

ep 19 Master

Wed, May 03, 2023 10:50AM 21:48

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

landowners, stream, lake champlain, wise, program, vermont, organizations, basin, watershed, assessment, quebec, resources, property, work, talk, forest restoration, materials, cate, great, podcast

SPEAKERS

Michele Braun, Alison Adams, Cate Kreider, Lauren Jenness

Cate Kreider 00:08

Welcome to restoration Roundup, a monthly podcast that explores recent research on, new and emerging best practices for, and stories about riparian forest restoration. I'm Cate Kreider, a recent graduate of the University of Vermont, and the interim host and director of this podcast with the support of the UVM extension and Lake Champlain Sea Grant. I've been proud to host this podcast for the past four months, but this will be the last episode I produce. Soon a new watershed forestry coordinator will be hired and where the show goes from there will be up to them. Look forward to updates on the direction restoration roundup will take in the coming months. And thank you for tuning in. As a podcast based on new research and developing projects, we sometimes come across promising ideas that are still too novel to do an episode on. Today I'm thrilled to check in with Stream Wise, an organization operating through the Lake Champlain Basin Program that works to connect landowners with research and resources to keep their privately owned streams and riparian areas healthy. After a successful run in 2022, they are beginning their 2023 season and have a lot to share about what they learned and where they're going. First, Lauren Jenness an environmental analyst at the Lake Champlain Basin Program, is going to give us the organization overview. After that, Michele Braun, the executive director of Friends of Winooski River, one of Stream Wise's community partners, is going to provide the perspective on what this work looks like on the ground, talking to landowners. I'm excited to hear from them both. Welcome, Lauren.

Lauren Jenness 01:49

Thanks for having me.

Cate Kreider 01:51

Yeah, thanks for coming. Can you tell me a little bit about the history of this organization? What was the inspiration? And how has the journey been to one year of functioning work?

L Lauren Jenness 02:02

Yeah, so this idea was originally proposed through our education and outreach budget by Will Eldridge, who's an aquatic biologist at the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department. He envisioned a similar program to the successful Lake Wise program in Vermont that has run, but targeted towards landowners along rivers and streams. So the basin program did fund this program, we issued a request for proposals and had a great consultant team apply and was awarded the funding. It's Fluid State Consulting, Greenleaf Designs, and The Image Farm. And together with the Basin Program, they worked with a project advisory committee composed of federal, state and local partners in Vermont, New York and Quebec, to make decisions about what Stream Wise would be, and the criteria for Stream Wise. All of that was developed between 2020 and 2021. And as you said, we had a very successful pilot year in 2022, with two organizations, one located in Vermont, and one located in New York. And now in 2023, we're hoping to expand streamwise to nine locations across the entire Lake Champlain watershed.

C Cate Kreider 03:24

Yeah, your website has a map and it looks like you're working with a lot of area. I can understand why you need to work with community partners. Can you speak a little more on how this program works and how successful the model has been?

L Lauren Jenness 03:37

It's worked out really great. The Lake Champlain Basin program, we've decided to run Stream Wise as a grant program. So, on an annual basis, local organizations will have the opportunity to apply to be a Stream Wise assessor for the upcoming year. And we provide the funding, and they say how they want to run Stream Wise in their local communities. And then throughout the year, once the grant contracts are in place, we work as a team collaboratively across the watershed to implement Stream Wise.

C Cate Kreider 04:14

And so far, that model has performed exactly as you hoped, which is awesome to hear. Incentive programs are a really interesting tool and a successful pilot year is a major win. So, looking at your website, I noticed that everything is about providing tools and resources to help landowners do their own work and maintenance. I'm curious about what you wanted to sit front and center when someone accesses stream wise's website.


L Lauren Jenness 04:41

Great question. Yeah, we really didn't want to reinvent the wheel at all. For Stream Wise. We wanted to package already existing materials and resources that have been developed across the watershed and just highlight them in a very landowner friendly way. Visually appealing way. So everybody knows and has a centralized resource so they know where to go and look for information. On the "for owners" page of the website, we have a great number of really beautiful, comprehensive guides all the way down to individual fact sheets about certain

best management practices that you can install along your stream. So we always are asking our network of water quality partners, if they have a certain resource that's related to streams or rivers, we'd be happy to post it on the Stream Wise champlain.org website.

 Cate Kreider 05:39


And while we're on the topic of where you drew your resources from, I'm curious about how you came up with your assessment metrics. I know you borrowed materials from several official departments, such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Vermont Nature Conservancy, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and a couple of others. Do they typically agree on what the best practices are? And did you change anything to make it more accessible to casual landowners?

 Lauren Jenness 06:06

So, those organizations that you just mentioned, they were a part of the project advisory committee, and the consultant team started with a literature review of all of the different riparian buffer related practices and standards in Vermont, New York and Quebec and, and kind of different models elsewhere as well. So, we pulled together those resources and they, through a series of meetings, had the project advisory committee review the resources, and then decide on the award criteria. We wanted to keep the criteria simple, so it's understandable by the landowner and then again, modeled after the Lake Wise program.

 Cate Kreider 06:51

Speaking of understandable, I noticed that all your materials are available in French as well as English. What is the Quebec Canadian element of your organization? I understand you extend partially up over the border.

 Lauren Jenness 07:06

Right, so Lake Champlain drains through the Richelieu River. So, uh, a chunk of the Lake Champlain watershed is located in Quebec in the Missisquoi Bay area. So we always try to make our materials available in English and French, so it's understandable up in Quebec. We have OBVBM, and they will be piloting the program this year, and most of the landowners that they want to reach out to speak French. So we wanted to make it just extremely accessible. So, we'll always have French translation services.

 Cate Kreider 07:43

I think that's a great standard to keep. And I think that leads in well to the next question: what is your marketing technique? How do you get landowners informed and interested in this work?

 Lauren Jenness 07:55

 Lauren Jenness 07:55

So we want to rely at the local level. We really want neighbor to neighbor contact, but we do that through a number of avenues. We have the Stream Wise website, we have Stream Wise social media channels, we're having shared physical materials like posters, placards, postcards, and then we all want to work together on it. So sharing the same branding, sharing your same messaging, sharing hashtags, and just getting down all of the messages to the local level.

 Cate Kreider 08:34

And as we know, that's been very successful so far.

 Lauren Jenness 08:37

So far. Yep. The Friends of Winooski River and Ausable River Association who piloted the program in 2022. They're already hearing from their local communities about posting events and having more assessments done. So, yes, focusing on the community level streams, and neighbor to neighbor contact is our goal.

 Cate Kreider 09:01

I think that's really important when you're working on this scale of forest restoration. I mean, you've created a different level of approach for stream maintenance that can't occur on a state budget or a statewide scale. That being said, you are scaling up your own project. What are the goals for the 2023 season?

 Lauren Jenness 09:25

Well, my goal is to make sure that all of the partners that received funding and wanna participate in Stream Wise have the tools connections and resources to do so. As a group, collectively across nine organizations, we hope to complete 72 to 83 Stream Wise assessments. A majority of those, hopefully, will earn the streamwise award. And together we will spend over 450 collective hours on the Stream Wise marketing campaign.

 Cate Kreider 09:59

That's big jump up, but I believe you can do it. And what about beyond that? What comes in 2024?

 Lauren Jenness 10:07

The Lake Champlain steering committee did just approve the budget for 2024. And we hope to grow the number to do at least 105 Stream Wise assessments in 2024. So, check out the grant opportunity this upcoming fall through the Lake Champlain Basin program.

C Cate Kreider 10:27
Awesome. So, 15 To 80 to 100. You've got a steep incline planned, but I'm excited to see it happen. Lauren, I want to thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. And thank you for all the information about Stream Wise

L Lauren Jenness 10:44
Thanks for having me.

C Cate Kreider 10:46
After speaking with Lauren Jenness, I had the opportunity to meet with Michele Braun from Friends of Winooski River. Michele, welcome to the podcast.

M Michele Braun 10:55
Thank you, Cate. I'm uh, I'm excited to talk about streamway.

C Cate Kreider 11:01
Yeah, thank you again for joining us here today. Appreciate you taking the time to talk about this really cool stuff that's going on. So, real quick, Michele, could you explain your relationship to Stream Wise and what your and other community organizations parts in this initiative are?

M Michele Braun 11:20
Yeah, so Lake Champlain Basin Program convened a large committee with representatives from Vermont, New York and Quebec, to design the program to develop the program. And I served on that committee. I think we worked for almost two years to develop the program. And then last year in 2022, friends of the Winooski River was the host organization for Stream Wise. In Vermont, which meant we were trying it out. We did assessments on six properties to to see how it worked and how it went.

C Cate Kreider 11:59
And I understand there were 15 properties. So I guess that the other other properties were done in New York, as you said.

M Michele Braun 12:05
Right, so there were just two organizations participating in the pilot year. Friends of the

Winooski river on the Vermont side of the lake and the Ausable River Association on the New York side.

C Cate Kreider 12:18

I hear from Lauren, that the number of community organizations are supposed to increase as you increase your scope.

M Michele Braun 12:25

Yes. So at the end of 2022, Lake Champlain Basin program, offered grants to community partners to implement Stream Wise in their watershed. And so this year 2023, the Ausable River Association is doing it again, along with additional groups in New York. And we have a group in Quebec as well, which is exciting. It took a little extra time to translate all the materials into French. So, they didn't participate last year, but they will this year. And in Vermont, we have six organizations participating.

C Cate Kreider 13:05

That's, that's a big scale up from last year.

M Michele Braun 13:08

Yeah, it is. It is.

C Cate Kreider 13:11

I'm sure that's really exciting to now see so much growth coming in.

M Michele Braun 13:15

Yeah, it's gonna be great because we, you know, all of the watershed groups and conservation districts in, in the state work together all the time, because we're, we're small organizations, so we really need each other as colleagues, kind of. And so it will be excellent to have more groups who we know, well, we can talk through the program and work together to improve the program.

C Cate Kreider 13:45

Yeah. So now you've explained how many people are doing this work. I'd love to hear what this grant that they give you makes happen, like, what is it that you are providing out there in the field on the ground? So, just tell me what a day doing this work looks like?

M

Michele Braun 14:05

Well, we start by promoting the program. So, we have volunteers around the watershed who can post for us on their community front porch forum. And we use our E-newsletter and social media. And we'll probably go out and put up some posters as well, depending on the response that we get from our, from our initial outreach. And folks write back to us and say they would like to have us come out and visit their property. And so, usually, two or three staff people go to someone's property. We have an assessment protocol. The consultant team, working with the Basin Program on this, put together a really robust resource package for assessors. So, we have a great field assessment guide. We use a software called Fulcrum We have an app on this Fulcrum software. So, we take a tablet with us and we go through the points in the app. Some of that we do ahead of time, you know, we will pull up the property on the State Natural Resources Atlas, to look at the soil type, so that we know what kind of recommendations would be appropriate. And to look at where the flood hazard area might be, where the River Corridor is, to kind of get some background information about the property, so that we're a little more ready when we go to talk to the homeowners. And then when we're there, we talk to the homeowners about their riparian buffer. And most of the people we visit, already know that keeping the wooded area along the stream is a really good thing. And they're proud to have maintained the buffer. But they still have questions, you know, they may not know all of the details of how best to take care of the buffer, such as you know how to deal with invasive species. Or if they want to plant more trees, where can they purchase native trees and that kind of thing. So we have conversations with them. And then we go back to our office, and we write up a report for them. Only the report writing part tends to take longer than it should. So that's an improvement we're looking to make in 2023 is to be more efficient about writing the, writing up the recommendations.

C

Cate Kreider 16:28

That brings us pretty well into my next question, which was: what goals did you accomplish in the 2022 season? And what are your hopes for the 2023 season and beyond?

M

Michele Braun 16:39

So in 2022, we did six assessments. And we did a public event as well, where we invited folks to come out and meet with us and Vermont Fish and Wildlife staff to talk about riparian buffers. This year, we're planning to do at least 12 assessments and two events, so twice as much. We also hope to get better at more efficiently producing reports that are useful for the landowners, and also start to track some of the landowners common questions or concerns or challenges, so that we can maybe start compiling streamwise landowner guide that addresses some of those common issues that people run into.

C

Cate Kreider 17:27

It sounds like a great series of goals. I've been looking at the Stream Wise website, so I see they have a lot of resources there. And more resources, specifically from the assessors, seems like a very helpful piece of information to be able to provide.

M

Michele Braun 17:41

Yeah, we we have a good library of resources to offer landowners to kind of back up our recommendations or illustrate our recommendation. Because we've already been doing really similar work with landowners through our Storm Smart residential site assessment program. And we put together resources for that. And that program starts with looking at stormwater and how stormwater is managed on a residential property. And Stream Wise starts with looking at a stream side buffer. But those things are often connected in some way, like a property we looked at, for Stream Wise last summer had rain gutters around their house, which is a good thing. But the outlet from the rain gutters was aimed at the top of their stream bank and was causing a gully on their stream bank. So, you know, we're able to talk to them about both, you know, the health of the stream bank and dealing with their stormwater at the same time.

C

Cate Kreider 18:41

And I think that's a great point as to how useful this kind of assessment work is like to have people like you and other partners out there in these places. They are knowledgeable not only about the assessment materials that are given and the health of streams, but about these other areas, which definitely have interplay with riparian systems. Water is such a wide reaching and complex series of patterns. So I think it's very valuable that Stream Wise has created this opportunity to get out there into the yards and talk about all of it.

M

Michele Braun 19:14

Exactly, yeah, it's a great entry point to engage landowners in taking care of the land.

C

Cate Kreider 19:21

If you could change one thing about the work that you're doing thus far, what would it be?

M

Michele Braun 19:27

I mean, the one thing is definitely finishing those reports sooner.

C

Cate Kreider 19:31

Ha ha ha.

M

Michele Braun 19:33

Another thing that's kind of on my mind is how to decide which properties to visit. We don't have time to visit everybody. It's a huge watershed. It's over 1000 square miles. And we only have three people. If a property is, you know, in the middle of 100 acres of nothing but forest...

does it really make sense? We really want to connect with people who could use some support to work toward the award in the future. We have to make choices and we need to start thinking about how we make those choices. Another aspect that the Stream Wise team needs to keep talking about is how we handle legacies of the past, essentially. If a previous owner of the property did extensive bank armoring, or if there's a lot of invasive species present, how do we help the landowners with those issues that are not problems that they caused while navigating the question of award... giving them an award or not giving them an award?

C Cate Kreider 20:46

That's a really interesting point, thanks for bringing that up. Michele, thank you so much for your input on Friends of the Winooski River's involvement with Stream Wise and how this program is shaping up. Thanks for coming.

M Michele Braun 21:00

Thanks, Cate. I was really glad to talk about it.

C Cate Kreider 21:15

Today's episode featured the call of the Scarlet Tanager. It was recorded by Martin St-michel in Brome-Missisquoi, Québec on May 18th of 2014.

A Alison Adams 21:25

For more information about today's topic and other topics related to riparian forest restoration, visit the Restoration Round Up podcast tab of Lake Champlain Sea Grants Watershed Forestry Partnership website. This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency under an assistance agreement to NEIWPC in partnership with the Lake Champlain Basin Program