



## **Somerset County Awards \$40,000 to Run of River Whitewater Recreation Area**

Skowhegan, Maine—The Somerset County Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Committee and Somerset County Commissioners recently awarded \$40,000 from the Community Benefits Fund for the Run of River Whitewater Recreation Area. Run of River is a proposed whitewater park and expanded trails network that will be located in and around the Kennebec River Gorge in downtown Skowhegan.

The \$40,000 from the county brings the total raised for Run of River in the last six months up to \$93,000. This includes a \$25,000 grant from the Quimby Family Foundation, a \$25,000 matching gift from a Maine Community Foundation Donor Advised Fund, and \$3,000 raised via Skowhegan River Fest event proceeds.

"Fundraising for Run of River is gaining traction, and it's so exciting," said Kristina Cannon, Run of River Committee member and Main Street Skowhegan executive director. "We are thrilled that the county TIF committee recognizes the value of the proposed whitewater park and trail system and the positive impact they will have on recreational tourism and economic development in the region."

On Tuesday night, the Skowhegan Select Board approved the use of \$25,000 of these fundraising dollars for field data collection, which will include a survey of the riverbed and an inspection of the gorge to determine the location of debris from the railroad bridge that washed away during the flood of 1987. Data collection will happen within the next eight weeks.

Data from the field work will be used to create computer-generated 3D hydraulic models for fisheries review—a requirement by state and federal agencies. These 3D models will cost an estimated \$65,000, and the \$40,000 awarded by the county combined with the \$25,000 gift from the donor advised fund will pay for this work.

"We were happy to be able to help with the Run of River project, and we look forward to seeing it completed," said Newell Graf, Somerset County Commissioner.

With the money raised for 3D modeling, the next fundraising goal is \$180,000 to cover the costs of required permits from state and federal agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Maine Department of Environmental Protection, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Run of River Committee is applying for grants and researching other possible funding sources, with the intention of beginning permitting in the spring of 2019.

"Because this type of project has not been permitted before in the State of Maine, the permitting process could take up to two years," said Cannon. "We are planning for



construction of the whitewater park to begin in the summer of 2021, so it's critical for us to raise the \$180,000 and move forward with permitting this spring."

The timeline for construction for the whitewater park in the summer of 2021 will coincide with the installation of a fish passage apparatus at Weston Dam, located just upriver from the proposed site of the whitewater park, which will ensure low water levels in the Skowhegan gorge.

Final design of the whitewater park and construction of three whitewater features in the river, access trails, terraced seating on the bank, and removal of railroad bridge debris from bottom of the gorge is expected to cost an estimated \$4.96 million. The Town of Skowhegan has reserved \$1.4 million in Sappi Tax Increment Financing dollars, leaving the committee \$3.56 million left to raise for construction.

"We still have quite a bit of money left to raise, but the momentum is building and we're up to the challenge because this an important project for the town, the county, and the state," said Cannon.

For more information, please check out [RunofRiver.org](http://RunofRiver.org) or contact Kristina Cannon at [Kristina@mainstreetskowhegan.org](mailto:Kristina@mainstreetskowhegan.org) or 207-612-2571.