

Shorey's Brook Dam to be Removed in York County

Much of the 4.3-mile Shorey's Brook in South Berwick has not actually looked like a typical brook for many years. The culprit is a dam perched several hundred yards below Route 101. Built as early as the 1630s, it has morphed over the centuries into a decrepit hodgepodge of industrial material, impenetrable by anadromous fish including alewives, smelt, and Atlantic salmon. A dam removal is currently on track to take place in November to restore the brook. In early October we toured the dam removal site with members of Great Works Regional Land Trust and other project partners.



Decrepit and inconspicuous, the Shorey's Brook dam is difficult to capture in a picture.

The Great Works Regional Land Trust (GWRLT) acquired the 27-acre Raymond & Simone Savage Wildlife Preserve that surrounds Shorey's Brook in 2008. A storm had breached the dam in 1996. Since then large volumes of eroding sediment from Shorey's Brook were degrading the Salmon Falls River and the Great Bay Estuary as the water moved around the manmade barrier during storms and spring floods. According to the monitoring team from the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve, the dam has also prevented the upstream migration of all anadromous species except American eel.

Realizing the scale of the environmental degradation caused by the dam, the trust began the process of removal in August 2010. Led by project manager and stewardship coordinator Darrell DeTour, GWRLT has gathered many partners, including the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Conservation Law Foundation, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and others, to plan, permit, and fund the removal.

This project promises to be a success in Maine both for reconnecting long-fragmented habitat and as a model to inspire other entities—land trusts, municipalities, and others—who may be considering a dam removal project but are daunted by the perceived complexity and cost. To date this project has drawn little controversy and is on track for a remarkably rapid completion. What renders the Shorey's Brook project so special is its quick progress, single landowner, and overwhelming cooperation among the various parties involved in the project. Two separate towns and their respective planning committees had to be brought into agreement as the dam lies between South Berwick and Eliot. One aspect that made the process easier is that the GWRLT owned the property on either side of the stream. The GWRLT has proven that a dam removal can be completed by a small entity through cooperation and persistence.

-Dylan J. King, Maine Rivers Outreach Coordinator