

FRIENDS OF THE MAD RIVER



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BUILDING RESILIENCE BY TACKLING STORMWATER TOGETHER

- A project funded by a grant from High Meadows Fund -

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Stormwater runoff is one of the highest priority challenges the Mad River Valley (MRV) faces as we work to build flood resilience in our five towns. It is a collective problem calling for collective planning and action.

Our project lays the foundation for a long-term program that proactively manages water throughout the Mad River Valley. Our first focus will be on stormwater runoff impacts, but, as the program matures, additional modules may expand to other water-focused aspects of climate resilience (e.g. wastewater and drinking water).



*Looking south to Mad River headwaters, in the wake of Irene.
Photo by Mansfield Flight*

The Watershed-Wide Water Management Program (W3MP) we develop will consider the varied contributions to MRV stormwater runoff and strive to reduce impacts from these sectors using a variety of approaches. The program will both anticipate forthcoming water quality legislation and provide non-regulatory solutions to address stormwater runoff.

A Taskforce of official municipal representatives and other interested community members will serve as the nucleus of the planning effort, ensuring that the resulting program meets the community's objectives. The taskforce will work to: plan the 1 ½ year W3MP development process; educate and engage the community in the planning process; solicit community involvement & input; advance planning by framing research needs and then considering research results and public input; develop framework for future W3MP that outlines program roll-out, scope/priorities, decision-making, management body, and funding; and exchange information regularly between municipal boards and Taskforce via official town representatives. Friends of the Mad River (FMR), organizational partners, paid professional consultants (engineers, hydrologists, planners) and other entities like state agencies will support the Taskforce in its work.

WHY THIS WORK IS IMPORTANT

The Mad River drains a 144 square mile watershed encompassing the Vermont towns of Fayston, Waitsfield, and Warren and parts of Duxbury and Moretown. The Mad River watershed drains to Lake Champlain via the Winooski River and contributes to the Lake's water quality. Tropical Storm Irene demonstrated our community's vulnerabilities and brought opportunities for long-term resilience to light. With a changing climate, we should be prepared for precipitation events (and associated flooding) that become more frequent and more intense.

Recent watershed-wide planning efforts for resilience include U.S EPA's Smart Growth Implementation Assistance (SGIA) Project's Disaster Recovery and Long-Term Resilience Planning in Vermont: Policy Memo for the MRV and Friends of the Mad River's Stormwater Management Regulation in the MRV: Review and Recommendations. Three of the top five overall strategies recommended for addressing resilience in the SGIA Policy Memo involve stormwater: 1) address the management and regulation of roads and driveways; 2) explore valley-wide stormwater management; and 3) pursue cooperation with the agricultural community regarding pre-disaster mitigation measures.

The MRW presents the "perfect storm" of rural stormwater runoff challenges – it has some of the steepest terrain in Vermont, resort development in sensitive headwater areas and village development closely flanking the river, a high concentration of rural roads, a typical residential development pattern that skirts under the State permitting threshold, and a loss of riparian buffers to agriculture. Aside from large development projects, stormwater management has fallen largely to local municipalities who lack the resources to appropriately address the challenges, and who can't act outside their borders. Furthermore, stormwater in the MRW is not a typical "urban stormwater" challenge that focuses in developed areas; our stormwater challenge is more dispersed in nature and, therefore, requires a different suite of tools.

COMMUNITY BENEFIT

A Watershed-Wide Water Management program will: 1) foster collaboration as well as information and resource-sharing among municipalities; 2) coordinate efforts, improve efficiencies, and reduce expenses; 3) improve water quality; and 4) increase resilience to future flooding. The taskforce of volunteer representatives from each town will work to shape a program that fills local needs, prepares for impending state regulation, identifies sustainable funding mechanisms, and provides realistic, readily-achievable strategies for increasing resilience. Community forums and smaller conversations will build understanding and gather community priorities. The process will be driven by community members, yet supported by staff.

CURRENTLY ENGAGED

The **Towns of Duxbury, Fayston, Moretown, Warren and Waitsfield** will have official Taskforce representation. All five Selectboards voted to support Friends of the Mad River's application to High Meadows Fund and have already, or will, appoint a Taskforce representative. Official representatives will be responsible for exchanging information and input between their municipal board(s) and the Taskforce.

Friends of the Mad River (FMR) – Lead organization that manages grant administration (manage finances, hire contractors and provide grant reporting) and manages the project, in general. Corrie Miller, FMR's Executive Director, will organize and facilitate Taskforce meetings, coordinate community education and engagement, and provide ongoing project stewardship.

Mad River Valley Planning District (MRVPD) will participate on the Taskforce, help organize Community Resilience Forums, host Tri-Town Selectboard Meeting, and drive the planning technical work.

Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVPRC) will drive the planning technical work, together with MRVPD.

Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) will participate on the Taskforce, support the stormwater technical work, and publicize any outcomes that can build awareness more broadly across the state.

Mad River Valley Chamber of Commerce will participate on the Taskforce and ensure that local businesses have a voice in the planning process.

Technical Teams – Professional engineers, hydrologists, and planners who interact with the taskforce and drive the development of technical materials.

The **Stormwater Technical Team** will develop a Technical Standards Manual that reviews municipal standards, assesses and compiles environmental data, analyzes issues and gaps; delivers innovative management recommendations and outlines possible funding sources/models; includes regulatory and non-regulatory tools for municipalities, homeowners, developers, farmers, commercial enterprises, and road crews that are specific for the Mad River Valley's rural landscape.

The **Planning Technical Team** will work with Taskforce and local planning commissions to translate technical recommendations into an appropriate planning framework. This planning framework could include suggested bylaw update language, road policy recommendations with regard to maintenance and construction, town/regional plan updates, and other resilience considerations.