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Discussions focus on river remediation

KEENE — The Ausable River Association sponsored a successful River Walk recently.

More than 60 people came together to learn about balancing public safety and river ecosystem health using stream-design techniques.

Members of the public joined town, county, state and regional officials and nonprofit representatives for discussions using examples throughout the Town of Keene.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service New York Field Office Coordinator Carl Schwartz and Trout Unlimited's John Braico shared their expertise about how rivers work and how they can best be managed in a way to protect homes and businesses.

The Town of Keene hosted speakers along several of the tributaries where damage from Irene-related flooding was severe.

"We identified what's been done well in the wake of Irene, future restoration needs, and now, we'll begin developing those plans and integrating them with the Ausable Watershed Management Plan that AsRA will present late this winter," Dave Reckhan, district manager for co-sponsor Essex County Soil and Water Conservation District, said in a news release.

Each stop along the walk presented a specific set of challenges that required protecting landowners' property, reconstructing infrastructure and doing right by the river. Schwartz stressed that management solutions that account for the flow and power of a river will require minimal maintenance, cost less over time, best protect property and provide good aquatic habitat. Many such strategies do require mechanized management, for which training and resources are available.

"Towns along the Ausable can begin to make small changes in river-restoration practices now," Allison Buckley, conservation director for the Adirondack Council, said.

"Increasing the effectiveness of bank-stabilization efforts will, in turn, decrease time and money spent in each community. It's a win-win."

Ausable River Association staff recently completed a management strategy for the Ausable watershed, a process that involved hundreds of hours of data collection, input from regional experts, private citizens and town officials. It was done with funding and guidance from the New York Department of State.

In the next six months, the association will complete the Ausable River Watershed Management Plan.

Then, choosing the best course to take will once again require input from citizens, landowners, town officials, businessmen, nonprofit groups and government agencies.