

FISH LADDER WORK IS COMPLETE

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By David Smith, Sun Staff Writer

HOPKINTON — Work on a fish ladder and portage path located directly across the Pawcatuck River from the Bradford Printing and Finishing Plant has been completed at a cost of about \$ 150,000.

The initial work to change the fish ladder and make it easier for fish to migrate upstream was completed in December of 2008.

At the same time, landscape work was completed on a portage path to provide canoeists and kayakers an easier way around the dam and fish ladder.

Less than two weeks later, a big storm dropped lots of rain, raising the river over its bank and causing that landscape work to be eroded.

The result was another look at the portage path and a change in materials from loam and seeding to a combination of different size riprap. Large stones form the base and the bulk of the area, while smaller stones were used for a path for boaters. The smaller stones make it less likely ankles will be turned while portaging, said Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Association Executive Director Chris Fox.

Previously, boaters had to scramble up and over large rocks and a small stream, which created slippery footing. Now the path around the fish ladder is flat with a gradual slope to the river below.

It was the WPWA that hired the contractor and sought funding for the work, which is being paid for by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, which is a branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife.

At the same time the portage path was being completed, it was determined that the chain link fence that once provided a barrier against someone falling into the fish ladder washed out in that December storm, and should be replaced with something more durable. It was decided that an aluminum grate would be installed.

On Friday morning, a variety of state and federal officials, Bradford Printing and Finishing Environmental Director Dave Gibbons, Fox and the contractor met at the ladder for an inspection.

Meghan Walter, a hydraulic engineer from NRCS based in Warwick, was on site to inspect the work. She said the work was done to specification.

"It looks good," she said. She added that the riprap was 26 inches deep and included a fabric to stabilize it. She said that, ideally, sediment will find its way into the riprap and vegetation will eventually take hold and stabilize it even more.

Without the stabilization provided by the riprap, Walter said erosion could eventually undermine the fish ladder.

The contractor for the work, Bill Wilbur of WILCO Development of Johnston, said he brought in about 100 yards of stone. Pelletier Welding and Fab Company in Warwick fabricated the custom- made aluminum grate. Owner Paul Pelletier said once the grate was fabricated, his company installed it using stainless steel fasteners.

The Department of Environmental Management holds an easement for the portage path, which also gives the DEM clear access to maintain the fish ladder. Prior to that, Fox said, boaters were essentially

trespassing on the property. With the installation of the portage path, an easement was deemed to be in order. And with the “invitation” of the portage path, the grate on the fish ladder was deemed essential for liability reasons.

As the group broke up on Friday morning, Fox was one of the last to leave, but not before he was handed the bill by the contractor.

“It reminds me of when I was married and I was sitting in the club after the reception. They came over and handed me the bill,” he said.

Except this bill was a bit more expensive.



DAVID SMITH /The Press

From left, Dave Gibbons, from the Bradford Printing and Finishing Plant, WPWA Executive Director Chris Fox and Natural Resources Conservation Services hydrologist Meghan Walter look over the new grating on the fish ladder on the Hopkinton side of the Pawcatuck River. Above is the portage area.