



Friends of the Chemung River Watershed

Paddling in the same direction 2014 Annual report



Contact: James Pfiffer, executive director
111 N. Main St.
Elmira, NY 14901
riverfriends@stny.rr.com
607-846-2242

2014 Board of directors and advisers

- **President Lee Hanle Younge**, Big Flats, N.Y.; retired director of Chemung County Environmental Management Committee
- **Vice-President Pauline Emery**, Elmira, library director Southeast Steuben County Library.
- **Secretary Thomas O'Brien**, Corning, N.Y.; attorney.
- **Treasurer Jim Ripley**, Pine City, N.Y.; Chemung Canal Trust Company vice president.
- **Board member Jennifer Fais**, Corning, N.Y.; retired planner with the Southern Tier Central Regional Planning and Development Board and co-chairperson of the Chemung Basin River Trail Partnership.
- **Board member Don Hall**, Elmira, N.Y.; retired corporate administrator for Precision Filters, Ithaca.
- **Board member Thomas Beecher**, Pine City, retired IBEW Local 139 electrician.
- **Executive director James Pfiffer**, Elmira, N.Y.; public relations consultant and former newspaper reporter and columnist.
- **Adviser Scott Shaw**, Horseheads, N.Y.; associate planner 1, Elmira-Chemung Transportation Council.
- **Adviser Richard H. Bean**, Sayre, Pa., retired production control manager.

Building the future of our rivers



Dear river friends,

This year was the year of river safety and river trips.

This year River Friends increased our number of our guided paddles and beginner paddling classes to encourage more people to discover and use our rivers for recreation. It worked.

In 2014 we taught more than 1,100 people – many of them children – how to safely enjoy our rivers. We led guided educational-themed paddles for more than 100 people – many of them first-time paddlers. We partnered with fire departments to teach river safety classes to children in public schools, summer camps and Summer Cohesion sites.

We distributed nearly 70 free life vests to children and taught them the importance of always wearing a vest on or near the water.

The result was a three-fold increase in the number of people paddling, fishing and hiking river trails – many of them introduced to this local outdoor recreation through River Friends programs.

Our public outreach

All my thanks and respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Pfiffer".

Jim Pfiffer

Executive Director, Friends of the Chemung River Watershed

Projects

Project	Results	Location/date	Participants	Volunteers
White Wagon Trail	May		Cleanup and trail building	15
Minier's boat Launch				
PC safety class	June	Parley Coburn	580 (500 kids)	
Hendy safety class	June	Hendy Elem	23 kids	
W. Elmira Summer	July 1	W. Elmira Town Hall community building	18 kids, four adults	

Camp				
------	--	--	--	--

Eco-recreation

Event	Date	Location	Participants	Volunteers
Nat. Strollers	5/16	Lackawanna trail	7/rain	
Nat. Strollers	6/12	West Elmira Trails	16/rain	
May 31 paddle		Bottcher's to Fitch's	25	
June 21 paddle		Dunn to Wellsburg	25	
Nat. Strollers:	7/25	Lackawanna	23	
Nat. Strollers	8/29	Seeley Creek	19	
Nat. Strollers	9/12	Lackawanna	13	
Thrills and chills	10/18	Grove St	38	

Cleanups

Date	Where/who			Trash
April 12 Brian Layton	Fitch's Bridge adopt a launch	5 people called Riverside Patriots		6 bags/800 lbs. Neigh. Watch Sign under bridge, computer monitor
April 26	Lack RR trail	86 people		1,500 pounds
May 3	Fitch's adopt a launch			

June 14	Probation boat launches			
June 14	Fitch's and Dunn Field cleanup			
June 21	Fitch's and Dunn Field			250 pounds
June 27	Country Club Drive	28		1,500 pounds
Sept. 20	River Southside	probation		
Sept. 13	Brian Layton			

2014 Accomplishments



Ecorecreation

Our 2014 eco-recreation events helped us bring more than 150 paddlers to the Chemung River to learn about safe paddling, river history and outdoor recreation. Our continuing partnership with Southern Tier Kayak Tours of Ithaca, allows us to provide professionally guided and safe paddle trips that include equipment, transportation and supervision.



We led six guided hikes, including an annual October Halloween themed hike at the Grove Street Boat launch. Many of our hikes include visits from live animals – including hawks – and how these animals are impacted by our environment. Many of our ecorecreation events were financed, in part, with a \$5,000 Xerox Foundation grant and a \$1,885 National Environmental Education Fund grant.

Our ecorecreation events featured educational themes about the environment and rivers. An Elmira man, who is part Native American, dressed as an Iroquois Indian and met participants in one of our paddles along the river to talk about Native American history and how and why rivers led to the settlement of many of our towns and cities.

Through a partnership with the Horseheads Family Resource Center and the Chemung Valley Audubon Society, we led six guided walks for more than 80 parents, grandparents and their children. The short walks along river banks, trails and creek sides included lessons in natural history, environmental stewardship and aquatic wildlife.



This nature stroller program is a fund-raising project for River Friends, financed by the Chemung Valley Audubon Society. We plan to continue and expand the program in 2015 and beyond.

Part of our mission is to show the public how to creatively use rivers as outdoor classrooms. That's why we partnered with Community Arts of Elmira for a Nov. 11 program on how rivers and nature inspire creativity and art. The presentation included a panel (poet, painter, and photographer) discussion and River Friends 2015 plans for youth art project at various boat launches creating art from materials found in nature.

River Friends staff and volunteers led a guided paddle for an outdoor travel and adventure writer to promote the Chemung River Watershed and outdoor recreation in our area.

The program is through a partnership with the Chemung County Chamber of Commerce to improve tourism and public awareness the area's outdoor recreation opportunities.

For the fourth year in a row, River Friends has hid 30 gold painted shoes along river trails for hikers and bikers to find and turn in for prizes. The gold shoe event is run by Tanglewood Nature Center in Elmira to get people outdoors to enjoy nature and a healthy lifestyle. More than 300 people, from toddlers to seniors, participated in the gold shoe event.

ARC/Southern Tier Industries partnership with Chemung ARC

We began a collaboration with Chemung ARC and Southern Tier Industries, Elmira-based nonprofit organizations that supports and aids people with mental, physical and emotional disabilities. The partnership helped River Friends expand our volunteer numbers and provided ARC members with opportunities to improve job skills and expose them to more interactions with people and places in the community. They worked side-by-side with community volunteers all ages and



backgrounds. Together River Friends and ARC cleared a mile-long stretch of riverbank land to build a nature trail at the White Wagon Boat Launch in Chemung. We removed litter and debris from the Lackawanna Rail Trail in Elmira, nature trails in the Town of Elmira and boat launches along the river.

Result: A cleaner and safer environment for the community and improved job skills, self-confidence and knowledge of the community for the volunteers.

Keeping it clean



We kicked off our cleanups with an April 25 and 26 Earth Week community cleanup of the Lackawanna Rail Trail in Elmira with more than 70 volunteers from Corning Community College, local businesses and environmental groups. On April 25, 16 volunteers from CCC's Community to Community program and River Friends will clean the northern section of the three-mile trail, from Eldridge Park to Wegmans.

The following day 62 volunteers from Kennedy Valve and Chemung ARC in Elmira; Access Midstream in Horseheads; the Chemung County Environmental Management Council, and River Friends cleaned the trail from Wegmans to East Water Street. We removed more than 1,500 pounds of trash.

We removed more than four tons of trash from of boat launches, trails and abandoned transient homeless camps and party places along riverbanks and trails. Our cleanup partners included Chemung ARC, Kennedy Valve, Wegmans, Access Midstream and the Chemung County Probation Department. They provided volunteers, funds and supplies to conduct the cleanups.

More than 125 community volunteers helped with the project.

This year, with the support of the AHWAGA Canoe and Kayak Club, we cleaned trash from Brick and Miller's ponds and Eldridge Lake, all in Elmira. This program will continue indefinitely.



The Riverside Patriots, a group of five or six community residents, adopted the Bottcher's Landing, Fitches Bridge and Dunn Field boat launches and did monthly cleanups and monitoring of the sites. The Riverside Patriots join several other groups and organizations that have adopted boat launches.

Boat Launches

We continue to monitor and clean the nearly dozen public boat launches on the rivers and we made the following improvements to launches in 2014:

- Erected an osprey nesting pole at Bottcher's Landing Boat Launch as part of an Eagle Scout project. There are now two osprey nesting poles on the river (one in Elmira) and another pole to be erected at Dunn Field Boat Launch in 2015.
- Through an Eagle Scout project we installed fishing line recycling canisters on kiosks at five Chemung River boat launches.
- Began project to finance and install 90-foot concrete access road and boat ramp at Minier's/Sen. Smith Boat Launch in Big Flats.



River education in partnership with Elmira's Finn Academy

The Finn Academy, the first charter school in the Southern Tier, began a long-term partnership with River Friends to use our environment as an outdoor classroom to teach students math, science, art, history, ecology and many other topics. The fresh-air outdoor classrooms will give students a hands-on understanding of our environment through expeditional learning that includes river paddles and hikes, water testing, tree planting and lessons on the water cycle, ecology, and environmental stewardship.



White Wagon Trail construction

Thanks to a \$5,000 grant from Access Midstream in Horseheads, River Friends and the Town of Chemung were able to begin construction of a mile long nature/education trail on the Chemung River at the White Wagon Boat Launch in the town of Chemung. The hard-packed dirt trail follows the route of a former canal tow path in a scenic and heavily wooded stretch along the riverbank. Trail signs and informational kiosks were designed and are expected to be installed in 2015. The trail is designed for educational purposes.

Our trail construction crew included volunteers from Chemung ARC, Southern Tier Industries, River Friends and the Town of Chemung.



West Elmira spur trail cleanup

River Friends teamed up with West Elmira officials and 32 volunteers on June 27 to test a pilot program to clean a badly littered trail at the end of Country Club Drive in West Elmira.

The trail, which leads to a series of beautiful nature trails along the river, was littered with trash, brush and other debris that had been dumped there for years.



Volunteers from River Friends, Chemung ARC, and Chemung County Soil & Water removed the debris and trimmed brush, dead branches and trees to make the spur trail cleaner, safer and more attractive.

Matt Mustico, director of the town's highway department, operated a piece of heavy equipment to help clean the trail and remove heavy debris.

Soil and Water employees distributed printed information cards -- about the hazards of dumping along streams, rivers and trails – to the homes on the street. Additional cleanups will be done in 2015 on the other dead-end street spur trails that lead to the river in West Elmira.

Public education and information



Our staff, board members and volunteers kept the public informed of our work through regional news media, e-mails, newsletters, working information tables at community events, open houses at the West Elmira Volunteer Fire Department and Elmira Fire department and at the weekly summer farmer's market in downtown Elmira.

We also gave 11 lectures and PowerPoint presentations about river safety, recreation, ecology and stewardship. We partnered with Community Arts of Elmira to give a public presentation and panel discussion on how rivers and nature inspire creativity for artists, writers and photographers.

Benches, swings and a boat

The Chemung Sunrise Rotary club donated four benches, and with the help of River Friends, installed two of them on the Lackawanna Rail Trail in Elmira and one in the West Elmira Community Garden and one on the trails leading from the garden to the Chemung River.



A Southside man donated his 12-foot aluminum fishing boat to River Friends. We then applied for and received a \$300 grant from the Community Foundation of Elmira-Corning and the Finger Lakes to purchase an electric boat motor and battery. The row boat will be used for River Friends trash cleanups, safe boating classes, rides and guided paddles.

River Friend worked with members of the Chemung County Chamber of Commerce Leadership Chemung to build and install two wooden swings on the West Elmira River Trails.

Fishing derbies

Our Pike fishing contest at Eldridge Lake and our youth fishing derby at Brick Pond helped us raise nearly \$5,000 and provided two days of fishing fun and family learning for more than 140 people.

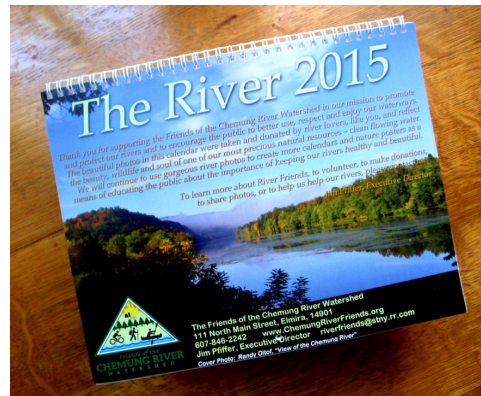


The derbies helped more people learn about River Friends, discover recreational fishing opportunities in Elmira and learn the importance of caring for our natural environment for future generations.

Calendars

To help improve river awareness we sponsored a fund-raising project to get area photographers and river users to shoot photographs of our rivers to be used in a 2015 and 2016 River Friends

More than 250
by more than 20
used in the calendars were
members and our staff and
photos for our 2015



calendars.

photographs were submitted
photographers. The photos
selected by River Friends
board. We began collecting
calendars.

Expanded river safety education

A tragic Mother's Day drowning reminded the public of river dangers and the need to wear life vests and know the river you paddle.

After the accident River Friends expanded our free public river safety education. We partnered with local fire departments to give river safety presentations to more than 1,000 people, most of them children.

We secured grants to purchase a river rescue boat and motor and donate it to a local volunteer fire department that covers the most popular paddled section of the Chemung River in Big Flats, N.Y.



We partnered with fire departments to teach river safety classes to over 1,000 children in public schools, summer camps and Summer Cohesion sites.

We taught beginner and safe paddling classes to more than 60 people – many of them children -- including a youth summer camp and people with disabilities.

Thanks to a \$2,550 Anderson Foundation grant we were able to give away 100 U.S. Coast Guard approved life vests to children who don't own or can't afford vests and taught youth

safety classes about the dangers of swimming in rivers.

Show me the money!

In March 2014, the students in Mrs. Maren Schiefen's 4th grade class at Big Flats Elementary donated \$100, through the Community Foundation of Elmira-Corning and the Finger Lakes, to



River Friends to buy supplies and equipment to help keep our rivers clean. River Friends Director Jim Pfiffer gave the class a PowerPoint presentation on environmental stewardship as thanks for the donation.

The class was one of five that donated \$100 each to River Friends through a new program that teaches children about the importance of donating to community groups. Other classes that donated include: Mrs. MacPherson's

kindergarten class at Diven Elementary, Mrs. Oplinger's kindergarten class at Holy Family and the Horseheads Intermediate School fight grade classes of Mrs. Marks, Mr. Durr and Ms. Hogue. A Girl Scout troop also donated \$100.

River Friends flowing into Steuben County

River Friends provide free river trail consultant services to the villages of Campbell and Savona to assist the municipalities in improving river access and developing river trails on the Cohocton River.

We helped the Steuben County Conference & Visitors Bureau and the Steuben County Department of Public Health assess Steuben County's water and outdoor recreation opportunities and help develop marketing strategies, collaboration opportunities and product development for surrounding counties.

We gave an environmental stewards presentation to children at the Corning Children's Center and led a guided paddle on the Chemung River for students and staff at Corning Community College.



We began working with Steuben County Planning Department and the Southern Tier Central Regional Planning and Development Board to develop a plan to build a 40-mile river trail from Erin to Cohocton. We did trash cleanups at the Addison and Rathbone boat launches on the Canisteo River.

Annual meeting celebrates volunteer from Spain and Chemung ARC

A chemical engineer who moved to Elmira from Spain was the River Friends 2014 Volunteer of the Year. Diana Povedano, who came to Elmira with her husband who works for CAF in Elmira Heights, was given the award at our Nov. 18 annual membership meeting and fundraiser at the Golden Glow Volunteer Fire Company in Big Flats.

Chemung ARC was recipient of the River Friends 2014 Business of the Year for 2014. ARC partnered with River Friends to provide volunteers to build trails, plant trees and flowers and clean up trash. The collaboration allows ARC clients to get real life work experience and while helping improve our environment and community.



Tom Harrigan (far left) of Chemung ARC, received the 2014 River Friends Business of the Year Award and Diana Povedano of Elmira received the Volunteer of the Year Award

More than 60 people attended the annual meeting and selected photos for the River Friends 2015 calendar from over 100 river photos taken by local photographers.

Trail brochures

In partnership with the Elmira-Chemung Transportation Council and a \$2,500 grant from the Arnot Ogden Hospital Creating Healthy Places we reprinted 5,000 copies of the Lackawanna Rail Trail brochures for public distribution.

Grants:

River Friends received \$32,585 in grants in 2014 to be used for everything from buying life vests and boating equipment to building a boat launch and teaching river safety and beginner paddling classes. Our grants ranged from \$100 from an elementary school class to \$5,000 for safe boating and environmental cleanup programs.

Our grants are supplemented by funding from many municipalities along the river and from our more than 1,000 individual members.

Help us protect our rivers

Make a credit card donation at www.chemungriverfriends.org or send your tax-deductible donations to: Friends of the Chemung River Watershed, 111 N. Main St., Elmira, NY 14901. To volunteer, contact riverfriends@stny.rr.com or (607) 846-2242

