

THE BALLARDVALE GAZETTE

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALLARDVALE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

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Shawsheen River Restoration

Much activity is taking place along the Shawsheen River regarding its restoration and the future of Andover's three dams --- the Balmoral, Marland Place and Ballardvale dams. The Town of Andover has entered into a partnership with several organizations including the Shawsheen River Watershed Association, MA Division of Ecological Restoration, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, MA Division of Fish and Wildlife, MA Division of Marine Fisheries, Coastal America Foundation, MA Corporate Wetlands Partnership, Tactitian Corporation, American Rivers, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Earth Island Institute and the Center for Ecosystem Restoration, in an effort to study the river's past, present and future.

Thomas Ardito, from the Center for Ecosystem Restoration, provided this description of the work happening on the Shawsheen River: "The work...needs to be seen in the context of the entire river. The Shawsheen River is one of the most important tributaries of the Lower Merrimack River, which is, in turn, one of the largest and most important rivers in Massachusetts. The Shawsheen historically supported a host of environmental values, including abundant migratory fish such as river herring and shad, which were destroyed by the construction of mill dams. Although the mill dams provide other values now they were built for one purpose only --- to power factories, specifically the textile mills at Ballardvale and Marland Place. A partnership of state, federal, non-

profit and local organizations are now working together to restore the environment and fisheries of the Shawsheen River, Merrimack River and Northeastern Massachusetts through restoration of the river. Toward that end, we are studying all three dams on the Shawsheen. While we are evaluating dam removal, there have been no hard commitments to any one action (including dam removal) at any of the dams. Moreover our restoration efforts are focused this year on the two downstream dams, Balmoral and Marland Place.

Several informational meetings and presentations have been held, including one on February 3 at Memorial Library, where Beth Lambert, River Restoration Program Manager, and Nick Wildman, Priority Projects Coordinator, both from the Division of Ecological Restoration, Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game, gave a presentation on dam removal in Massachusetts. The presentation was general in nature and although the Shawsheen was occasionally referred to, their talk was not specific to the Shawsheen or the three dams mentioned above.

According to Lambert, there are more than 3000 known dams throughout Massachusetts, most of which were built in the 19th century to provide energy for mill production. Many have outgrown their usefulness. Currently, approximately 43 dams in the state provide flood control, 44 are licensed hydropower producers, and 164 (not all in use) supply community water. Most dams are privately owned, and state law mandates that owners are responsible for upkeep and

repair and that the "owner shall be responsible and liable for damage to property of others or injury to persons, including but not limited to loss of life, resulting from the operation, failure of or misoperation of a dam." Not surprisingly, many owners do not view their dam as an asset.

Properly built and well-maintained dams do provide the benefits for which they are designed --- water distribution, flood control, or energy production. But in doing so, they turn rivers into ponds and inhibit natural stream processes. They restrict the full free movement of native fish and have a negative impact on water quality by encouraging low dissolved oxygen levels and raising water temperatures. They allow high nutrient accumulation and provide a sink for toxic substances. Dams that are in poor, or even fair, condition can be a deterrent to natural processes, a liability and an eyesore.

Neighbors, however, often view dams and their resulting millponds positively, as is the case in Ballardvale, where the millpond is an attractive feature of Ballardvale Center and recalls the role that the dam and resulting water-generated power played in the history and economic development of the neighborhood and beyond. The dam in Ballardvale is known as a "run-of-river" dam -- whatever water goes into the pond, flows out of the pond and over the dam. Water resulting from heavy rain is not controlled, with or without the Ballardvale dam, and it has never provided water supply or flood management.

Lambert and Wildman discussed why dams are removed, the dam removal process, including the extensive study and data collection processes, and the subsequent river restoration. As already mentioned, many owners opt to remove dams because of the perpetual cost of maintenance and upkeep. Owning a dam is an expense and a liability. Communities choose to remove dams in the

interest of community improvement and development, and to avoid the risk of dam failure. There have been two near-failures of note recently --- in Taunton in 2005, which required emergency evacuation, and a more recent event in Freetown. Removal is often made more attractive by available public funding. The entire process takes several years, and much study precedes the removal of a dam, including feasibility and cost assessments, engineering and design studies, mapping of wetland areas, topographical surveys, sediment sampling, structural and historical analyses, etc. Permitting, construction and restoration of the river and surrounding area follow. Areas upstream of dams and under water, "green up" within 9 months. Native trees, shrubs and grasses can become established in a few years to stabilize the land, provide erosion control and lead the way to the river's natural state.

As Ardito warns, "It's important to note that these are 150-year old stone structures in rivers, and they don't last forever." The dam in Ballardvale, co-owned by Shawsheen Rubber and Shawsheen Realty LLC, was assessed in 2007, and was determined to be in fair condition. As a result, another assessment is not required until 2012. The Office of Dam Safety, however, noted numerous deficiencies in the structure, and estimated the cost of repair at \$150,000 to \$240,000. To date, no repair nor decision on a course of action have been made.

Bob Douglas and Gail Ralston from the Andover Conservation Commission, and members of the Center for Ecosystem Restoration will join the Ballardvale Historic District Commission at its regular meeting on Wednesday, April 7 in the 3rd floor conference room of Town Offices to discuss the Shawsheen River Restoration Project and its potential impact on Ballardvale. The public is welcome to attend. For confirmation that plans have not changed, email Diane Derby at derby01@comcast.net a day or two before he

meeting. Please arrive at 8pm to participate in the discussion. A public meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 9, 2010 at Memorial Library by the Center of Ecorestoration concerning the Shawsheen Project. Please visit their website <http://www.ecorestoration.org/shawsheen> for more information.

---The Gazette editor would like to thank everyone who offered information and corrections. Any inaccuracies are the responsibility of the editor.

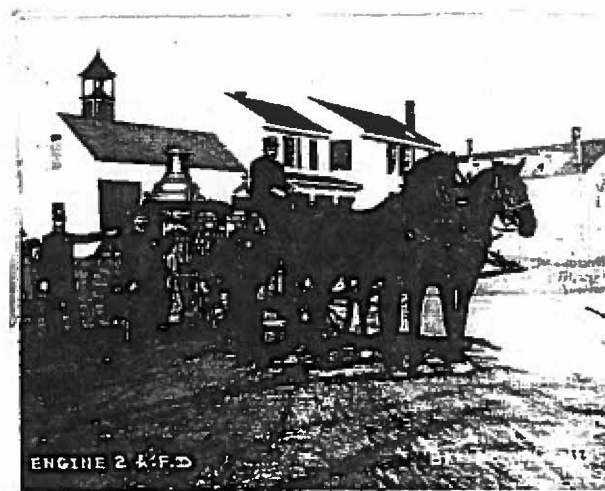
Ballardvale Fire Station

The following information concerning the history of the Ballardvale Fire Station and the current plans to relocate it came from Bruce Taylor, the BVHD Commission representative to the current Ballardvale Fire Station Building Committee.

In 1862, the Shawsheen Steam Engine Fire Company was organized, comprised of an unpaid group of 25 citizens who responded to fires with hand- tubs and fire buckets. A horse drawn steam engine and ladder and ten more volunteers were added to the Company in 1864. The original building, located at 213 Andover Street, was moved across the street in 1896, to its current site at the corner of Andover Street and Clark Road, and included construction of a 67' hose tower. In July of 1912, the Company purchased an auto-combination hose and chemical car --- Sam and Jerry, Ballardvale's fire horses, were retired after 26 years of service. In 1953, the hose tower was removed. Thirty years later, in 1983, possible replacement of the Ballardvale Fire Station was considered. A site study was conducted in 1994. In 1996, the year of the 100th anniversary of the current bulding, Fire Chief Hayes requested \$1.5 million to replace the Ballardvale Station.

Once again, technology has changed and the station does not meet the specifications to house today's standard fire equipment. The existing site at the corner of Andover Street and Clark Road does not allow for expansion of the facility. The Town has come to the decision that the current location restricts the Andover Fire Rescue Department's ability to provide adequate fire and emergency services to Ballardvale and beyond. The Ballardvale Fire Station Building Committee was formed to provide a feasibility study with recommendations to the Board of Selectmen and Town Manager that addresses the following topics:existing conditions at the Ballardvale Fire Station; assessment of present and future needs for fire and rescue services in the Ballardvale area; possible sites for a new station; preliminary designs for a new station; and preliminary cost analysis and funding sources.

At present the Committee is in the process of securing permission for a traffic study. Approval for funding the study has not yet been passed by Selectmen. Five parcels of land are currently under consideration as possible locations for a new station.



**Ballardvale
Historic District Commission**

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***Come to the April 7 BVHDC meeting at 8pm to hear about the
Shawsheen River Restoration Project and the Ballardvale dam!***

Visit <http://andoverma.gov/boards/agendas/bvale.pdf> for the Ballardvale Historic District Commission meeting agenda and schedule changes.

CALENDAR

Mar. 23 (Tuesday)	Town Election
Apr. 7 (Wednesday)	Ballardvale Historic District Commission monthly meeting Town Offices – 3rd Floor Conference Room – 7:00 pm Shawsheen River Restoration presentation – 8:00 pm
Apr. 28 and 29	Town Meeting – Andover High School
May 3 and 4	Town Meeting – Andover High School (if needed)
May 5 (Wednesday)	Ballardvale Historic District Commission monthly meeting Town Offices – 2 nd Floor Conference Room – 7:00 pm
Jun. 2 (Wednesday)	Ballardvale Historic District Commission monthly meeting Town Offices – 2 nd Floor Conference Room – 7:00 pm
Jun. 9 (Wednesday)	Shawsheen River Restoration presentation Memorial Hall Library, Andover