



Hoosic River Recreational Assessment



Ashlee Martinez, Katie Stevens,
Keith McWhorter, Blake Goebel
Environmental Planning
May 2005

Hoosic River Recreational Assessment

Introduction:

This project was carried out by four Williams College Students for an Environmental Planning class. It was done for the Hoosic River Watershed Association for the purposes of looking at options for improving recreation on and awareness of the Hoosic River. Our project focused specifically on the section of the river stretching between the Ashton Avenue boat launch in North Adams, MA to the Strobridge Complex and old Tannery Dam in Pownal, VT. This section was chosen because it is a long navigable section of the river. Upstream North Adams and Adams have built flood chutes that restrict access to the river and the dam prevents continued direct access downstream. In order to complete this project and formulate the recommendations we make we did a visual stream survey both by car and in a raft floating the river. We then conducted a series of interviews of local people who had interests and experience on the river for their input onto what they would like to see improved for their recreational purposes. We looked extensively at the land ownership so we could understand who we needed to work with in order to make the changes we thought necessary as well as the legal ramifications of the changes we suggested. This report is the result of our research and gives recommendations for possible improvements HooRWA could make.

Description of the Project Site:

The Hoosic River watershed consists of the Hoosic River and all of its tributaries. The river flows through western Massachusetts, southern Vermont, and into upstate New York, where it drains into Hudson River. Our project focuses on three towns the river runs through: Pownal, Vermont, and North Adams and Williamstown, Massachusetts.

The headwaters of the river are in Lanesborough and Cheshire, Massachusetts. The tributaries gather into a man-made lake, the Cheshire Reservoir, and then flow as one river northwards through Adams, North Adams, Williamstown, Massachusetts, and into Pownal and North Pownal, Vermont and northeast into New York. As the Hoosic runs through the Berkshires, it is lined on the west by the Taconic hills and by the Hoosac range on the east. The topography is sharply contrasting, with steep hills lining the flood plane. There are few large wetlands in the river basin to absorb runoff from the hills and storm water, which leads to rapid changes in water level. To prevent these flashy stream flow patterns from negatively impacting the towns through which the river flows, the towns of Adams and North Adams commissioned the US Army Corps to install flood chutes in the river to barrier against high water and speed up the flow of the river through the towns. The chutes have been successful in preventing flooding, however they also cut off all access to the river in the towns. They have also affected the river ecosystem by increasing river temperature and providing less than ideal habitats.



Adams Flood Chutes. Hank Art

The watershed as a whole is full of natural resources that serve the surrounding communities. Forests cover seventy-three percent of the watershed and another twelve percent is covered by agricultural land. This land provides habitats for a number of species, including whitetail deer, pheasants, coyote, bears, beavers, and many others. The waters themselves provide habitats for many fish, particularly brook, brown, and rainbow trout. The fisheries are particularly productive because there are both warm-water and cold-water habitats, providing for a number of different species.



Hoosic River in Williamstown. Katie Stevens

Project Description:

Our project looks to create an action plan for the recreational use of the Hoosic River from the Ashton Avenue canoe launch in North Adams, Massachusetts to the Strobridge Complex in Pownal, Vermont. This stretch of the Hoosic is the longest floatable section in the area, starting just downstream of the flood chutes in North Adams and ending just upstream of the Pownal Dam. Our client for the project is the Hoosic River Watershed Association (HooRWA), based in Williamstown. Our project is intended to increase use of the river for all potential safe, and environmentally friendly recreational activities in the hope that this will improve the use of the river by the local population, which would in turn increase knowledge of the river and increase support for river restoration and protection. This is also in accordance with the expressed goals of both the Pownal and Williamstown master town plans. The Pownal plan explains that “Lands adjacent to streams and water bodies which serve a recreational function should

be protected from adverse impacts of development” (Pownal Town Plan, 42). In Williamstown, they believe that “Preserving open space and access to it are important to maintain the character of Williamstown” (Williamstown Master Plan, 17).

In order to gather such information, our project was conducted in several stages. We first determined the land ownership for property abutting both sides of the river throughout our project area. Second, we conducted both a walking/driving and a floating survey of the river in order to gain a more intimate perspective of the river and the land areas that have recreation potential. Third, we conducted interviews with individuals associated with the river, asking structured questions to determine potential recreation opportunities including fishing, boating, hiking/walking, cross-country skiing/snowshoeing, hunting, mountain biking, motorized vehicle use, and swimming. With our gathered information, we evaluated with several different sites for improved recreation along specific areas of the river.

History of the Project:



hoorwa.org

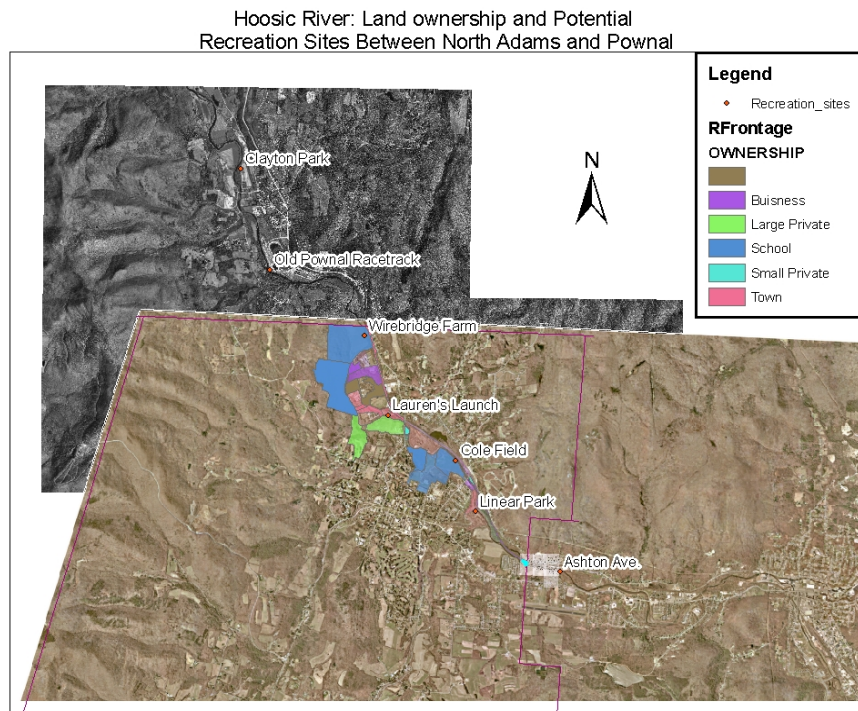
The Hoosic River Watershed Association (HooRWA) was founded in 1986 as a non-profit citizens' group “dedicated to the restoration, conservation, and enjoyment of the Hoosic River.” (hoorwa.org) They have been influential in the creation of nature trails, boat launches, and parks along the Hoosic and have carried out educational and public awareness activities to make people more aware of their impact on the river and the river's potential for use. They also carry out a continuing water quality monitoring program.

The watershed that HooRWA serves has a complicated and varied history. The Hoosic River was drastically changed in 1875 when the Hoosac Tunnel was built through the Hoosac Plateau. At the time it was completed it was the longest tunnel in the world at 4.74 miles. The tunnel allowed the Fitchburg Railroad Company to access the Hoosic Valley. As history continued, the river became a source of energy to power many mills. It was also used as the resident sewer, which made it extremely unclean and unhealthy. This industrialization is particularly apparent in the chutes controlling the river in North Adams. This was especially clear in the winter months when the waste and trash would sit on top of the river frozen in the ice until it was swept away in the spring. The water-powered mills were replaced with other industry and the mistreatment of the river continued to its proximity to this industry and to roads.

The Hoosic is much cleaner today that it was during the industrial revolution. Modern federal and state regulations stop the unrestricted dumping and destruction of the river. This has helped the river recover along with the reduction in human population

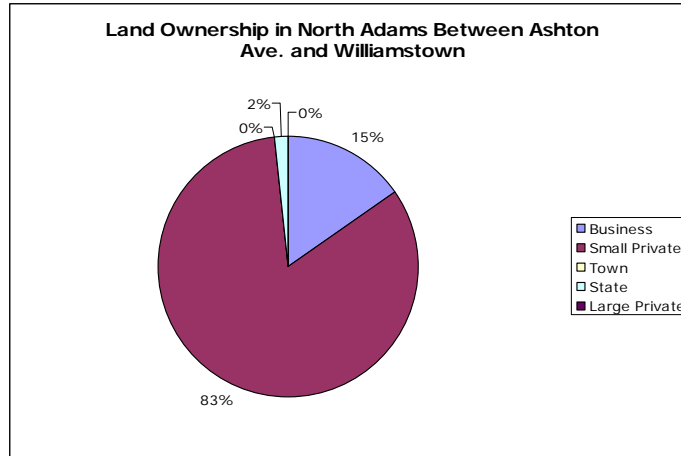
along the river and the reduction in the amount of livestock around the river.
(HooRWA.org)

Land Ownership:



Our group looked at the land ownership of each parcel of land abutting the Hoosic in our project area. By identifying the waterfront land owners, we will create a resource for HooRWA that should be helpful in learning who is effected by projects on the river and what partnerships can be made. The Town Hall in each of the three towns had this information as well as maps delineating the property lines. We gathered and analyzed the data from North Adams, Williamstown, and Pownal.

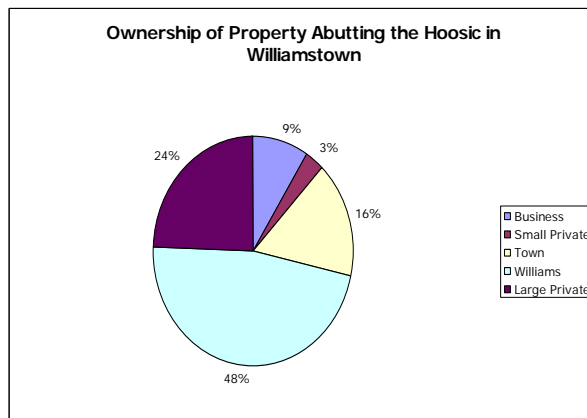
The land along the Hoosic in North Adams, between Ashton Avenue and Williamstown, is owned almost entirely by private landowners. Most of the parcels are no larger than half of an acre. The Boston & Maine Railroad owns a small portion of land; a narrow strip that follows the north bank of the river.



Williamstown has four main categories of ownership, according to the maps last updated in January 2005: business, town, private, and Williams College. The two main businesses along the river in Williamstown are Steinerfilm and Phototech.. Although Phototech is no longer in business here, they are still the formal owners of the land. Together the two businesses comprise 74.75 acres of riverfront property. A third business that is not mentioned in the paperwork in terms of acres owned is the Boston and Maine Railroad. The railroad follows the Hoosic all through Williamstown and crosses the river several times. In many cases the railroad makes accessing the river very difficult.

Williamstown itself owns about 132.75 acres of property next to the river. This is important because it may be easier to increase recreational opportunities on town owned property where it is not necessary to deal with private landowners.

Private ownership of riverfront property comprises 222.89 acres of land. This number includes the 115.8 acres owned by The Spruces, the mobile home park along State Route 2.

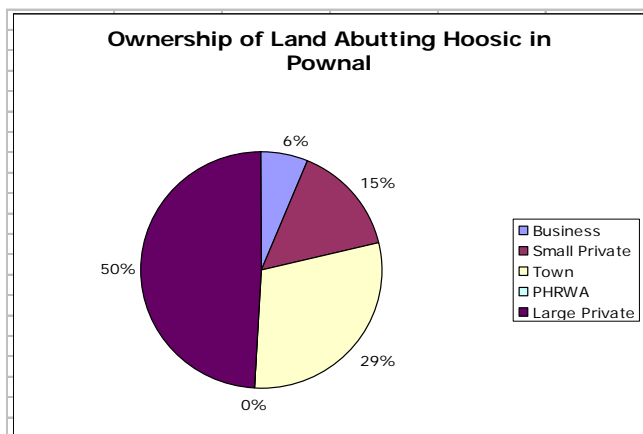


Williamstown is different from the other two towns in that Williams College is a huge riverfront property owner. The college owns 383.45 acres of property along the river, including Cole field and Wire Bridge Farm.

Pownal similarly has four main categories of ownership: Business, Private, Town, and the Pownal Hoosic River Watershed Association (not to be confused with HooRWA). The distribution of land within those categories, however, is different from that of Williamstown. The riverfront businesses in Pownal are the Pownal Tanning Co., which owns land both upstream and downstream from the Hoosic Hydropower site. The Tannery Dam site, recently renamed the Strobridge Complex which is at the Hoosic Hydropower and a former EPA superfund site is surrounded by a new park and historic buildings. Progress Partners, Inc. recently acquired the racetrack site that runs along the river and along Rt. 7 in Pownal. They have potential recreation plans that they have yet to present to the town of Pownal. The Boston and Maine Railroad continues to follow the Hoosic all through Pownal, also limiting river access.

The town of Pownal owns nearly a third of the property abutting the river. The vast majority of the riverfront properties, however, are owned by private landowners. Some of the 1503 acres of private property are small lots, but most if it is comprised of large dairy and vegetable farms and privately owned open space. Five private land owners own 1317.25 of the 1503.8 acres of private land.

The final category of land ownership in Pownal, while small, is relatively important to our project. The Pownal Hoosic River Watershed Association was formed when HooRWA wanted to form a park along the river. Vermont public funds for land purchases generally cannot go to an out of state non-profit, so a group of local people in Pownal formed PHRWA and created what is now Clayton Park.



Legal Considerations:

Legal restrictions on our project come in two forms: zoning regulations and wetlands protection legislation. Zoning regulations restrict the types of activities that are allowed in our sites. The Zoning schedule divides the properties up into different dimensions, each of which has their own restrictions. Certain recommended changes, such as putting in official parks at some of these sites, would require a permit from the Board of Appeals to change the zoning, while other activities such as fishing and conserving land, are allowed in all dimensions. However, we are recommending ways to improve and encourage use of these sites for the activities that are already going on there.

For this reason it may not be important to worry about zoning as we are not attempting to change current uses.

The second type of legal restriction that we face is wetlands and rivers protection. These regulations come on three levels ranging from federal government to state regulation to local bylaws. Federal regulation is covered under the Clean Water Act. This is very broad in its address of the wetlands and focuses on protection of the wetlands in the way those wetlands impact the waterways of the United States. They are more focused on heavy pollution, dredging, or dumping of wetland areas that would have significant impacts on the watersheds. Our project only incorporates low impact changes which do not include any of the impacts mentioned above, so the national regulations apply little to this project.

State regulations require more attention. In Massachusetts the Rivers Protection Act, which amended the DEC's Wetland Protection Act gives the wetland area a buffer of 100 feet on either side of the river where development is restricted. Some development is allowed within the buffer including unpaved walkways, minor pruning of undergrowth, and even plantings. These are the allowable actions that affect our project. Development that is not listed can be done in the buffer zone as long as it meets the approval of the Conservation Commission. Vermont has slightly different standards. It has either a 50 or 100 foot buffer depending on the importance of the wetland area. Within this buffer hiking, bird watching, boating, swimming, other recreation, research and education, and docks and steps of the size being recommended are allowed. Mowing existing lawns, putting in barbecue pits, bird houses, and other similar structures are allowed for residential use but may need permitting in a park setting.

State regulations, particularly in Vermont, allow most of the improvements we recommend in this project. The actions that these regulations do not allow have such small impact on the natural environment, and often have good impacts, that we think it is likely permits would be granted. The areas where we are recommending the most significant changes are all town or state owned land. This means that any activity that happens in these areas would need to be done through partnership with these entities as they would continue to be the owners.

Pollution Considerations:

The stigma of the Hoosic's polluted history is still present. While the past thirty years have marked incredible change as the Hoosic becomes cleaner, healthier, and a safer river to recreation on, live near by, and more aesthetically pleasing to look at, pollution problems still persist.

The river is currently classified as "Class B, impaired." A class B river is generally fishable and swim able, but not drinkable as a Class A river. The "impaired" part references that while it is *generally* fishable and swimmable, at certain times, (for example high water or after sewage treatment plant releases) it is not. A more technical definition from the *Massachusetts Surface Water Quality Standards* reads, Class B "waters are designated as a habitat for fish, other aquatic life, and wildlife, and for primary and secondary contact recreation. Where designated they shall be suitable as a source of public water supply with appropriate treatment. They shall be suitable for

irrigation and other agricultural uses and for compatible industrial cooling and process uses. These waters shall have consistently good aesthetic value.”

Dick Schlesinger is the Water Quality Manager for HooRWA. He explains that the amount of sampling the HooRWA performs does not give as complete a picture of what is going on the river as they would like. They have recently moved to looking more closely at the macroinvertebrate population as a way of determining overall river quality. Unlike the specific sampling that tells about a piece of the river, the macroinvertebrates will react to whatever is in the water. Thus a healthy macroinvertebrate population means a healthier river, and a non healthy macroinvertebrate population leads to a less healthy river.



HooRWA water quality monitoring. HooRWA.org.

The biggest threats to the Hoosic today, are nonpoint sources pollution, Mr. Schlesinger said. This is confirmed in the *Assessment of Land Use Activities and Nonpoint Source Pollution in the Hoosic River Watershed, December 1998* that sites a number of nonpoint source pollution including underground storage tanks (UST), pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers from farms and lawns, farm manure, impervious surface runoff, including road salt and sand, and old and current dumps and transfer stations, both official and unofficial. Nonpoint source pollution is harder to monitor, determine, and do something about.

The first recommendation for HooRWA in this regard is to update their current resources, confirming the locations of the existing nonpoint pollution sources as of 1998, as well as looking for new potential sites of nonpoint sources of pollution. This is easier said than done. The 1998 group did an extensive survey of the Hoosic River Watershed, concluding in many places that nonpoint source pollution sites were still unknown and that data was incomplete. Still, an evaluation of the sites and around the potential recreation areas would provide valuable information about which to base the level of recreation encouraged.

Logically, the Hoosic River becomes more polluted as it continues downstream Mr. Schlesinger explains that HooRWA is now looking towards increased soil, slope, and land use sampling and data. These should give an indication on where they need to look more.

Increase recreation on the Hoosic should not be considered without improvements to water quality and river health that will make the river a safer and prettier place to recreate. Indeed the biggest recreational draw to the river may well be one that is cleaner.

Recreational Activities:

The river can be used, and is used, for a variety of recreational activities. Fishermen are active in certain parts of the river. HooRWA leads rafting trips from the Ashton Avenue Launch to Lauren's Launch in the spring months when the water level is high enough to float a big raft down. During this time and even later into the summer the river is used by a variety of canoe and kayak enthusiasts who in the later months do not mind portaging sections of the river where the depth becomes too low. Trails run along most sections of the river, particularly those on public land. Some are in good repair, others not. Some do not appear to be official trails but simply places where people have blazed their own paths. Some swimming does occur on the Hoosic River though it is not recommended. Rivers classified as "Class B" are swimmable, and the Hoosic River is "Class B impaired." Finally, people like to spend an afternoon next to the river and also trails often begin or end at park areas where there can be clear marked access to the trail head. There are some parks on the Hoosic River, namely Linear Park off of Route. 2 in Williamstown, and Clayton Park and the Strobbridge Complex in Pownal. These activities: fishing, boating—canoeing, rafting, and kayaking, hiking/walking, skiing/snowshoeing, swimming, and use of the parks, are the focus of our planning for the river. This plan investigates making these activities easier and safer, and the river a more active part of the surrounding community and more noticeable entity in people's consciousness.

Fishing:

With the presence of good insect hatches, trout habitat, and spawning gravel that many other regional streams lack, there is great potential for trout fishing on the Hoosic. Unfortunately, the river's history of mistreatment limits this potential.

Much of our information in this section comes from an interview with Joe Overlock, the president and founder of Berkshire Fly Fishing. The main thrust of his opinions was towards the potential of the Hoosic as a great Eastern trout fishery. He reported catching Brown Trout of up to 22 inches and Brook Trout up to 14 or 16 inches, trout sizes that are rare on the East Coast (at least south of Maine).

Joe focused on two main problems with the Hoosic that are keeping it from becoming a premier trout fishery. The first and most obvious is the neglect that residents have shown the river, both in polluting it and generally treating it as a second-class waterway. He thinks that the river is in a transition stage; people have thought about it negatively for a long time but after he started the fly-fisherman's group recently he's seen a lot more people out fishing and enjoying the river. Beyond the perception of the river also lies the problem of significant amounts of PCBs that make the fish unsafe to eat. The second problem that he points out, which is outside the scope of our project but worth mentioning, is the flood chutes that control the river as it flows through much of Adams and North Adams. These channels increase the flow and temperature of the river, washing away insect larvae and habitat, and making these sections unsuitable for trout.

Boating:

Boating along the Hoosic includes canoeing, rafting, and kayaking. While these sports are popular, they are limited to the population that owns or has access to such crafts. With boating, pollution is less of an issue since direct contact with the water is minimal. Access however, is the primary concern here. Good boat launches and pull-outs are of top priority for these types of uses. They must be either in designated locations, or public property. The boat season is often restricted to early spring (depending on the year) due to low water levels. Eileen Fielding from HoorWA explains that the river could be floated through most summer months, if the boater were willing to wade across certain areas. In the early spring, however, as water levels rise, due to snowmelt and spring precipitation, the waters can become somewhat dangerous at times. A safety check or “snag patrol” to float the river and remove any dangers such as snag trees should be conducted at the beginning of the season to avoid these potential risks.

Finally, as stated earlier, the longest stretch of floatable river in this area is the part we are investigating. Depending on the type of craft and skill level, it is floatable in just a few hours. The river lacks other such comparable stretches.



Recreation along the Hoosic. hoorwa.org

Hiking/Walking/Skiing/Snowshoeing:

These four activities, hiking, walking, skiing, and snowshoeing are lumped together because they require similar terrain (depending on the season) and face similar obstacles for implementation. Most of the trails mentioned in this report refer to marked and unmarked trails that skirt the river, at times on both sides. The main pollution concern for these activities is an aesthetic one—trash along the riverbanks and trails. Trails require regular maintenance and marking to be user friendly and draw use from local pollutions. At this time some trails are more maintained, marked, and publicized than others. A possible future plan for the trails would be to connect many of the systems at the individual parks or locations together so that the river could be walked for many miles.

Swimming:

Swimming is a debated topic for the Hoosic River. As “Class B, impaired,” swimming cannot be officially recommended. However, it is still often used for this purpose, particularly in the summer months. It should be discouraged the further downstream one goes, particularly after the sewage treatment plants, and anywhere where sediment is high. Making swimming a viable option for the river would strengthen the case that clean-up is necessary for recreational improvements.



Recreation along the Hoosic. hoorwa.org

Hunting, Mountain Biking, Motorized ATV/Snowmobile Uses:

Hunting, Mountain Biking, and Motorized ATV and Snowmobile uses along the river are restricted to the Strobridge Complex for our project, where they are currently and historically popular uses of the associated land. These activities share some commonalities. All except hunting are often sited as heavy impact recreation, leading to rapid soil erosion and trampling of plants and their ecosystems on and off the trails impacted. “Noise pollution” is another common complaint with the motorized vehicles in particular. Because of the nature of these activities, including hunting, trail sharing can be difficult and sometimes incompatible with other uses. For example, a trail used by both snowmobilers and cross-country skiers can become a danger.

Stream Surveys:

A basic outline of this section of the river

We began our physical survey of the river with a walking/driving tour at Ashton Avenue. This site is the home to a walking trail and one of the few canoe/boat launching points along the river. The banks along the river here are steep—reinforced on the east side and eroding on the west. This erosion appears to be a combination of natural stream erosion and erosion from use, particularly near the canoe launch. A railway runs along the east side of the river. Originally put near the river because of the flat land, the railway now poses a threat to the river’s natural course, requiring reinforcements in many

areas. At the Ashton site, near the east side is an abandoned mill. It is unclear whether the mill has been properly cleared or cleaned, and remains a potential site for Underground Storage Tanks or other contaminants that might leach into the river as nonpoint source pollution.

Much farther downstream we also saw what appeared to be an old oven resting on a gravel bank, and noticed several shopping carts in the river as well.

As the river passes Cole field it wraps around and then widens some as it makes a sharp turn in front of Park St. Here the flood plain is very wide and the river piles up against gray rip-rap put directly in front of its intended route by the Army Corp of Engineers. Next, the river goes under Route 7 which has a high, well enforced bridge. The river bends northward after going under Route 7 until it runs into Lauren's Launch. On the west side of the river at this point there is pasture and to the east there is Department of Public works land for the town of Williamstown. Lauren's launch serves as a take-out point for the HooRWA rafts and other boaters and serves as a put in place for those wishing to continue downstream towards Pownal.

From Lauren's Launch the river runs north along Route 7 past the Department of Public Works and Steiner Film. It continues to follow the path of Route 7 and the railroad goes along it. It passes the old greyhound racetrack. The area across the river from the racetrack extends upwards from the river which is covered with some family housing but which also has several still working farms. These are significant as farms are always potential for pollution and nonpoint source pollution with fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, as well as leaking oil from old cars and machinery, underground storage tanks.

Because of its mountainous and sparsely populated terrain, Pownal has many small tributaries that feed directly into the Hoosic, especially during high water in the spring. Investigating several of these tributaries, we found similar land uses to those along the Hoosic itself—mainly farmland and private homes.

Recreation Sites:

In evaluating potential recreation along the Hoosic River, our group undertook both a walking/driving and a floating survey of the river. In addition to looking at potential recreation opportunities, on these tours we looked for drainage pipes and small streams discharging directly into the river, as well as erosion, trash, and supported river banks. All of these have the potential to influence recreation, both through pollution levels and direct access to the river, and our findings from these surveys are interspersed through our recommendations.

Generally, we noticed a large amount of trash along the banks of the river. Although the sections closest to roads, especially Rte. 2 and North Hoosic River Road, generally had the most garbage along the banks, almost every section of river bank that we saw had at least some trash. This followed with the disturbing trend on the river between the Ashton Avenue canoe launch in North Adams and Williams' Cole Field of a close proximity to roads and railroad tracks, but a limited number of access points. We also found inflows into the river through a number of pipes, especially again between the Ashton Ave. launch and Cole Field. Although these ended up being outside the scope of

our project to examine, they're important to note as potential sources of point-source pollution.

We ended up examining several specific sites for their recreation potential. These areas include the Ashton Avenue canoe launch in North Adams; Linear Park, Williams College's Cole Field and surrounding area, and Lauren's Launch in Williamstown; and Clayton Park as well as the Strobridge Complex in Pownal. These spots are current or potential access points that we have singled out for the potential of better access to further our goal of improved recreation.

Ashton Avenue:



Ashton Ave. GIS map. Ashlee Martinez



Ashton Avenue Bridge and Railroad (above left) and Canoe Launch (above right). Katie Stevens.



Mill along Ashton Avenue. Katie Stevens

The Ashton Avenue Boat launch is a small area on Ashton Avenue before the bridge over the river coming from Rte. 2. Its most impressive feature is its parking lot that is surrounded by big white stones and is well marked with a sign. The lot holds 6 cars comfortably and is approximately 50 feet from the river. The area where the boats are launched is highly eroded and is fairly steep. The area around it is not an official park but the undergrowth has been highly trampled and it is fairly open along the river and there is a marked trail entering to the east. The area seems well used but poorly maintained. We also noticed a significant amount of trash at the site. The first option for the area would be to leave it as it is. This requires no additional funds or manpower. It would continue to serve the current purposes of HOORWA, which uses it as a put in area for their rafting trips and would continue to get relatively the same amount of attention it gets now.

Since this is a relatively easily accessible area and is well marked and highly used by boaters as an upriver starting point there is also the possibility of really making this into a park instead of simply a canoe launch. This would include better marking of the boundaries of the park, a reasonable clearing of some of the undergrowth to clear space for people back from the river, and potentially some park attractions such as picnic tables or grills. It would not be a significantly high cost but would require man power to make the initial changes and then a person to do regular upkeep of the park area. Other changes would be to stabilize the boat launch itself either through some form of structure or by the regular dumping of sediment into the boat launch area to minimize erosion and make the launch less steep and prevent further difficulties. The parking lot also could be enlarged depending on the desired traffic for the area. There seems to be adequate land to the south and east where it could be expanded. Alternatively, this could be kept the same size to control the amount of people using the park and prevent over use.

The bridge directly below the canoe launch also appears to be a popular spot for launching bikes into the river. We saw at least three bicycles just downstream of the bridge, resting on the bottom, and any improvement of the site should include their removal.



Bikes in river by Ashton Avenue. Katie Stevens.

Linear Park:



Linear Park, GIS map, Ashlee Martinez

Lower Linear Park is located on Linear Lane, off of Route 2 east of Cole Avenue. The park is on town-owned land and sits behind the town tennis courts. The entrance to the park is marked by a large sign displaying the area and the trails within it. Upon entering the park, the main path branches into two series of trails: the Field Trail and the River Trail. Both sets are well marked and well kept. The River trail leads down towards the Hoosic, along which there are a number of “View Points” where the river is accessible. These “View Points” include benches where hikers can rest and enjoy the scenic view of the river. As the trail follows the Hoosic, it turns at the confluence of the Hoosic and Green rivers. There is a swimming hole in the Green River just below another of the trail’s “View Points”. There are not many apparent changes needed at Linear Park in terms of improving recreation. It is well maintained, with trails, signs, river access, as and an open lawn area. Increased advertisement such as signs marking the turn off from Route 2 may increase the use of the park since it may be hard to find.



Sign at Linear Park, Ashlee Martinez



Keith at Riverview site in Linear Park, Ashlee Martinez

Cole Field:

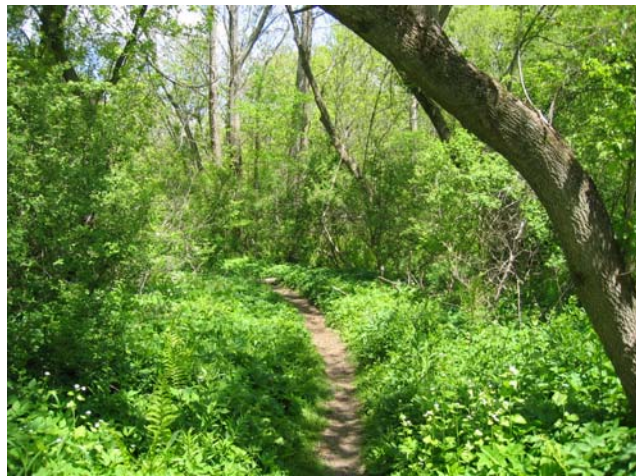


Cole Field. GIS map. Ashlee Martintez.

Continuing downstream, the next potential recreation is the Cole field area at Williams College. The fields are currently used for a variety of athletics. To the northwest of the fields lies a wooded area with a small network of unmarked trails. This area is owned partially by the college. These trails meander along the river and the surrounding woods. One bench along the trail exists to sit on. By and large, these trails are for those who know them, and are not widely publicized to the larger Williams and public community. The trail heads are difficult to find, and the late summer months and spring mud seasons renders them almost impassable, save for those who do not mind getting dirty. They are frequented by a limited group of Williams students, and local residents, particularly those with dogs or those who find other appeal such as nature or bird watching. The Williams Outing Club occasionally uses the site, just north the of the field hockey field, for a canoe launch. To reach any of these trails, one can park about a five minute walk away along Stetson Road by Eph's Pond.



Cole field and parking. Katie Stevens.



One entrance to Cole Field trails. Katie Stevens.



Trail along river. Katie Stevens.

One of the major impediments to recreation at this site is that it sits atop an old landfill. At points, it is the most aesthetically troubling spot that we came across. Coming around a bend in the river, the left bank was eroded to reveal large amounts of trash coming out of the soil, and more trash falling into the river. The landfill site is scheduled to be capped this summer to prevent further erosion from the river that exposes trash. However, there are likely to be further erosion problems here as the river upstream is artificially constrained, both by the flood chutes and by rip rap that looks to have been put in to protect the Boston and Maine rail lines. As a result, the river will tend to heavily erode the banks on the outside of its bends, including the bank holding in the Cole landfill. Hopefully this site, with the riprap in place after this summer, will become more aesthetically pleasing, and a place where increased recreation could be encouraged.

Recently, part of the athletic fields have been made into a driving range. The driving range, that covers the field at two entrance points to the trails further discourages their discovery and consequent use.



Cole Field Landfill Falling into River. Katie Stevens.

If we did nothing to improve Cole Field trails and river access, the advantage would be no increased costs and manpower. This option also preserves the “secret” of the trails, and to some extent their woods character that comes from minimal use. However, the projects’ goals are increased recreation, use, and understanding of the river. Since these trails are not widely known or easy to find, marking the trails with blazes and a sign near the parking area, like that in Linear Park, would increase their recreational potential. Such publication, however, would require more trail maintenance, and a plan for long term trail use. Because of the distance from parking to the trails themselves, this site is better suited for hiking and walking than boat use. However, an official or easier to use canoe launch not only for the Williams Outing Club, but for the public is another option if there were interest. The downside is that it would entail people walking their canoes across the fields.

Fishing is also a possibility at the far west end of this property, where the river curves and meets with Park Street. While there are many reasons to induce greater recreation, including the Williamstown Master Plan, such goals are not necessarily in line

with the goals of the College. Increased foot travel would require regular maintenances, possibly wear down the trails quicker, and affect the quiet atmosphere that currently make the trails a place to “get away.” Further steps for this research include investigation if and who maintains the trails now and potentially, how the college would feel about increasing access to this area, as no changes can be done without their consent.

Lauren’s Launch:



Lauren’s Launch and Williamstown DPW, GIS map, Ashlee Martinez

The third potential spot for increased recreation is Lauren’s Launch next to the Department of Public Works in Williamstown. This in reality appears to be little more than a sign and a trail leading to the river on Public Works property. There is a little parking area about 100 yards away from the trail toward Rte. 7. This is a slight distance from the launch itself but may be necessary due to the closeness of the road to the river at the actual launch. Between the river and the road is a line of small trees and on the other side of the road are a small red shed and then an open field. Once again the opportunity to do nothing exists for this space as well. This would once again make the launch site continue to be used in much the same way it currently is. It costs nothing and takes no time at all. It does not, however allow for more public knowledge or use of the river. Adjustments that could be made would include more signage to let the public know of this access point, an improved parking area that could hold more cars in a structured way could be useful in making access easier since this is not an area that is easily accessible by foot. Like Ashton Avenue, the launch itself could be reinforced by either a structure or by sediment deposits to prevent its further erosion and make river access continually accessible. The other attribute this area has is the big field across the street. This seems like a perfect place for picnics or frisbee games. It would especially be ideal for festivals or events to be put on about the river to raise awareness in the area. This place much like Ashton Avenue could have some picnic tables or grills but it should be remembered that it’s most important attribute is its open space. There is some question as to whether an intense odor may be a concern at some times of year. The Hoosic Water Quality District has plans to expand its capacity and HooRWA should keep abreast of those developments.



Sign at Lauren's Launch, Katie Stevens



Blake at the Boat Launch, Katie Stevens

Wire Bridge Farm:



Wire Bridge Farm, GIS map, Ashlee Martinez

The Wirebridge Farm land was recently acquired by Williams College as an addition to the Hopkins Memorial Forest land. The Hoosic River runs on two sides of this land, separating it from Rte. 7 in one location and Steiner film on another. The site of a project from another ENVI 302 group, we will not discuss the potential recreation opportunities in detail. What becomes of this land will depend on the Hopkins Forest Users committee and what type of management plan they ultimately implement. There is potential for canoe put-in/take-out, as well as low-impact camping and walking trails along the river.

Old Pownal Racetrack:



Pownal Racetrack. GIS map. Ashlee Martinez.

Off of Rte. 7 in Pownal, the Old Pownal Racetrack is a potential river recreation site. Situated in between the railway and the Hoosic River, this site is currently underused. It was recently bought by Progress, Partners, Inc. This group will present the future use plans to the town of Pownal, though this has not yet taken place. Out of the scope of our project, we keep this site on the list for HooRWA to investigate as more information becomes available.

Clayton Park:



Clayton Park. GIS map. Ashlee Martinez.

Clayton Park is a small park in Pownal off of residential Clayton Drive and Route 346 in Pownal, Vermont. It is owned by an independent, fairly inactive non-profit called the Pownal Hoosic River Watershed Association, which was set up with the purpose of securing Vermont state funds to get the park established. This means that the park is protected. It is, however, small, difficult to find, and gated in order to keep vehicles out of the park itself. The sign indicating the park has been stolen or otherwise dismembered. There is a very small parking area. At the entrance there is a wide trail down to the river about 75 yards away. Bike and ATV tracks can be seen along this trail. Other seemingly designated trails exist along this property, but they are hard to find from the main

entrance and unmarked. The access to the river, however, is direct and minimally sloped in most locations.

Any actions that would be done here would need to be done in conjunction with PHRWA. Recommendations for this site include solidifying the ground from the main entrance to the river to allow better boat access, particularly as a take out point before the Pownal damn. Improvement might be to mark the park better to make it more well-known. We had trouble finding this site as the sign for the park is gone. Perhaps picnic tables to mark it as a place of recreation, as well as signs off of Rt. 346 and the surrounding roads.



Clayton Park Sign (that is missing). Katie Stevens.



Trail into Clayton Park. Katie Stevens.



View from Clayton Park. Katie Stevens.

Strobridge Complex:

The Old Tannery Dam site, recently renamed the Storebridge Complex, is located off Rt. 346 in Pownal, Vermont. It is town owned land, monitored by the Pownal Recreation Implementation Committee (different from the Pownal Recreation Committee). The committee was formed in 2002, when various state groups joined forces to buy it from private land owners. As a result, the parcel is subject to various land use restrictions from the Vermont Land Trust and the Nature Conservancy. As a former location first of a cotton mill and then a tannery, part of the site was until recently, an EPA superfund site. This cleanup included tearing down the old mill as well as capping hazardous chemicals at the “lagoon site,” just north of the bridge. The lagoon is the site of the new Pownal wastewater treatment plant.



Pownal Tannery Sign. Katie Stevens.

The land run by the Pownal Recreation Implementation Committee is over 800 acres and is on both sides of the river. The committee has long-range, extensive recreation plans for the area, including a trail system open to accommodating a wide variety of uses including hiking, walking, hunting, mountain biking, fishing, boating, skiing and snowshoeing and motorized vehicles such as ATVs and snowmobiles. The land along the river runs 2,000 feet. On the riverfront property at the Strobridge Complex, is a grassy hill area, with a flag pole and flowers, put in by the committee last spring. It overlooks the Hoosic as it cascades down the Pownal dam. Here access to the river is prevented by a cement wall. Two bridges cross the river at this section, one an old and unusable bridge, the other a temporary bridge that has been in place for 20 years. At this particular park, the committee plans to add a park bench and a recycle/trash bin this summer.



L to R: Ashlee, Blake, and Keith at Strobridge Complex Park. Katie Stevens.



Pownal Dam and fisherman. Katie Stevens.



Downstream of Pownal dam: cement wall and bridge (in background).
Katie Stevens.

It is obvious that the site has much potential for increased recreation. The major obstacles to this planning are funding, and committee personnel (they would like a few more committee members).

Ken Norris, head of the Pownal Recreation Implementation Committee, outlines the long term goals of the committee for this site. The old mill site, about 200 yards from the river will be turned into a community center with a possible amphitheatre. The committee is currently working on creating a fundraising system for this task. The

lagoon site has potential for walking and biking trails. Mr. Norris compared the possibilities to the Ashuwillticook bike trail that runs from Pittsfield to Adams, Massachusetts. Other long range goals include a pedestrian bridge from the tannery site to the 800 acres on the other side. There is talk in Pownal of putting in a new bridge (to replace the temporary one), and of putting in a canoe portage around the dam simultaneously. The network of trails will be developed into a system that runs all the way to the New York Border and joins with the Taconic Crest trail. The Woodlands Management Plan outlines and elaborate systems of trails that specify what types of recreational uses can occur on each part. This plan was recently approved by the state, and the committee looks forward to starting the implementation process.

The plans for the Storebridge Recreation Complex and associated land impact HooRWA and its mission to make the river a cleaner, safer, prettier, and more accessible river in several ways. First, the Woodlands Management Plan explains that “the state health department does not encourage the town to promote access to the Hoosic River due to PCB problems.” This initial statement implies that it is not yet appropriate to focus on recreation that comes in direct contact with the river, essentially undermining HooRWA’s vision. There is also discrepancy among different state and regional organization as to the danger of the PCB levels and their impact on recreation. The plan continues, however, that the Board of Health would support a boat portage around the dam, with warnings and 2,000 feet of buoys prior to the dam itself. The portage should be established with local and knowledgeable watershed organizations, it explains. This is a place where HooRWA can step in. Second, the Board of Health suggests and the Management Plan elaborates on the necessity of educative signs along the river sites, explaining the health hazards of the PCB’s. Signage and river education is another area in which HooRWA can help. It is possible, however, that increased signs could deter potential users from taking advantage of any increased recreation opportunities.

The Management plan, therefore, helps to set HooRWA’s agenda of this site. In order for the river to be made suitable for greater recreation, it must first be cleaned up. Adept at grant writing, HooRWA could also potentially help organize and locate funding for this site.

Planning Balance Sheet:

We used a planning balance sheet to examine the costs and benefits to both the “producers” and the “consumers” at potential recreational sites, the producers being those that construct and maintain the proposed changes, and the consumers being those that use the site and are impacted by the proposed changes. This, balanced with the needs of our client, has started to give us a better picture of which recreational alternatives would be both better and more feasible for us to recommend.

Looking first at the canoe launch site at Ashton Avenue, we came up with two main options for changes that would increase its potential for recreation. The first proposed option would be to improve the boat launch on the property. Currently, there is a steep path down an eroding bank to a small, cleared put-in area. We’ve received numerous complaints about the condition that the path is in, so our first proposed option is to put in more rip-rap to decrease erosion, and build a series of wooden steps down to the river.

Looking at the major costs to the “producers” and benefits to the “consumers” we’ve come up with a number of different factors. On the cost side for the producers are the materials used (lumber to build steps, rocks to prevent erosion, gravel to solidify the parking lot), labor, and the increased maintenance costs of maintaining a better site (m1-m3 on our balance sheet). For consumer benefits, there is the reduced time and hassle of launching a boat at the improved put-in (t1), and the value of increased recreation on the river (m4). This value includes increases in recreation due not only to decreases in the time and hassle of boat launching, but also to people floating the river that couldn’t access it at all from this site previously.

Second, we have the costs to consumers as well as the benefits to producers from the proposed changes. The consumers could be negatively impacted by two factors. The first is that substantial increases in use of the site and recreation on the river could prove detrimental to those that enjoy the solitude that recreation on the Hoosic currently provides. The second is health costs that could potentially arise from pollution in the river. On the producer benefits side, we have the benefit that the town receives from more people spending time on the river, and corresponding improvements in the town’s image.

The second proposed option at the Ashton Avenue location would be to clear out some of the underbrush around the parking lot, and construct a small park with a bench, picnic table, and an outdoor grill. This would increase the amount of time that people spend near the river, and would potentially benefit more people those that don’t want to float the river can enjoy it as well. Again, we examine this option with our planning balance sheet format.

Looking at the major costs to the producers, we have the same categories of material, labor, and increased maintenance costs that we had with our improved boat launch option. The material costs that we have been able to estimate are as follows: Picnic table - \$500, Outdoor grill - \$200, Park Bench - \$230, and small trash can - \$150. We may not want to include all of these items in the park, however. As far as labor costs, we spoke with Scott Lewis of the Williams Outing Club, and he expressed enthusiasm about a group of Outing Club volunteers helping with the construction of an improved boat launch. It may prove that the labor costs of building the park would be relatively more expensive than the first option then, because of this lack of volunteer labor. From the perspective of consumer benefits, most importantly we have the recreation value of the new park to those that spend time there. In addition, we’re likely going to see an increase in recreation on the river with people spending time at the park and thinking of the river itself as a recreation option, although this effect will probably not be as great as it would be with directly constructing better access to the river.

Second, we examine the costs to consumers at the site, as well as the benefits to the producers. As in the first alternative, there may be costs associated with crowding on the river, as well as with harmful health effects from pollution. However, since in this alternative increases in recreation on the river will come from a trickle-down effect from people visiting the park rather than an improved boat launch, we’re expecting that the increase in recreation on the river will be smaller, and so these costs will be correspondingly smaller as well. In addition, you have the costs of “negative recreation” at the new park. We’ve heard stories about residents neighboring Clayton Park in Pownal complaining of late night parties, and it may be that a park at Ashton Avenue

could have some of the same detrimental effects on its neighbors through this phenomenon. Looking at producer benefits from putting in a park, we have improvements in the town image much as we had with the first option.

Moving to the Lauren's launch site, we've made the same proposals here as we did for Ashton Avenue, and the categories of costs and benefits remain the same in our planning balance sheet. However, as the site is different, the relative impacts of these effects differ as well. We'll look at how these effects differ, starting first with a proposed improved boat launch.

The main difference with a boat launch here as opposed to at Ashton Avenue is that the bank is less steep, and the distance from the road to the put-in spot is shorter. As a result, the producer costs associated with the construction and maintenance of the site will be less (costs labeled m1 – m3 on our planning balance sheet). Conversely, the gains from an improved launch will not be as great as at the first site because the river is relatively easier to access.

Looking at a proposed park, the potential seems better at this site because of the large town-owned open space across from the launch. Unlike at Ashton Avenue, where underbrush would need to be cleared and the size of the park would need to be limited in scope, there is much more potential at the Lauren's Launch site for a bigger park. A park of the same size would also cost less here relative to at Ashton Avenue because of the currently available cleared space as well. Unfortunately, there is the large drawback of the neighboring Hoosic Water Quality District sewage treatment plant. We've heard reports about noxious smells in the area that would make the site unsuitable for a park, although when we were there in early spring there were no such problems.

What HooRWA Should Do Next?

1. Clean up river

It has become clear that the main impediment to increased use of the Hoosic is the view by many people that it is not a clean river. Thus the best way to increase recreation is to make the river cleaner for everyone's enjoyment. Sources of pollution come from both point source and non-point source polluters. HooRWA needs to update and improve its data on both types of pollution sources so they can tell exactly what is going into the river and from where. Then they need to formulate an action plan to effectively address and reduce these pollution sources. A healthier river is the biggest possible draw for recreation.

2. Improvements at Sites

This paper has outlined a variety of potential improvements at several sites along the river. These vary depending on the site and range from simply improving signs and making them more noticeable to stabilizing the boat launches at Ashton Ave. and Lauren's Launch to putting in picnic tables and garbage bins at sites. All these improvements make the different sites more desirable for people to use. To have these improvements along with regular maintenance make the sites cleaner, safer, and more fun for anyone and everyone who enjoys outdoor recreation.

3. Partnerships

HooRWA should not carry out these changes alone. Indeed in all the sites we looked at they can not do it alone. HooRWA does not own any of the land and thus can not make changes to the land without working with the property owners. Depending on the case this means working with the states, towns, or private companies and non-profits.

Outside of partnerships with those that actually own the property HooRWA should also actively seek partnerships with those groups that have an active interest in improving the recreational opportunities on the river. This could include Boy or Girl Scout groups, community service groups at local schools, Berkshire Flyfishing and other fly fishermen, or a company like Zoar Outdoor who could profit from being able to send rafts safely down the river.

One group in particular that expressed interest in helping develop the Hoosic was the Williams College Outing Club. We interviewed Scott Lewis, the Director of the Williams College Outing Club in order to get an understanding of what his group saw as the strengths and weaknesses of the Hoosic River and any suggestions he may have to further develop it for recreation. This interview was particularly helpful in understanding what the dominant outing group in the area saw as restrictions for its use of the river and what it would want in order to increase its use.

Scott believes that the Hoosic is very accessible to the Outing Club but has other aspects that restrict its use. The put-in and take out spots along the river, particularly at Ashton Avenue and Lauren's Launch are not well developed and are heavily eroded. The ability of the outing club to use the river for kayaks, canoes, or rafts is greatly restricted by the dependence on spring and fall water flows that make the river deep enough to use. For hiking, he pointed out that there has been little trail work along the river itself and they are under used. Even the outing club only has one activity that takes advantage of the existing trails. Scott also believes the outing club has simply not focused on the Hoosic to its full potential. Quite simply for no good reason they have simply not paid full attention to the river and what it has to offer.

Scott had a variety of suggestions for ways to improve the river and to get the Outing Club more active in using this resource for recreational activity. The outing club usually uses Cole Field as the put in spot for boating trips along the river and believes that better put-ins and take outs would need to be done at Lauren's Launch and Ashton Avenue. He suggested some kind of structure, potentially including steps to stabilize the put in spot and prevent erosion for easy boat access. He also pointed to the difficulty of pulling out of Lauren's Launch due to the way the currents worked at this spot and suggested that this place needs to be made easier to access from the water as well as have the take out/put-in improved. Scott's main suggestion had little to do with the physical makeup of the river and more with HooRWA's relationship with the Outing Club. He believes the Outing Club has simply not been focused on the river and the creation of an active partnership with HooRWA could change this immensely. He stressed the importance and desire of the Outing Club to be an active partner in all recreational development of the river. He thinks this will help focus the Club on using the river more and gives HooRWA a dedicated local group of active outdoor oriented people to help them improve the river.

So there is at least one major outing group in the area that believes it is in their best interest to work with HooRWA to effect these changes. HooRWA should foster this relationship with the outing club and with other similar groups in order to potentially gain both manpower and help with funding.

4. Publicity

Having this incredible resource and the improvements we are suggesting benefit no one if no one knows that that resource and those improvements are there. This is why publicity also needs to be improved if HooRWA wants to make the Hoosic readily available to the regular public. This should be done at the sites themselves by improving the signs along the roads so people passing by will know where these sites are and how to get to them. HooRWA should also keep a brochure available both in a hard copy and available on the internet. We put together a basic brochure of the recreational opportunities currently available as they are outlined in the brochure. It was done using Microsoft Word so that it can be easily updated and added to. Other publicity should happen in the form of events like Riverfest and other events along the river that not only brings people out to celebrate the river but also gain local media attention. People need to know where the river is and what types of activities they can use it for if they are going to use it.

Bibliography

Agency of Natural Resources Department of Environmental Conservation Water Quality Division. *Battenkill, Hoosic, & Walloomsac Rivers Assessment Report*. August 2002

Amy Kimball and Jayoung Koo. *Hoosic River Restoration Plan* Fall 2004 FES 829 River Processes and Restoration

Berkshire County Regional Planning Commission *Hoosic River Action Plan*. June 1987

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and Berkshire Conservation District. *Assessment of Land Use Activities and Nonpoint Source Pollution in the Hoosic River Watershed*, December 1998. Pittsfield, Massachusetts, 1998.

Chrsine Clawson, Nat Gillespie, Jen Newton, Joel Tolman, and Chuck Wall. *A Study of Nonpoint Source Pollution on the North Branch of the Hoosic River*. Environmental Studies 302. Williams College, November, 1996.

Elaine Denny. *PCBs in the Hoosic River: A Snapshot*. Williamstown, MA. May 2004.

Sharon Macklin, GIS files and maps, 2005

“Massachusetts Surface Water Quality Standards.” Industrial Wastewater. Department of Environmental Protection, www.mass.gov/dep/bwp/iww/files/314cmr4.htm (viewed 17 May 2005).

Mc Varish, Douglas C. and Meyer Richard. *Pownal Tannery, Town of Pownal, Bennington Country, Vermont*. West Chester, Pennsylvania. 1999.

North Adams Assessors Office, Land Ownership Records, 2005

Pownal Assessors Office, Land Ownership Records, 2005

Pownal Town Plan. Adopted October 5, 2000. Amended October 10, 2002.

Pownal Woodlands Management Plan. Town of Pownal. Pownal, Vermont. May 2004.

Williamstown Assessors Office, Land Ownership Records, 2005

Williamstown Master Plan: Final Report and Recommendations of the Master Plan Steering Committee. Williamstown, Massachusetts. December, 2002.