

## Critics say Irene cleanup bad for streams

Roaring Brook in New Russia after its restoration. Photo from Adirondack Council.  
The Adirondack Council and Ausable River Association contend that highway crews intent on rechanneling streams after Tropical Storm Irene are destroying trout habitat and creating conditions that could worsen flooding in the future.

Several mountain streams jumped their banks during Irene, flooding and damaging buildings and roadways. Since then, bulldozers have been used to divert the streams back into their original channels.

But Carol Treadwell, executive director of the Ausable River Association, said the bulldozers are also straightening the streams, removing boulders, lining the shores with rock, and smoothing streambeds.

Treadwell said the altered streams are poor habitat for trout, which often hang out behind boulders, in riffles, and in deep pools near river bends. She added that trees will not grow back on rock-lined shores, thus depriving the fish of shade.

Moreover, Treadwell said creating straight channels will allow water to flow faster, worsening the chance of flooding downstream in future storms.

Treadwell said the state Department of Environmental Conservation should require the crews to recreate natural conditions in the streams, with clusters of boulders, meanders, and varying depth.

After Irene hit, Governor Andrew Cuomo issued an emergency order allowing crews to rebuild roads without acquiring the usual permits.

“A lot of environmental damage is taking place in the name of public safety,” Brian Houseal, executive director of the Adirondack Council, said in a news release. “The governor should make it clear that there are some things road crews can do to rebuild without permits, but bulldozing trout streams is not one of them.”

DEC spokesman Michael Bopp said the department is working with municipalities, county officials, and the Army Corp of Engineers “to assist with the proper restoration of streams and rivers.”

Bopp added that the department also has inspected the sections of streams that environmentalists have complained about. “DEC is currently reviewing the information gathered during the inspections,” he said in an e-mail.

Some officials are urging that the East Branch of the Ausable—the river hardest hit by Irene—be dredged to minimize flooding the future. Again, the Ausable River Association contends this would only destroy trout habitat and worsen future flooding.

“It’s not a solution to flooding,” Treadwell said. “They’d need to create a channel twenty feet deep and two hundred feet wide to carry all the water that came down with Irene. Obviously we can’t build a channel that wide and that deep. And would we really want to see a channel like that in our valley?”

Treadwell also said the river would need to be periodically dredged to maintain the channel. She and Sheehan said it would make more economic sense to help residents move out of the floodplain.