



September 8, 2022

The Wilton Conservation Commission has voted unanimously to support the joint Souhegan River Local Advisory Committee (SoRLAC) and Nashua Regional Planning Commission proposal under the 2022 Water Quality Planning 604(b) Funding Program administered by New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services.

First, they propose to update the Souhegan River Corridor Management Plan. The existing management plan was written in 2006. Much has changed in the past 16 years. Their focus on changes in land use, and in the density of those uses, will be useful as development pressures continue to move up-river from greater Merrimack-Nashua and climate change places additional stresses on the Corridor. Based on a recent joint session with our Wilton Planning Board, where more collaboration and cooperation was discussed, we also believe their goal of producing a Souhegan River Corridor Resource Management appendix available for adoption into the Master Plans of SoRLAC towns will support development of actionable planning strategies that cross municipal boundaries.

Second, they are seeking funding to determine the sources of *E. coli* contamination in the river. The decades-long citizen science sampling done by the Souhegan Watershed Association has made clear that *E. coli* levels are highly correlated with rainfall events during summer months. Properly and efficiently mitigating the impairment depends in no small part on identifying the sources of contamination. Their request to do targeted biological source testing (BST) at known *E. coli* hotspots to determine the sources (e.g. human, livestock, canine, waterfowl, wildlife) is imperative for efficient regional and local efforts to improve water quality in the Souhegan River Corridor.

While 2023 funding for the Wilton Conservation Commission is unknown until our next town meeting, we plan to ask for matching funds, should the SoRLAC effort be funded, to enhance the bare bones BST sampling program in our town. The investment in those data could save the town significant expense by allowing targeted solutions for *E. coli* rather than continuing with generic, unfocused stormwater and IDDE efforts. We are also an MS4 designated town now with two 4th order streams, the Souhegan River and Stony Brook which converge in our town center and are the sites of our Wilton Riverwalk project. The goals of that project are multi-faceted economically and socially. But at the very least, we hope to once again celebrate the rivers that have made Wilton such a beloved rural community for our residents, eco-tourists and local small businesses.

Wilton has some of the highest quality water in the state due to our natural gravel aquifers. We plan to keep it that way. The Souhegan River and its surrounding shorelines are a treasured town asset. This project is essential and long overdue in achieving our goals of natural resource protection.

Respectfully,
The Wilton Conservation Commission