facilities. However, there are remaining water quality and fish and wildlife habitat concerns related to Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO), storm drains and non-point source discharges, anadromous fish passage, future water supply needs and hydropower demands.

Non-Federal Sponsor:

The Merrimack River Basin Community Coalition was created in response to regulatory requirements to mitigate CSO discharges. Because the Coalition communities faced an aggregate financial commitment in the range of 500 million dollars, the communities believed that such an investment should be made wisely. They believed that this wise investment should be founded on good science that holistically embraces the needs of the watershed. Generally the mission is to "spend smart" by making wise science based investments in activities related to water quality improvements that are not solely focused on CSO mitigation. The Coalition consists of five partners, the communities of Lowell and Haverhill and the Greater Lawrence Sanitary District in Massachusetts and the communities of Nashua and Manchester in New Hampshire.

Role of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers:

The Community Coalition was able to secure the assistance of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to undertake an assessment study to provide scientific water quality data for the Merrimack River. This study is cost-shared 50 percent federal dollars and 50 percent local dollars. Phase I is currently estimated to cost about 2 million dollars with each

Coalition community providing one-fifth of the local cost share. Phase I efforts are aimed at identifying the existing river water quality conditions, identifying and quantifying pollutant loads to the river, developing a computer model to evaluate the effects of existing pollutant loads including non-point sources on the river and evaluating pollutant abatement strategies.

Assessment Study Status:

The Corps with CDM, as its contractor for the assessment study, began review of information on the river and collecting new water quality data in 2003. Water quality data was collected from Manchester to the estuary for three non-storm conditions and two rain events in 2003. In spring 2004, we expect to collect the last water quality data set. This new data will be used to describe conditions in the river and the impact of pollutant loading. CDM is currently reviewing and evaluating the collected data. We have also collected hydrology and hydraulics data on the river and completed time of travel studies in cooperation with the United States Geological Survey. The primary effort in 2004 will be the development of the river computer model.

Study Coordination:

Technical methodologies for the study are being coordinated with the Environmental Protection Agency, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, and the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services as agency participation through out the effort is important to ensure acceptance of study results. Several meetings and workshops have been held with the agencies since study initiation in 2002. Current plans are to conduct the next workshop with agencies and other key stakeholders in the late spring 2004.

Study Reports:

Several interim reports have been prepared to date on the river and watershed and these reports are available on this web site.