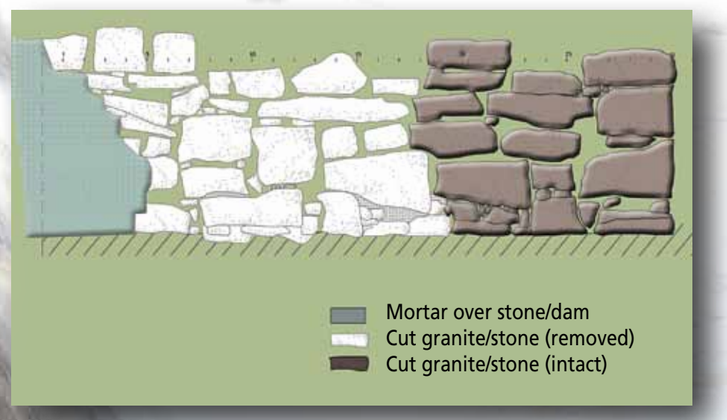
BALANCING THE PAST AND PRESENT

2011 photo of Wiswall dam and sawmill foundation wall prior to fish ladder construction



A Balancing Act

This former mill site here and mill village neighborhood are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In 2012, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offered to help Durham fund dam repairs and build a fish ladder here. The preservation of a historic site and the needs for a safe dam and of fish to migrate upriver had to be balanced. With input from historians and archaeologists, the initial plans were modified to minimize the impact. Archaeologists examined and documented the entire sawmill foundation before and during construction. Although some of the sawmill foundation wall had to be removed, the corner of the foundation was preserved.

Fragile and Irreplaceable

Archaeological sites are fragile and are part of our shared cultural heritage. Studying them provides unique insights about the lives and technologies of people who have come before us. History belongs to everyone and everyone has a stewardship role in preserving our natural and cultural history. When sites are damaged or artifacts are removed, part of the scientific and archaeological record is lost forever and cannot be replaced.

The National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's list of historical properties that are worthy of preservation. Listing often builds community pride and creates greater advocacy and funding opportunities. Special consideration is offered to listed properties during federally assisted projects, such as the Wiswall fish ladder project. For more information on the National Register of Historic Places, visit **www.nh.gov/nhdhr/programs/national_register.html**.

c.1892 Grist and Saw Mills Here
Newmarket Historic Association photograph

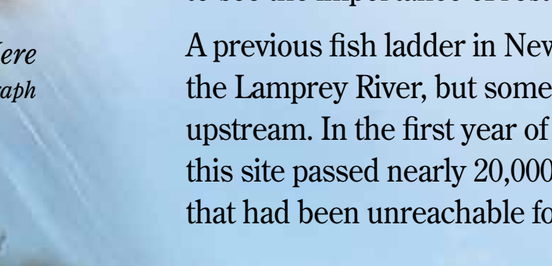
Re-opening the River

For at least 8,000 years people have recognized the importance of the Lamprey River and its abundance of fish. In the mid-1600s, European settlers built dams to harness water power for sawmills and mills to grind grain, but these dams had the unintended consequence of blocking the passage of fish. Four centuries later, we have begun to see the importance of restoring fish migration within our river systems.

A previous fish ladder in Newmarket had opened access to several miles of the Lamprey River, but some species benefit from habitat much farther upstream. In the first year of operation (2012), the new fish ladder at this site passed nearly 20,000 river herring into spawning grounds that had been unreachable for more than 360 years.

How Does a Fish Ladder Work?

River herring arrive at the base of the dam in spring. To get up and past the dam, they need a shallow incline similar to a wheelchair ramp. Once inside the ladder, they swim up the ramp, taking short rest periods behind "baffles," or partial walls, that slow the current. When they reach the top, they are free to swim once more in the natural river and find a good area to spawn.



What Are River Herring?

River herring is a name given to both alewives and blueback herring. River herring are anadromous fish that spend the majority of their lives at sea but return to freshwater to spawn. On average, these fish grow to 11 inches in length.

www.lampreyriver.org

www.nh.nrcs.usda.gov

www.ci.durham.nh.us

www.nh.gov/nhdhr

This panel was created with historic mitigation funding from the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the volunteer efforts of members of the Wiswall Historic Interpretation Committee.