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## Restoring and transforming the Green River watershed



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**Kevin Stine, with Trout Unlimited, plants a tree on the Karlan-Mason Green River Island, in Guilford, on Thursday, May 9, 2019.**  
KRISTOPHER RADDER - BRATTLEBORO REFORMER



Posted Sunday, May 12, 2019 8:00 pm

**By Bob Audette, Brattleboro Reformer**

**GUILFORD** – It's been almost eight years since Tropical Storm Irene swept across Vermont, leaving devastation in its wake.

One of the hardest hit areas in southern Vermont was the Green River watershed, with its steep slopes no match for the storm's deluge. Trees, shrubs, soil, rocks and boulders were washed into the river, which starts in Marlboro and merges with the Deerfield River in Greenfield, Mass., just two miles from the Deerfield River's confluence with the Connecticut River.

On Thursday along Hinesburg Road, where a house once stood, more than two dozen people gathered to help repair some of that damage. At what is now known as the Karlan-Mason Green River Island, a home once stood on the other side of the river.

"I could hear the boulders rolling down the river," said neighbor Shaun Murphy, about that day in August of 2011. The woman who had been living in the house had been evacuated by then, he said. "The water just started ripping trees out. By the end of the day, there was this new channel."

This was all flatland and forestland with a house on it," said Michael Leff, of Ecological Connections, who was hired by Connecticut River Conservancy as the project manager.

At what is now known as the Karlan-Mason Green River Island, debris carried by the floodwaters blocked the river's flow, forcing the river to jump its channel and carve a new one, leaving a house abandoned on an island that hadn't been there before.

Over the years, the house and all the debris left behind after the water receded was removed, the property was purchased by a nearby neighbor and protected with a conservation easement and a restoration plan was developed by Fitzgerald Environmental Associates, under contract with the Connecticut River Conservancy.

The new island is named after Jimmy Karlan and Kathryn Mason, who put together the funds to purchase the parcel, donating a river corridor easement to the Vermont River Conservancy to prevent its development.

"Thanks for all the new plantings and the gifts of hope, collaboration and community that you bring to this sweet island," wrote Karlan and Mason in a note to the organizations involved in the project and the volunteers who did all the digging and planting. "Your hard work and visions have created transformation, visible for years to come.

"We had a lot of help from many agencies and citizens who joined together to restore this island," Karlan told the Reformer. "What we paid for the land was pennies compared to what these stakeholders put into it."

The planting on Thursday was the second phase of the project, said Leff.

"The first phase was removing the building and all sorts of stuff," said Leff.

Jim Herrick, of Jim Herrick Earthwork in Marlboro removed "with surgical precision" 50,000 pounds of debris along the nearly 1,000 feet of river frontage, said Leff.

Major funding for the restoration project came from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program offered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, a division of the USDA. Leff said the EQIP funding the project received is specific to efforts meant to reduce sediment flowing into Long Island Sound.

"The entire Connecticut River watershed is eligible for this kind of funding," said Leff.

The project also received funding from the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation.

"It takes five or six partners, all of us working together, to get this done," said Ron Rhodes, one of two of CRC's river stewards for Vermont and New Hampshire.

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The more than 500 trees and shrubs planted on the island were delivered by New England Wetland Plants, based in Amherst, Mass.

"We do restoration projects all throughout the watershed," said Kathy Urffer, the other river steward. "We work with farmers and other landowners whenever there is any kind of restoration that can help enhance the health of a stream."

One of the CRC's main responsibilities is corralling the grants necessary to do this type of work, she said.

The Connecticut River Conservancy also received help from Land Stewardship Inc., U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Trout Unlimited, the Guilford Conservation Commission and the Watershed Management Division of the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

David Sagan, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who is stationed in Sunderland at the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge, said little projects like this one on the Green River begin to add up and can make a big difference for a watershed.

"Each small project ties into the bigger picture," he said. "It restores a part of the bigger ecosystem that is the 7.2 million-acre watershed of the Connecticut River. It's awesome to see all these people helping to restore this portion."

Sagan oversees the entire watershed for the Fish and Wildlife Service.

"What we see here is a relief valve," said Marie Levesque Caduto, the local watershed coordinator for the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. "It's a small space for the water to spread out, slow down, and drop sediment. If this was not restored, the sediment would wash away and all that sediment and the nutrients in it would be a problem downstream."

Ben Parker and two workers from Land Stewardship Inc. were brought in to plant the tubelings, young seedlings planted along the river bank.

"We're normally by ourselves," he said. "It's awesome to see all these people. And more often than not, we're contracted to go into a place that has invasive plants that need to be removed. It's really rewarding to go into a place that doesn't have anything and put in native plants."

According to the Connecticut River Conservancy, riverbanks with native trees, shrubs and flowers are the most cost-effective restoration projects that can be implemented in the watershed. "Restoring riverbank trees and shrubs, which were cut and removed over the years, is an important step toward improved water cleanliness, more stable riverbanks, and better fish and wildlife habitat for our rivers," notes the CRC, which has secured funding to plant native trees and shrubs along the banks of the Connecticut River and its tributaries to filter polluted runoff and provide a buffer zone between the region's streams and land use.

The project was also partially funded by a buyout program managed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

About a decade ago, said Drew Adams, who recently retired from his job as a soil scientist for the NRCS in Brattleboro, the federal government initiated a buyout program to purchase homes in flood-prone areas.

"We were going back to the same homes again and again doing rip rap work and stream bank restoration," he said. "Finally, we got wise and said those houses should have never been built there. This buyout program is not just happening in Vermont, but nationwide."

Caduto said the buyout program sounds threatening to some people, but the goal is to protect the health and safety of people.

"All the properties under the buyout program are threatened by this kind of destruction," she said. "It's not for just any house, but specifically for those that are consistently threatened by repeated damage from flooding."

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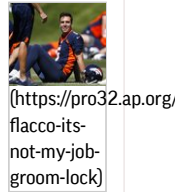
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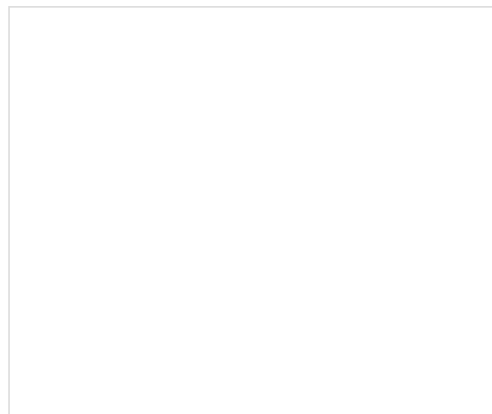
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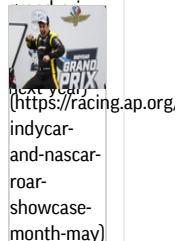
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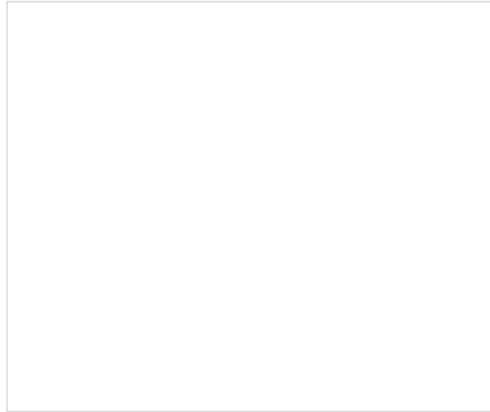


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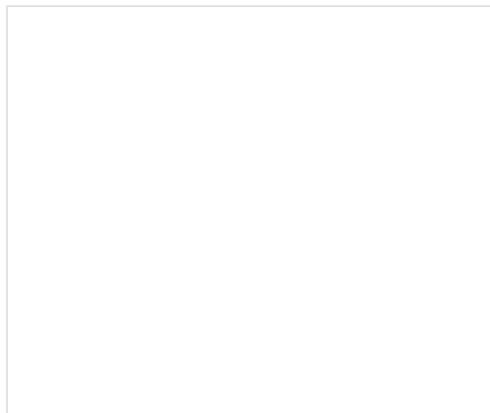
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3	-	Kevin Harvick ( <a href="https://racing.ap.org/berkshireeagle/driver/kevin-harvick">https://racing.ap.org/berkshireeagle/driver/kevin-harvick</a> )
4	3	Chase Elliott ( <a href="https://racing.ap.org/berkshireeagle/driver/chase-elliott">https://racing.ap.org/berkshireeagle/driver/chase-elliott</a> )
5	1	Brad Keselowski ( <a href="https://racing.ap.org/berkshireeagle/driver/brad-keselowski">https://racing.ap.org/berkshireeagle/driver/brad-keselowski</a> )

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