

Bennington Banner

Jeffords springs to Batten Kill's aid
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Thursday, July 28, 2005 - MANCHESTER -- The Batten Kill's beleaguered trout and riverbanks will receive a little bit more help from Congress - likely in the form of cold hard cash.

On Tuesday at 1 p.m., Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt., will visit the Manchester wastewater treatment facility to announce new appropriations for stream and fish habitat improvements on the river.

"Sen. Jeffords has always considered the Batten Kill an important natural resource for Vermont," said Diane Derby, the senator's press secretary.

Although Jeffords continues to work on the details of the spending bill with other members of Congress, Derby said, more money will likely be provided this year.

According to the senator's Web site, \$200,000 was appropriated for the Batten Kill in 2000, 2001 and 2002, and \$250,000 was allocated in 2003 and 2004, for a five-year total of \$1.1 million.

Including funds budgeted for land acquisition near the river, Derby said, approximately \$2 million has been spent by the federal government to restore the river.

According to a spokesman for Jeffords, Brian Keefe, these funds have been used to study the trout population, river temperatures and erosion on the riverbank.

Other speakers at the event will include representatives of the Batten Kill Watershed Alliance, the Green Mountain National Forest, Trout Unlimited and Orvis.

Environmental officials look forward to continued progress on the Batten Kill.

"This river is a gem," said Paul Brewster, supervisor of the Green Mountain National Forest. "We're willing to do whatever we can to restore the river to what it once was."

Brewster mentioned that the Forest Service has collaborated with other groups to reverse the decline of the river as a cold-water trout fishery.

In recent years, Brewster said, the river has become too warm to support its normal trout population. "This river has been known for the quality of its trout."

Federal funds have also allowed property on the riverbank to be purchased and set aside for conservation, Brewster added, including a wetlands area near the Batten Kill's headwater.

"Using the money we received over the past few years, we've been able to gain a better understanding of the river's decline as a fishery," Brewster said. "Now, I see us moving forward with this information."

Steve Roy, a fisheries biologist for the Green Mountain National Forest, said that the visit will give Jeffords the chance to see the ongoing habitat improvement project on the river.

During the event, Roy said, some habitat restoration will take place. Trees and roots will be installed in the river and along the riverbank at Manchester slide, he said, to stabilize the bank and provide a shady habitat for fish.

These "root wads," said alliance executive director Cynthia Browning, are the lower parts of trees and root structure that provide shade for the trout and prevent erosion from the riverbank.

"It's very appropriate that Jeffords should come to look at this project," Browning said. "He will get to see how volunteer work and a collaboration between different groups multiplies the effectiveness of important federal grants."