

Ecological Restoration Limited Project: Invasive Plant Control Town of Conway/Friends of the South River

The Friends of the South River, along with many others including town officials, have long been concerned with the ecological health of the River. One of the biggest threats to this treasured resource has been the rampant spread of invasive plants – particularly Japanese Knotweed. Knotweed infestations are so dense that they prevent native plants and animals from occupying their former habitat. This includes several protected species.

A major habitat restoration on the Town of Conway owned South River Meadow has recently been completed and it is now a showplace of native plants and animals thriving without the destructive stands of knotweed, barbary, bittersweet, etc. around the perimeters of the 11-acre meadow. Town voters approved this 2017-2019 invasive plant control project from Community Preservation Funds. Located near Conway Center, property around it is degraded by Japanese Knotweed and other invasives. Nine landowners of these small parcels have all agreed to limited professional herbicide treatment at their own expense. This is a tremendous step toward a healthier environment. It is a recognition of a shared problem and neighborhood investment in proven solutions. It is our sincere hope that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will take whatever steps are necessary to enable the success of this critical and unique project. Two important new sections proposed for habitat restoration are also included (areas 2 and 3 described below).

Area 1: South River Neighborhood (North of Town Center). A small portion of the Town-owned South River Meadow into which knotweed has spread since the initial treatment program from 2017 through 2019. It is at the northern most section of the Meadow and was not part of the initial treatment program. The area is also comprised of the small properties of nine residents whose banks along the river are all degraded by knotweed and other invasives.

Area 2: Town Parcels Upstream of Covered Bridge. The Town of Conway owns land on both sides of the South River around our restored and treasured Covered Bridge. It is just off Route 116 – the main thoroughfare in Conway. A millstone proudly marks “Entering Conway.” Unfortunately, ugly invasive plant jungles mar the views and thwart any walkers from enjoying the river and this public space. Control of the extremely dense invasive exotics along the riparian woodlands between the millstone and covered bridge will allow native species to repopulate the area. Conway residents can then determine appropriate enhancements so they may enjoy and better protect this resource in the future, such as trail/s and historic/nature signage.

Area 3: Former Reservoir Area (Manwell Property). This area once housed the former Tucker & Cook Reservoir. Flat terrain with sandy soils provide ideal habitat for some species of special concern. Dense knotweed with massive root systems now impair utilization of this vital resource. Farther from the river, wooded areas are infested with Asian Bittersweet, Japanese barberry and honeysuckles. These threaten native trees and plants which provide essential bank stabilization and cooling shade for the river’s inhabitants

Invasive management will be conducted by pesticide applicators that hold Massachusetts pesticide applicators licenses, are experienced with invasive plant control and have excellent field botanical skills. The utmost care will be taken while conducting invasives management to protect native plants, wildlife, and resource areas. A full description of application methods is included in the Habitat Management Plan.

The Conway Conservation Commission, PO Box 240, Conway, MA 01341 will review this Notice of Intent (NO), which is being submitted as soon as possible. Copies are available from concomm@townofconway.com (Bruton Strange, 413 625-6805) or Friends of the South River (Janet Chayes 413 768-7416, jchayes1@comcast.net). The Conservation Commission will hold a virtual public meeting at phone # 413-369-1541; PIN – 1541 on August 11, 2020 at 8:10 pm.