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For immediate release: August 2, 2024**York River Stewardship Committee Awards \$42,000 in Grants for Local Watershed Projects**

The York River Stewardship Committee is excited to be awarding \$42,000 through its newly created York River Watershed Grants Program to support five local projects. These projects will help implement the *York River Watershed Stewardship Plan* that identifies actions to protect, promote and enhance water quality and river resources throughout the York River watershed. Funding for the grants program is provided by the National Park Service Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers Program.

“This is what we envisioned when we worked to achieve Wild and Scenic designation for York River,” said Joan LeBlanc, Chair of the York River Stewardship Committee, the local group that directs the federal funding that the program receives each year. “These new community-based grants will protect water quality, conserve valuable natural resources, and promote safe and enjoyable public access to the York River – all key priorities for the watershed,” she noted.

The organizations and their projects that are being funded are diverse and involve land protection, public access, recreation, outreach and education activities with project goals of resource preservation, connecting people to the river, and fostering sustainable approaches. The Stewardship Committee is supporting York Parks and Recreation’s efforts to develop a new kayak tour series on York River; York Land Trust’s acquisition of three parcels donated by the Town of York that have significant conservation values and will add 42 acres to its McIntire Highlands Preserve; York’s River Access Ad Hoc Committee’s ongoing feasibility study to explore options and develop designs for a new public dock for paddle craft at Goodrich Park; the Town of Kittery and Save Kittery Waters’ implementation of its CreekSmart program to encourage residents to take actions to protect water resources; and the York Conservation Commission’s outreach efforts aimed at reducing use of pesticides and fertilizers.

“Long-term protection of our rivers and watershed lands requires these types of partnership approaches and our communities are fortunate to have so many organizations and committees focused on this important work,” said LeBlanc.

The projects are just getting started and most will be completed within the year. Grant awards from the Stewardship Committee range from \$6,000 to \$10,000, and the organizations leading the projects are co-funding project activities or have secured additional funds from other sources to match the Wild and Scenic program funds. The Stewardship Committee anticipates running its York River Watershed Grants Program annually, with applications due mid-winter. Information about Wild and Scenic River designation and the grants program is available on the committee's website: www.YorkRiverMaine.org.

The 2024 grant recipients and projects are:

- **York Parks and Recreation Department - York River Kayak Tour Series (\$6,000).** York Parks and Recreation will purchase kayaks and develop a kayak tour series along York River to enhance and encourage river recreation opportunities and provide information about river resources and ecology to tour participants. A number of free tours will be offered by Parks and Recreation for several years to connect local residents to the river.
- **York Land Trust - Expansion of McIntire Highlands Preserve (\$10,000).** York Land Trust will complete boundary surveys, title research, and other land acquisition-related activities before acquiring three parcels from the Town of York. The parcels are in the York River watershed and will expand YLT's existing McIntire Highlands Preserve by 42 acres. YLT ownership and stewardship of the parcels will help sustain this large unfragmented forest area, preserve important wildlife habitat, enable long term public recreation on existing hiking trails, and protect the water quality of Boulter Pond, one of Kittery Water District's water supply sources.
- **Town of York River Access Ad Hoc Committee - Feasibility Study and Designs for a Paddle Craft Dock at Goodrich Park (\$10,000).** As part of its ongoing feasibility study, the River Access Ad Hoc Committee will hire a consultant to evaluate options and recommend designs for a public access paddle craft dock at Goodrich Park along the York River. Designs will incorporate accessibility considerations and sustainability features such as low-impact materials, erosion control measures, and sea level rise projections. The York Harbor Board is also providing funding support for the design phase.
- **Town of Kittery & Save Kittery Waters - CreekSmart Campaign (\$10,000).** The Town of Kittery and the citizen's group Save Kittery Waters will hire a part-time coordinator to continue implementation of its CreekSmart program to encourage practices that protect water resources. The program promotes S-M-A-R-T actions: S-say "no thanks" to lawn fertilizers; M-mow high; A-avoid toxic pesticides; R-restore vegetative buffers near waterways; and T-take care of your septic system.
- **York Conservation Commission - Pesticide and Fertilizer Education (\$6,000).** As part of a multi-media education approach, the Conservation Commission will develop and mail a brochure to residents to encourage practices that minimize misuse and decrease overall use of pesticides and fertilizers in yard care. The goal is to reduce risks to people, pets, and wildlife and minimize negative impacts to water quality throughout the town.

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