

# Presumpscot River News

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## Mitchell Endorsement Caps Year of Progress



*Senator George Mitchell and FOPR President, Dusti Faucher, October 18, 2002. Photo by Will Plumley*

It has been a year of great progress for the Presumpscot River with many changes, which fit well into the Friends of the Presumpscot River (FOPR) River Renewal Initiative. Events worth celebrating include:

- Creation of the Presumpscot Preserve
- Final Environmental Impact Statement issued for five dams
- Smelt Hill Dam ... GONE
- River Management Plan opportunities shared with the

public

- Senator George Mitchell endorses FOPR work

On the 30th anniversary of the Clean Water Act, Friends of the Presumpscot River honored Senator George Mitchell for his role in cleaning up the nation's waters and to kick off the next phase in our restoration of the Presumpscot River. The event was held October 18 before a full house at the American Legion Hall on the banks of the Presumpscot River in Westbrook.

Board member, John LaPointe, did an admirable job of introducing Senator Mitchell, giving us all a wonderful history of the Senator's achievements and the Honorable Don Esty, Mayor of Westbrook welcomed us to Westbrook. Mayor Esty emphasized how important the restoration of the Presumpscot is to the city of Westbrook.

Several local elected officials also attended, watched our video depicting the conditions on the river as it is now, altered by the building of dams, and listened to information about the potential this beautiful river has for restoration. We are grateful to everyone that attended for their support and their donations. Sixteen people became new members of FOPR that day!

Friends presented the Senator with a pewter trivet, donated by Lovell Designs of Portland. This trivet, an ingenious design of fish that form Saint Brendan's cross, represents both the Senator's heritage and the fish we are trying to restore to the river. Accepting the honor, Sen. Mitchell spoke at some length on the progress made over the past 30 years and work left to be done. In closing, Sen. Mitchell endorsed the river restoration work of Friends of the Presumpscot River and asked all present to support our efforts.

Dusti Faucher, President of FOPR said of Senator Mitchell's remarks, "Prior to our involvement in this project, there was a significant lack of awareness about the restoration opportunities on the Presumpscot. Today, this has changed dramatically with an outpouring of public support for FOPR's position. And, with the endorsement of a respected leader such as Senator Mitchell, Friends' efforts on the Presumpscot are even more energized."

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## Smelt Hill Dam

At the same time, final demolition work was taking place on Smelt Hill Dam. In an effort spearheaded by the Coastal Conservation Association (CCA), the old dam was breached in September and gone in just a few weeks. Without the work of CCA, our work would be



*Breaching of the Smelt Hill Dam,  
September 27, 2002  
Photo by Will Phumley*

much more difficult. The lower seven miles of river are now open to fish all the way up to Cumberland Mills Dam in Westbrook. Canoeists and kayakers also benefit. Check out the great pictures on the Portland Trails website ([www.trails.org](http://www.trails.org)) of the first canoeist coming over Presumpscot Falls since the original dam was built in the 1730's.

We expect to see alewives, American shads, blueback herring, stripers, smelts and several other species, including a Atlantic salmon in this reach of the river as spring migration takes place.

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## **Friends File Supplemental Historical Documents**

During our research for historical documents, we found several petitions to the Massachusetts General Court (the legislature of the day) from settlers along the Presumpscot all the way to Bridgton, as well as the Native Americans. These settlers knew very well that it was essential to keep the river open for migrating fish and their very survival depended upon it. During the war, the British patrolled the coast, making it nearly impossible to take their boats out to sea to fish for cod.

A quote from the 1781 petition by the towns of Gorham, Pearson Town (Standish), Windham, and Bridgton states, "...it makes it more Expedient that all Stream Should be open where the Fish have been wont to frequent, for it appears to be a grievance that ought no longer Quietly be Bourn that one great Source of life which Nature has provided for Publick use Should be Destroyed to Serve the Intrest of a Few individuals..."

In order to continue the re-population of several native species upriver, we will persist in our efforts to achieve fish passage at Cumberland Mills and the upstream dams.

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## **Final Environmental Impact Statement from FERC**

During the summer, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) issued the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the relicensing of five dams owned by SAPPI: Saccarappa, Mallison Falls, Little Falls, Gambo, and Dundee. FOPR and other organizations and individuals had criticized the Draft EIS for not doing enough to balance private hydropower production with public benefits, especially in the area of restoring the river's fisheries. The Final EIS incorporates many of FOPR's conclusions and recommendations. Most notably, the Final EIS requires that fish passage be installed on all five dams, beginning with Saccarappa when passage is acquired at Cumberland Mills.

Although FERC did not explicitly call for dam removal, the agency completely and explicitly rejected the dam owner's position on providing no anadromous fish passage, finding that power generation and fish passage are the appropriate balancing of its responsibilities under the Federal Power Act, and further finding that the Presumpscot River with fish passage has the potential to develop "sizable runs of shad and river herring if fish passage facilities are constructed."

Final EIS requirements form the basis for terms of the new licenses, and FOPR is watching this process closely to assure that license terms are faithful in their execution of these requirements. Presently we are waiting for the final licenses, which will be issued as soon as the State of Maine finalizes the "401 Clean Water Act Certification" for the water quality in the impoundments behind the dams. A draft "401 Certificate" was issued in December of 2002, with the final version expected before summer.

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## **Presumpscot Preserve**

Last spring, Portland Trails, working in partnership with the City of Portland Land Bank Commission, acquired a spectacular parcel of land along the Presumpscot River in North Deering. The rugged terrain, cut by streams and home to huge hemlock, is a joy to walk. Preserving the land also protects important wildlife habitat in Maine's largest city.

Portland Trails is excited about preserving Presumpscot shorelands, and is pursuing additional property acquisitions. Portland Trails' efforts this year along the Presumpscot River will benefit Greater Portland residents, visitors and wildlife for many generations to come.

For more information on the Presumpscot Preserve, or to contribute, call Portland Trails at 775-2411.

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## **Friends Smelt Hill Dam Footage Aired Nationally on CBS**

Anyone watching Charles Osgood's Sunday morning program on December 22 got a real treat. Osgood did a piece about dam removal around the country and included a clip from Friends of the Presumpscot

River showing the demolition of Smelt Hill Dam! Special thanks to Friends members John Branson, who shot about an hour of footage capturing the removal of Smelt Hill Dam last fall and donated it to FOPR, and Bill Knowles, owner of Maine Video Systems, who prepared the beta format version favored by CBS. Thanks also to American Rivers, who called us with CBS's request and forwarded the tape to them.

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## **Fundraising**

FOPR recently received a second grant of \$10,000 for two years from the Orchard Foundation and a \$10,000 grant from the Cricket Foundation. We are very grateful to both these organizations for their continuing support.

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## **Annual Meeting**

The Annual Meeting was held at 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 18, at Walker Memorial Library in Westbrook. Sandra Cort was renewed as a member of the board and elected treasurer. We also welcome new board member, Sarah Coombs.

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## **Did You Know?**

Did you know that FERC's estimates of the impact of removing the Little Falls dam would lower the water levels just 3 to 4 feet?

Did you know that the Maine Department of Marine Resources estimates that the Presumpscot has the potential to support nearly 800,000 American shad, alewives, blueback herring and Atlantic salmon with the three dams removed and fish passage on three others?

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