



UPPER CONNECTICUT RIVER
MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT
FUND



Upper & Lower Eaton Dam Removal Project: First Branch of the White River

Project overview: The WRP and its partners removed the Upper and Lower Eaton Dams in summer 2019. Located on the First Branch of the White River in Royalton, less than 1 mile upstream of the confluence with the main stem White River, the dams prevented fish from migrating upstream and sediment/debris from moving downstream. Removal improves water quality and restores fish passage to over 30 miles of the White River.

Site history: The “Mill Village” site has had a dam since 1776. According to the town website, “The busiest place in [Royalton in the 1780s] was at the mills on the First Branch in an area known as Mill Village. Frontier towns needed a grist mill and saw mill in order to grow and the First Branch was an ideal location in Royalton for these water powered businesses. The oldest remaining building in Royalton stands here ... the Mill House, built in 1780 around the charred remains of a house burned in the Raid. ... The Mill House is located just below the Lower Eaton Dam....”



Mill Village before 1920 – Lower Dam shown in lower left corner of photo (Nash)

Upper Eaton Dam: The Upper Eaton Dam was located immediately upstream of the Mill Road bridge. Originally built from logs, the dam was rebuilt in 1924 using concrete. The dam was damaged in the 1927 flood and was not rebuilt. This dam provided power for the “factory” building built in 1882. Before it burned in 1968, the factory was used to make finished lumber, shoes, and small wood parts like drum hoops, hockey sticks, step stools, and clothes pins.



View upstream from Mill Village in 1913: Lower Dam, Factory, Covered Bridge, and Upper Dam (Royalton Historical Society)

Lower Eaton Dam: The Lower Eaton Dam was located downstream of the bridge. Originally built from logs in 1776, this dam was rebuilt in the 1920s using concrete. The dam was damaged in the 1927 flood, and was rebuilt in 1943. This dam provided power for a grist mill, saw mill, carding machines and fulling mill, and blacksmith shop. Mill Village manufacturing declined after the railroad was built and South Royalton village became the commerce center in town around the 1870s. The saw mill was in operation until 1970.

For more information: www.whiteriverpartnership.org or (802) 763-7733

Eaton Dams Removal Project: In 2017 landowners David Roller and Maggie Vincent reached out to the WRP to express their interest in removing both dams. A 2003 study conducted by the Connecticut River Conservancy determined that removing the larger, more-intact Lower Eaton Dam was feasible. So the WRP raised grant funding to develop removal designs for both dams in 2018 and to remove both dams in 2019.

The removal project included: 1) Removing the 1950s “Block House” to provide construction access; 2) Removing the Upper Eaton Dam; 3) Removing the Lower Eaton Dam in sections to facilitate sediment removal upstream; 4) Placing large stone in the new channel to restore in-stream habitat; and 5) pouring a concrete cap to protect the Mill Village historic site on river left. To wrap-up the project, the WRP will install an interpretive sign and will work with community volunteers to plant native trees along the First Branch restore riverside habitat.



Upper Eaton Dam site before (left) and after removal (right).



Lower Eaton Dam site before (left) and after removal (right).

Project partners & funders: Canonica Farm & Forest, David Roller & Maggie Vincent, Greater Upper Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited/White River Open, Ripple Natural Resources, Upper Connecticut River Mitigation and Enhancement Fund, US Fish & Wildlife Service/National Fish Passage Program, Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, Vermont Ecosystem Restoration Program, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department, VHB, WRP

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