

Town of Epsom moves to fund Clean Water Act Restoration Project Study Proposal on the Suncook River

(Submitted by Eric Orff)

Epsom selectmen approved town funding of \$16,000 towards a \$40,000 Suncook River Restoration Project after the May 2006 flood caused the Suncook River to change course. Department of Environmental Services (DES) staff members Steve Landry and Steve Couture presented the proposal to Epsom for 60 percent federal matching Section 319 Funds along with the needed town contribution of 40 percent. The Friends of the Suncook River (FOSR) voted a contribution of \$500 towards the project at their January 2007 meeting.

The scope of the geomorphic study includes:

- 1) To provide a better understanding of the location and distribution of the impacts of the flood, including erosion damage, channel changes and sediment deposition.
- 2) To identify flood and erosion hazards that remain along the affected section of the river.
- 3) To develop a geomorphic-based assessment of the project reaches and generate river management/restoration options that will reduce hazards and improve aquatic/floodplain habitat in the affected section.
- 4) To develop preliminary river management/restoration design alternatives with associated permitting and construction costs including a "no action" alternative. †



(photo by E. Orff)

The Friends of the Suncook River have published a special commemorative calendar illustrating and documenting the historic shift in the Suncook River channel in the town of Epsom in May of 2006. The calendar runs from May of 2007 to April of 2008, marking the anniversary dates of the event. It contains approximately 15 photographs and one color photo/map.

The calendar sells for \$10 or is free with a one year Family Membership (\$25). Shipping by mail is \$2 additional. To order a calendar use the membership form on the back of this newsletter.

Epsom dairy farmer, Bill Yeaton, looks out over the new Suncook River Channel known as "the Little Grand Canyon" located in Epsom south of Route 4.

The Great Mother's Day Flood (cont'd)

By Bill's description, the event of the century in Epsom was just underway when he arrived at the locally called Cutter's Pit at the end of Rhodora Drive at about 11:00 AM on Monday. The Suncook had overflowed its bank a quarter mile above the access road to the pit, flowing through a wetland and boggy area along the edge of the old Suncook Railroad bed before converging on the access road and flowing into the pit. The flow was picking up dramatically by the minute according to Bill and was soon a raging flood. It then began to devour the bowels of the sand pit and ripped huge trees and house sized chunks of the pit quickly washing them down the newly formed river. The river was relentless at tearing at the earth, widening the trough to a hundred feet, then two hundred feet and more as the raging boiling flow gained momentum. Then the tongue began to devour the sand to the north along the bed of the pit slicing off three hundred foot wide swaths at a time. Chomping the exposed sand pit as it marched northward within minutes creating a canyon like vision in the once flat sand pit bed.

It was mid afternoon when the current owner of the old mill site, Bob Griggs, first noticed a change in the flow of water that had been pouring six feet high over the top of the dam at the Old Mill. A huge white pine tree, 60 feet in length, was forced mostly over the dam by the powerful flows on the far side of the dam. He noticed by midnight that only a small flow was pouring over the dam. When he last checked at 2:00am, the top of the dam was bare. The river was retreating upstream, flowing away from the upstream side of the dam face! By mid morning the water level was two feet DOWN the front side of the dam – as the river continued to flow upstream. Below the dam the river was waterless, a few foot long rainbow trout were seen flapping in the few remaining pools. By day's end the channel immediately above the dam was dropping even faster as its withdrawal hastened, and by Wednesday morning it was nearly possible to walk across the river even above the dam. The growing vortex less than a half mile above the dam had swallowed all the flood waters. The Suncook River flowed upstream from the dam until it vanished from the nearly a half mile section to the breach. The flood raged on in its new channel. †