

## **Pete Diminico Tribute**

Pete Diminico, who passed away on Christmas Day, 2020, had a long-standing love affair with the New Haven River. He was an angler, and as such loved to match wits – and his knowledge of hatching insects and fly-fishing lures – with the trout in the stream. During his decade or more of fighting serious illnesses Pete often retreated to the banks of the New Haven with his dog Roxy\* for sustenance and hope, and always found both there by the waters of his treasured river.

Pete was an indefatigable and fierce advocate for the health of the New Haven River and other surface waters in Vermont. Ever alert to threats to water quality, Pete co-founded the New Haven River Anglers Association in 1982, and also New Haven River Watch in 1993, which he later helped merge (along with Otter Creek River Watch and other like-minded groups) into the Addison County River Watch Collaborative (ACRWC) in 1997. For the better part of 20 years Pete served loyally and energetically on the ACRWC Steering Committee – much of that time as the New Haven River Watershed Monitoring Coordinator – until 2015, after which he continued to stay on top of water quality issues both at the state and local level. Pete also served on the Middlebury River Task Force to help coordinate post-Tropical Storm Irene restoration work on that river.

Heidi Willis, chair of the Addison County River Watch Collaborative, said, “The passing of Pete Diminico leaves a very large hole in Vermont’s conservation community, especially for those who love Vermont’s rivers. As a passionate fisherman, he was familiar with the New Haven from the headwaters to the mouth, and kept himself informed about issues and problems, both at the local and state level, which impacted the New Haven and other rivers. The New Haven River, and other rivers in Addison County and Vermont, run clearer and cleaner due to Pete’s efforts. I like to imagine him now, on a free flowing river, surrounded by a healthy watershed, with a happy dog nearby, getting ready to cast a fly....”

Never one to shrink from a fight, for years Pete was extremely vocal with members of the Vermont Legislature – some of whom were his friends – in order to make sure the State was providing for the monitoring, protection and remediation of rivers and lakes. In 2015, Pete fought hard for the passage of H.35, the Vermont Clean Water bill, writing to local legislators at the time, “The goal of H.35 is to improve our water quality not only in Lake Champlain but all waterways in Vermont...The goal is to help reverse the current trend and lead Vermont down the path to healthier waters... A clean water State should be the goal of all Vermonters to improving their quality of life.”

As founding member and sometimes president of the New Haven River Anglers Association, Pete led a number of initiatives including: spurring a New Haven River Acid Rain Study (1983); establishing a Wild Trout Study section on the river (1983-1986); Vermont's first Catch and Release regulation (on a section below the Munger St. Bridge, 1987); leading successful oppositions to a hydropower project at Bartlett Falls; helping defeat a tertiary direct discharge sewer treatment plant in Bristol Village in the 1980s, and; a habitat improvement project below the Hewitt St Bridge in the mid-1990s.

Pete also was one of the founding members of the Bristol Conservation Commission in 2003, and served until 2019, often as Chair and Vice-Chair. Pete led several projects for the Commission, perhaps his crowning accomplishment being his leadership of the

siting, design, permitting and fundraising for a Universal (disabled persons-accessible) Fishing Platform along the New Haven River at Eagle Park, and was the clerk-of-the-works for this project, securing funding from various sources including the VT Fish & Wildlife Department, the Chuck Baser Memorial Fund, and the Bristol Conservation Reserve Fund. The platform was completed in 2012, and won a public space honor award from the VT Chapter of the American Association of Landscape Architects (2010-2012). In addition, Pete spearheaded the development of a Conservation Reserve Fund established in Bristol in 2007. The fund has been instrumental in the conservation of working farms and forests including the Farr and Fuller properties along Bristol's northern gateway, the Lost Pond Forest adjoining The Watershed Center, and many riverside properties including the Saunders River Access, where Pete loved to walk up to the end of his life.

Pete passionately believed that the protection of natural habitats was a communal responsibility. Pete wrote, "Although ultimately the water quality of the New Haven River is the State's responsibility, local communities are in a much better position to manage and protect this pristine river. In the future, it is my hope the local communities and municipalities will not only offer annual financial support to NHRW/ACRWC but also help to create strong town plans regarding water quality."

\*According to Pete, more than once Roxy "pointed" large brown trout out to Pete as the prized fish lurked in pools of the river. Roxy would jump up and down in excitement when she spied the brown. You may be pleased to learn that Roxy is now in the company of one of her litter-mates at a welcoming home not far from Pete's house.

M. Witten draft (with contributions from Heidi Willis, Dave Henderson and Kristen Underwood)

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