

# River's future looks rocky without help

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*BY FRED J. AUN*

*For the Star-Ledger*

This is a call to any angler involved in the landscaping, construction or quarrying trades who has access to big rocks. Your generosity can help the Musconetcong River and its fish.

A plan to remove a crumbling dam on the Musconetcong in Mount Olive, a project that would help trout and other fish in the 44-mile-long stream, has hit a roadblock. While the removal of the dilapidated Gruendyke Mill Dam near Hackettstown seemed to be moving ahead happily, those involved with the project are wondering how they'll get more than 2,000 tons of boulders.

"We need a whole bunch of stones," said Beth Styler Barry, executive director of the Musconetcong Watershed Association (MWA). "We're looking for local contractors, quarries; anybody at all that can help us to bring in some stone."

Princeton Hydro, the company in charge of designing the project, said the MWA needs 1,215 tons of 12- to 18-inch diameter rounded stone and 980 tons of 30-inch diameter rounded stone.

The rocks are needed to create weirs in the river after the dam is breached. They'll help stabilize the silt that will be dislodged when the dam is removed, Barry said.

While the need for weirs was always known, the association had no idea getting the rocks, and particularly bringing them to the site just off Route 46 near Hackettstown, would be so costly. "That part of the project is looking like it will cost more than \$50,000," Barry said.

MWA President Bill Leavens said the cost could actually reach \$70,000.

"Most of that is the trucking," he said. "What we're looking for is a construction site close by where we can acquire them."

Those involved with the project would also like to see another small dam just upstream from the Gruendyke Mill Dam, known as the Seiber Dam, simultaneously removed. Ideally, all of the old dams blocking the Musconetcong's free flow -- there are more than 20 of them -- should be dismantled, Leavens said.

"It's all about fish passage," he said. Removing the structures also eliminates pools of water that heat up in the summer and make life difficult for coldwater species including trout.

"Ninety percent of these dams have long outlived their usefulness and they are just creating problems on the river now," said Rick Axt, chairman of the New Jersey chapter of Trout Unlimited. "The historical significance of some of these is outweighed by the environmental impact they are creating on our rivers."

Leavens said anybody with boulders, or ideas on how the MWA can secure some,

should write him at [bill.leavens@gmail.com](mailto:bill.leavens@gmail.com). If the rocks are secured, there's a good chance the project can begin this fall, he said.

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