

## Souhegan River

There are two local organizations that monitor the Souhegan River:

**The Souhegan River Local Advisory Committee (SoRLAC)** is charged with providing local input for permitting along the river under RSA 483. There are slots on the committee for three citizens from each of the six riverfront communities. Meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month and are always informal and open to the public. Most meetings are held at 7pm in the Milford library. The ‘protected river’ signs we hope you’ve noticed at all bridge crossings come through this committee. Any construction activities within a quarter mile of the river are looked at by SoRLAC and recommendations based on our local knowledge are passed to NH DES for permitting. Placing a dock in the river, building a house, removing trees all require a permit. The major work both alongside and in the river at the Fletcher Paint sites in Milford has been a major concern for the committee this year and will be the focus of improvements for the area in the next year. The placing of uprooted trees into the riverbank in Merrimack to prevent erosion was another subject of major controversy. Erosion control is a danger to the river and should be used as a last resort. Future protection for the river means that land along the river needs to be conserved either through setbacks or ownership whenever available.

**The Souhegan Watershed Association** has a wider view than SoRLAC, the entire Souhegan watershed. There is a map and other information at [www.souheganriver.org](http://www.souheganriver.org). SWA’s focus is primarily on education about the river and sponsors three main programs: a free canoe trip schedule to get people out on this and other rivers, cleanups both for trash and keeping the river open for canoeing and kayaking, and water quality monitoring.

The water quality program has now compiled 20 years of data on the river water and has just issued a report that says that except for places where the river flows through the center of towns, the river consistently meets the state standards for swimming and fishing and that the occasional times during the summer when E. coli counts exceed the recommendations for swimming are all naturally occurring – almost always the result of heavy rains that wash naturally occurring riverbank pollution into the river.

The Souhegan has been studied as the pilot program to protect instream flows for all NH rivers and standards have been set to keep enough water in the river to protect its habitat. This is critically important as we’ve seen drought conditions all this year. Future work will be required so the river will be able to meet the standards that have been set and may require reconfiguring some of the 13 flood control dams so water can augment low flows.