

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 24, 2004

CONTACT: Diane Baedeker Petit, 413-253-4371
Sara Izquierdo, 413-772-0384

Citizens asked to help with Sawmill River conservation efforts

Response needed by Friday, August 27

Owners of land adjacent to the Sawmill River in Montague, Leverett and Shutesbury who have not already done so are asked to contact the Franklin Conservation District by this Friday to sign a permission form that will allow the district to survey river characteristics from private land along the banks. The district may be reached at 413-773-0286.

The Franklin Conservation District, in partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), is conducting the study of the Sawmill River with the support of the towns of Montague, Leverett and Shutesbury. The purposes of the study are to improve understanding of the river, design stabilization projects to protect public and private property from erosion and flood damage, enhance wildlife habitat and recommend voluntary management practices to restore the health of the Sawmill.

NRCS conducted an initial assessment of river conditions in 2002, which identified eroding sites that need attention, as well as pristine sites that could serve as models for restoration projects. The support of local landowners and access to both eroding and pristine sites are essential to the success of this project. To date, the conservation district has not received permission to access all of the necessary locations.

"In the past, we've dealt with problems on a site-by-site basis. While that approach solved problems in the short term, it leads to accumulated stresses on the river and an increase in the severity of problems over time," explains Montague Town Planner Robin Sherman. "This project considers problems throughout the whole watershed. We are attempting to provide proactive, holistic restoration alternatives."

According to Franklin Conservation District Chairman John Bennett, that's why access to all of the problem and pristine sites is crucial. "Without access to these critical areas, the study will identify problem areas but the encompassing nature of the study will be lost," says Bennett. "The integrity of the project now hinges on the permission of a few landowners to grant access to their property."

###