



# Franklin Conservation District

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## Conservation experts, Montague town officials work to restore the Sawmill River, seek landowners' help

Staff from USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Town of Montague, and the Franklin Conservation District marked Earth Day 2004



by planting live willow stakes at three sites along the Sawmill River, as part of an on-going river restoration project. Now the conservation district is seeking the help of landowners along the Sawmill River in determining what additional work needs to be done.

The Franklin Conservation District, in partnership with the NRCS, has been conducting an assessment of sediment and erosion and agricultural flood damage problems in the watershed and their related impacts on ecosystems in the Sawmill River watershed. The intent of these studies is to understand the river and problems that have occurred over the years.



In order to conduct the final phase of the study, landowners along the river shoreline are being asked to provide the conservation district access where

appropriate. Physical examination of the bank and water flow is essential to the successful completion of the study. Even though there may not be erosion and sediment problems on the stream near your property, problems upstream could impact your property in the future.

**If you own property along the Sawmill River in Montague and have not yet signed an access permission form, please contact the Franklin Conservation District at 413-773-0286.**

In April, Rita Thibodeau, NRCS district conservationist for Franklin County and several other NRCS and conservation district staff members joined Montague Town Planner Robin Sherman in planting the willow stakes at the river's edge at two sites along Leverett Road and one site in the state wildlife area at the end of North Street.



Once established, the willows will shade the river, keeping water temperatures cool enough for trout and salmon to survive in summer. The vegetation will also protect water quality by providing a buffer to catch run-off from the road during rainstorms. In some locations it will also help prevent riverbank erosion and sedimentation in the river.



As of early June, the willow stakes were on their way to becoming established, having sprouted leaves.

Over the past eight years, the Town of Montague has contacted NRCS several times for assistance in repairing extensive storm damage to roads and bridges in the Sawmill watershed and to stabilize a severely eroded bank, which threatened a highway.

The Sawmill River watershed encompasses some 32 square miles in the western Massachusetts towns of Leverett, Montague, Shutesbury and Wendell. The river travels fourteen miles from its headwaters at Lake Wyola in Shutesbury to its confluence with the Connecticut River in Montague.