

## Creating Something Beautiful after Tropical Storm Irene: Dog River Park

Tropical Storm Irene in 2011 showed the power that water can hold. After the extensive emotional and physical damage that occurred to the properties along Water Street, in Northfield Vermont the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Vermont Emergency



*Flood damage after Tropical Storm Irene*

Management set plans to buy-out owners whose properties were severely damaged by Irene. With [FEMA, 14 houses were purchased](#), and demolished to create floodplains and riparian buffers.

[\*Living in Harmony with Streams: A Citizens Handbook to How Streams Work\*](#) mentions the importance of having a

long-term approach, versus a reactive approach. A long-term approach takes into account the dynamics of a river and promotes a landscape that keeps the riverbed stable, slows the flow of water, which in turn promotes a healthy stream system both upstream and downstream.

Having these riparian zones mitigate future flooding events by stabilizing sediments. The vegetation around

the river holds soils in place, so when a major storm event occurs loose soils are not being washed away to then be deposited somewhere downstream. Having these natural areas around the river also allows for it to naturally meander, or curve, which slows the flow of water. These vegetated areas also benefit wildlife by providing shade, food, and safety. This in turn benefits birders, fishers, and anyone else who just wanted to enjoy the beauty of nature.

In 2014 the Friends of the Winooski River (FWR), along with partners, moved forward in implementing a plan to create a park in this area. When creating the plans for this project, local people's input was incredibly important to all project partners. They wanted to create a space that not only was environmentally beneficial but also benefited the community. Milly Archer, the Water Resource Coordinator for Vermont League of Cities and Towns, wrote about this opportunity saying, "Northfield's plans to restore the ravaged area along Water Street involve creating a place where the river can be enjoyed for recreation, relaxation, and community engagement, while also serving as a critical safety valve floodplain when waters rise."



*Dog River Park Conceptual Design*

The damage left from Tropical Storm Irene, even years later, needed extensive engineering, architectural, historical, and environmental knowledge to begin the process of creating Dog River Park. Thanks to partners such as Hartgen Archeological Association, Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, Milone & MacBroom, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, the Friends of the Winooski River, the Town & Village of Northfield, and Norwich University, Dog River Park was able to be created.



*Dog River Park after renovation,  
before vegetation became established*

Dog River Park has something for everyone. Gazebos for picnics, benches for bird watching, river access points for cooling off, and pollinator gardens to support the local gardeners. This park is a great addition to the community, and in 2021 Dog River Park received a [Merit Award](#) for positive public uses. The park was finalized in 2018, and although the process to create Dog River Park was long, the outcome is one that the Friends of the Winooski is proud to have been a part of. Our condolences go out to those who were affected by Tropical Storm Irene, and our thanks goes out to all those who helped the community have this little oasis.