

Conservation Matters

A monthly column focused on conservation education, as the result of collaboration among several area conservation commissions and organizations. If your town's commission or conservation organization would like to contribute articles, please contact Jessica Tabolt Halm jesshalm78@gmail.com

Title: Environmental Perspectives

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It's easy to forget, when any river, pond or lake first comes into view and the lure of lily pads, ducks and turtles takes hold of the imagination, that these are almost always part of a much bigger system of wetlands. The same is true of the Baker River. From the headwaters of the Baker River on the slopes of Mt. Moosilauke and Streeter Mt., this wetland complex stretches over 36 miles to the confluence with the Pemigewasset R., in Plymouth, dropping in elevation from 3500 feet, in Jobildunk Ravine on Mt Moosilauke, to 480 feet, near the Armory in Plymouth.

Draped along the slopes of the valley, over 15,000 years-worth of fine sands have accumulated, in places over 50 feet thick, rounding the hilltops and elevating the bottomlands. Perched within these sediments, all along the length of the river reach, are numerous beaver ponds, fens, and vernal pools, manmade reservoirs, small streams and, of course, the Baker River. Every one of these wet areas is part of the greater wetland system; and each plays a part in keeping the whole valley drenched in high quality aquifer water, rich in diversity of plants and wildlife, and protected from catastrophic flooding.

The Baker River Watershed Association (BRWA) helps steward this system, bringing together the four towns that line the banks of the river to raise environmental consciousness, monitor water quality and flood risks, and create a forum for individuals interested in protecting and preserving the watershed. This year, the BRWA is involved in several activities that serve this mission. The water sampling team collects once-a-month water samples from 13 popular swimming areas, testing for *E. coli* and chloride (from road salt). This summer, interns from Plymouth State University will visit these same 13 sites every two weeks to monitor river health, including water clarity, oxygen levels and pH. The BRWA hosted a special race class in this year's first ever Baker River Regatta, with prizes for trash collection. And, on Aug 4 (rain date Aug 5), the BRWA is organizing a multi-town river clean-up event with individual organizers in Warren, Wentworth, Rumney and Plymouth.

So, next time you visit your favorite water body, expand your horizons and ponder the role of this special place in its larger watershed. And, if the BRWA activities sound like something you'd love to be part of, then please consider joining the ranks of elected board members on the Baker River Watershed Association (<http://www.bakerriverwatershed.org>). We can always use more help!

Caption for accompanying photos: PSU interns Mac Bevier and Dillon Thompson collect water quality data from a stretch of the Baker River left barren by river dredging in Warren in the wake of the Oct 30, 2017 floods. This dredging has created a barren landscape, devoid of canopy cover, fish or bird or amphibian habitat. In sharp contrast is the next site downriver in Wentworth, where the river was left to repair itself.

