

NEW ENGLAND GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENT FUND

GRANT REPORT FORM

Date: February 9, 2009

Contact Person: William Rideout

Name of Organization: Squannacook River Rail Trail Committee

Address: 88 South Harbor Road, Townsend, MA 10469

Phone: 781 981-5624 (day) / 978 597-5413 (eve) **Email Address:** rideout@net1plus.com

Date of Award: April 2008

Grant Amount: \$1,000

Purpose of Grant: The grant award enabled us to mail informational flyers to Townsend residents, encouraging them to attend an open public meeting about a proposed rail trail.

FINAL REPORT SECTION 1: UPDATING YOUR PROFILE

Please see the updated Applicant Profile at the end of this document.

FINAL REPORT SECTION 2: GRANT OUTCOMES

A. CHANGE OR ADVANCMENT OF GROUP'S FOCUS/GOALS

1. How is your campaign progressing? Briefly describe its evolution.
 - October 2007 - We completed an Environmental and Engineering Assessment study, funded through a \$20,000 grant from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation for the Townsend section and \$10,000 in Community Preservation funds for the Groton section. The study is a requirement for consideration for federal funding for rail trails under the SAFETEA-LU) highway bill.
 - June 2008 - We held an open public meeting to present the study results. Thanks to our NEGEF grant award, we were able to mail meeting invitations (see Appendix A) to every Townsend household, encouraging residents to attend. We also publicized the meeting via local newspapers and our e-mail lists.
 - October 2008 - We requested the Townsend Board of Selectmen to appoint an official town committee. In November, the Selectmen established the Squannacook River Rail Trail Funding Exploration Committee and appointed several SRRT members to the committee.

2. What factors have helped move your campaign forward?

Publicizing our successes has been a positive factor. Each time we demonstrate our commitment and our ability to move the project forward, we gain credibility with the general public as well as town and state officials whose support we require.

3. What obstacles still stand between your group and achieving “success?”

Both Townsend and Groton have firmly attested that no town money will be used for the rail trail. Furthermore, much of the funding originally earmarked for rail trails by Congressman John Olver has been used for other rail trail projects. Our next major obstacle is to identify funding for construction, environmental liability insurance, and maintenance. The chief mandate of newly formed Squannacook River Rail Trail Funding Exploration Committee is to address this obstacle.

B. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

1. Have members of your group become more active in other community activities or organizations since you began your campaign? If so, in what ways?

We have given presentations on the rail trail to local organizations such as the Business Association, Recreation and Activities Council, Historical Society Board of Directors, Lions Club, Land Trustees, Rotary Club, and Couples Club. We support and attend meetings of the Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, who invited us to give a talk on our rail trail. We have attended all of the Trustees of Reservation Putnam Conservation Institute’s rail trail workshops. We attended the 2007 and 2008 Moving Together Conference in Boston and the Linking Together kick-off conference in 2008.

2. Did the experience with this group make you and/or other group members more politically active at any level? If so, at what level: local, state, regional?

SRRT already includes a Groton Selectman and a member of the Groton Trails Committee, Community Preservation Committee, and Conservation Commission. Recently, Townsend members Bill Rideout and Steve Meehan were appointed by the Board of Selectmen to the Squannacook River Rail Trail Funding Exploration Committee. This is the first experience on an official town committee for both Steve and Bill. As town appointees, rather than a group of private citizens, we believe we can work more effectively with organizations such as the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) and MassHighway Central District.

C. COMMUNITY CHANGES

1. In your opinion, have you and/or group members significantly increased knowledge of how your community works, its environmental issues and how to solve problems locally?

For many of us, the Squannacook River Rail Trail Funding Exploration Committee is a first experience on official town business governed by Open Meeting laws. Our new approach will be to talk as a committee with federal and state representatives, as well as the MRPC, to learn the current trail funding and construction processes.

2. Since the group's formation, have other local environmental issues received community attention and sparked other community activism? If so, what issues?

Not specifically on environmental issues, but we have shared resources and ideas with TRAC (Townsend Recreation Area Council), a newly-formed group dedicated to recreation and community programs.

D. NEGEF'S IMPACT ON GROUP'S WORK

1. Although it's hard to quantify, please tell us if and how NEGEF's grant and support made a difference to your group and its work. If you had not received the grant from NEGEF, what difference, if any, would it have made to your campaign?

Without the NEGEF grant award, we would not have sent a town-wide mailing, which was an important part of our successful open public meeting. Many of the 150 people who attended signed up to join our mailing list. Members of the Townsend Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission, and Historical Society attended. Arthur Frost, Mass Highway District III Commissioner, commented that the turnout was excellent compared to other similar meetings he had attended. Other attendees were Ann Sullivan (Mass Highway), Sheri DuFour (Montachusetts Regional Planning Commission), Ed Torcoletti (Department of Conservation and Recreation), and Virginia Wood (candidate for State Representative).

2. What additional skills, information, trainings would help advance your campaign?

While we have advanced on several fronts, we now face new financial challenges. Much of the funding earmarked for rail trails by Congressman Olver's office has been used by the North Central Rail Trail. In addition, the formulas for match funding have been changed from the earlier 80% federal/20% state to the present formula of 80% federal/10% state/10% town. This places a larger percentage of the financial burden on the towns. Since the 10% town match is unlikely to ever be raised with town funds, we must find a way to raise or eliminate the town match.

FINAL REPORT SECTION 3: FINANCIAL REPORT

1. Please attach an itemized expense sheet that shows how you spent the NEGEF grant money.

(Please see Appendix B.)

2. Was the NEGEF grant your only source of funds? If not, what additional funds did your raise? From what sources?

We paid for the town-wide mailing using \$1,000 from NEGEF along with approximately \$100 pitched in by committee members. Committee members also contributed time and skills (learning about bulk mailing, creating the flyer, delivering, etc.).

Additional funds we raised include a \$20,000 grant from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation and \$10,000 in Groton Community Preservation funds for the preliminary environmental and engineering study.

FINAL REPORT SECTION 4: NEGEF PROGRAM EVALUATION

1. Please comment about our program and how you think we can improve it to meet the needs of the grassroots environmental community in New England.

We were particularly impressed by a statement in the FAQ that “the validation a grant award offers to a community group is equally as important as the actual funds.” For many of us, this is a first experience in grassroots activism, and we feel encouraged on a personal level by NEGEF’s support.

2. Do you know of other community groups that might benefit from our program? Please include names and addresses and we will contact them.

Friends of Willard Brook
Emily Norton, President
info@willardbrook.org
www.willardbrook.org
PO Box 696
Townsend, MA 01469-0696

Townsend Conservation Land Trust
Townsend Memorial Hall
272 Main Street
Townsend, MA 01469
Jules Melbin, Chairman
978-597-6219

Ashby Land Trust
Alan Ewald, President
978-386-2269
Jeanie Lindquist, Vice President
978-386-5591
info@ashbylandtrust.org
www.ashbylandtrust.org
P.O. Box 144
Ashby, MA 01431

Townsend Recreational Activity
Council
Karin Canfield, President
masscanfields@verizon.net
978-597-9171

North County Land Trust
Janet Morrison, Executive Director
P.O. Box 2052
Fitchburg, MA 01420
Telephone: 978-342-0174
northcountylandtrust@verizon.net
www.northcountylandtrust.org

APPLICANT PROFILE UPDATE

1. What is the mission or the goals of your group?

Our mission is to build a rail trail. Having recently reached our goal of completing a preliminary environmental and engineering study, our next goals are to apply for Federal funding under the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) highway bill and to identify additional sources of funding.

2. How long has your group been in existence?

We formed in 2002 as a Feasibility Study Committee and expanded in 2006 into the current Squannacook River Rail Trail (SRRT) Committee.

3. What issue/issues got your group going?

Our current group assembled in 2006 to place a non-binding referendum on the ballot in Townsend's special election, asking voters if the town should pursue a rail-to-trails conversion.

4. How many people started the group?

The original Feasibility Study Committee started as a four person group.

5. Is this the first time that the group's "founders" had been "activated"? If not the first time, with what other issues had they been involved?

This is the first involvement in grassroots activism for Bill Rideout and Steve Meehan. Al Futterman is the NRWA's Land Programs and Outreach Director and holds leadership roles in the Squannassit-Petapawag Areas of Critical Environmental Concern Stewardship Committee and the Pepperell Spring Preservation Committee.

6. How many people are currently involved as the core group of leaders/workers?

We now have at least 15 individuals, including town-appointed committees from two towns.

7. Is this a membership organization? If so, how many members do you have?

We have 15+ core members, with as many as 35 members mobilizing during key issues. We meet regularly and communicate by e-mail. We have 194 addresses on our general e-mail list.

8. Do you have any paid staff? If yes, how many full-time equivalents?

Al Futterman receives partial funding from the Bruce J. Anderson Foundation to offer technical assistance to the SRRT Committee.

9. Approximately how many people in your community can be "activated" to support your issue – i.e., go to a meeting, sign a petition, call a selectperson, etc.?

In Townsend, our supporters include more than 1,000 people who voted for the rail trail in the ballot referendum. In Groton, supporters include 150 residents who voted unanimously to use Community Preservation funds for the preliminary engineering study.

10. Has the focus of your group broadened or changed at all since it first started? If so, in what ways?

Since we started, our focus broadened to include two towns. In addition, members of SRRT have been appointed to a town-appointed committee to explore funding.

11. Have any members of your group run for or been appointed to public office since they started working on your issue/issues? If so, for what office? Elected or appointed?

In November 2008, the Townsend Board of Selectmen formed the Squannacook River Rail Trail Funding Exploration Committee and appointed Bill Rideout and Steve Meehan to the committee. The committee meets jointly with the Groton Rail Trail Committee, which includes Groton Selectman Chairman Peter Cunningham and Groton Trails Committee member Bruce Easom.

12. Describe the size and make-up of your community.

Townsend and Groton are both rural, with small-town character and a strong sense of heritage and historical preservation. Groton's population is 10,406 and Townsend's is 9,500. Both towns try to balance steady development with protecting our aquifer and the Nashua River watershed.

13. Have you networked or shared information/resources with other groups? If so, with whom and how did you find out about them?

We interface with the Wachusett Greenways, Nashua River Watershed Association, Friends of Willard Brook State Forest, Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, Ashburnham Rail Trail, MA Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Groton Trails Committee, Groton's Community Preservation Committee, and with other rail trail groups.

14. How have you gained knowledge about your issue?

We attend workshops and conferences. We interface with the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission and MassHighway Central District. In October 2008 we toured the rail bed while exchanging ideas with Massachusetts Congresswoman Niki Tsongas.

15. If your organization is more than a year old, can you quantify any of your "successes"? Examples might be number of acres preserved, miles of trails, increase in recycling rates in town, toxic sites cleaned up, greenspaces/community gardens created, amount of money raised, legislation passed, etc.

- Demonstrating public support in Townsend by a ballot vote, in which the rail trail passed by 1021-259.
- Obtaining funding for a preliminary environmental and engineering study through a \$20,000 grant from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (Townsend) and \$10,000 in Community Preservation funds (Groton).
- Completing the study and presenting results in an open public meeting.

16. What are the biggest challenges your community faces?

We must construct and maintain the trail without using town funds. We must minimize the impact on abutting businesses and residences.

17. What skills do you feel you and/or members of your group could use to help move your issue forward?

Our committee must maintain public support for the project, deal with critical issues such as abutter concerns, and identify funding resources.

APPENDIX A

INVITATIONS TO OPEN PUBLIC MEETING

The Nashua River Watershed Association encourages you to attend this meeting:

Squannacook River Rail Trail Open Public Informational Meeting

**June 12, 2008 at 7:00 PM
North Middlesex Regional High School Auditorium**

The Squannacook River Rail Trail Committee is hosting an open public information meeting on the proposed rail trail. The purpose is to present preliminary findings of the Rail Trail Environmental & Engineering Assessment study and to solicit input from Townsend and Groton residents.

Who should attend?

Residents of Townsend and Groton and anyone who is interested in the proposed rail trail. The study results and proposed solutions will help Townsend and Groton make future decisions about the rail trail. There will be an opportunity to ask questions following the presentation.

What is the Squannacook River Rail Trail?

The proposed rail trail is a shared use path along a 3.7-mile segment of the former “Greenville Branch” of the Boston & Maine Railroad. The 3.7-mile corridor begins on Depot Street in Townsend Center and extends to the Bertozzi Conservation Area off Townsend Road in Groton. Approximately 2.8 miles of the trail is located in Townsend and 0.9 miles in Groton.

What is an environmental and engineering study?

This study is addressing many issues critical to the feasibility of this rail trail, including potential environmental impact, parking and road crossings, safety, business impact, and abutter concerns. The study also involves a discussion of the civil and structural design issues, environmental resource areas affecting trail development, and an overview of applicable state regulations.

Who is FST?

The Burlington-based engineering firm of Fay, Spofford & Thorndike LLC is a leading consultant in the field of paths and trails. FST completed similar studies in Acton, Concord, and other Massachusetts towns. They also designed the Nashua River Rail Trail, the Nashua Heritage Rail Trail, and the rehabilitated Cape Cod Rail Trail.

Who is the Squannacook River Rail Trail Committee?

The Squannacook River Rail Trail Committee is a group of local volunteers from Townsend and a town committee from Groton, assisted by the Nashua River Watershed Association.

For more information, please visit:

www.SquannacookRiverRailTrail.org
or
www.NashuaRiverWatershed.org





Proposed Squannacook River Rail Trail

Non-Profit Org.
 U.S. Postage
PAID
 Fitchburg, MA
 Permit No. 35

Nashua River Watershed Association
 592 Main Street
 Groton, MA 01450

APPENDIX B - EXPENSES

SRRT Direct Mailing to Townsend Residents

Amount	Paid To	Service
\$377.06	Staples	Print 3,800 mailers (2-sided, black & white)
\$462.58	Direct Mailing Services, Inc.	Address, fold, tab, and sort 3,724 mailers.
\$245.78	US Post Office	Postage
\$1,085.42	TOTAL	

Amount of NEGEF grant: \$1000
(Remainder paid by SRRT)