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Salmon Falls watershed event draws leaders, landowners

ROCHESTER — More than 90 community leaders and landowners attended a recent program titled "Your Land, Clean Water, Your Legacy" at the Governor's Inn. The panel discussion and social hour were presented by the Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative and the NH Association of Conservation Districts, as well as several regional nonprofit organizations, including the Acton Wakefield Watersheds Alliance, Moose Mountains Regional Greenways, and the Strafford Rivers Conservancy, with assistance from UNH Cooperative Extension.

The Piscataqua/Salmon Falls Watershed was recently identified by the US Forest Service as the watershed most at risk in the U.S. to suffer a reduction in water quality due to potential loss of forested land to development within the next 20 years. Program participants heard from a panel of local landowners, foresters, and staff of state and regional conservation organizations about proven practices that can protect the water quality of the Salmon Falls Watershed. Such practices are completely voluntary and can be implemented with financial and technical assistance that is available from nonprofit, town, county, state and federal sources.

Linda Schier, executive director of the Acton Wakefield Watersheds Alliance, welcomed the audience, gave an overview of the Salmon Falls watershed and introduced the panel of speakers and the exhibiting organizations.

She pointed out that the 330 square mile Salmon Falls Watershed, encompassing towns in Maine and New Hampshire, provided drinking water for 28,000 people in the Somersworth and Berwick, Maine areas. Schier also noted that three of Wakefield's five lakes that drain into the Salmon Falls River are currently at risk of losing their high quality water status.

LaMarr Clannon, coordinator for Maine Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials, set the stage with a discussion of the connections between water quality and forestry management. She gave specific examples of how water pollution results from poor land management practices and how good management preserves water quality.

She also noted that one form of pollution is temperature rise, as occurs when rain falls on hot parking lots and then drains into a stream or river, making life uncomfortable, or even intolerable, for some species of fish.

Wendy Scribner of UNH Cooperative Extension and Farmington landowner Art LeClair described how best management practices in privately owned forests provide benefits to landowners as well as to the watershed because they increase forest uses and profitability. One of the challenges is fragmentation — the average parcel of land has decreased from 120 to 40 acres over a few decades.

LeClair's advice to landowners included "Walk the land often" and "Keep good records."

Amanda Stone, Cooperative Extension specialist in Land and Water Conservation, and Milton

Mills landowners Janice and Tim Long, went on to discuss conservation easements and how they protect our natural resources. The Longs thanked MMRG for their assistance in the process of conserving their acreage.

The presentation wrapped up with Dan Wright, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), who gave information about NRCS programs available for landowners to access funding and technical assistance for best management practices of forest, wildlife, agriculture, and water resources.

Due to the noted risk of degradation of the Salmon Falls Watershed (SFW), applicants for NRCS funding from the SFW area will be given priority in the funding process.

After the panel, participants met one-on-one with exhibitors and panelists to discuss their individual needs for forest management programs.

For more information regarding forest conservation in New Hampshire, please see the website of the Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative, www.prep.unh.edu/sfwc.htm, which lists the contact information of all participating organizations.

Another similar program is planned in Acton, Maine at the Town Hall from 6-8:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 7. For more information regarding the upcoming Maine event, contact Melissa Brandt of York County Soil and Water Conservation District at (207) 324-0888, ext. 214.

(Rochester Times editor John Nolan contributed to this story.)
