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## River worth saving, say those who know it

**By Meg Murphy**  
*Staff Writer*

LAWRENCE -- Karina Sosa knows if she steps in the Spicket River, she floats. Sosa and her teenage colleagues spent the summer walking along a bridge of trash -- car tires, shopping carts, sofas, mattresses, computers -- and studying the insects that survive in the dirty river.

Karina, 13, and classmate Anibal Andino, 15, were left disappointed by the neglect of the river, where dragonfly larvae, crayfish, scuds and mussels survive despite the mess.

"The water was really, really dirty," Anibal said of the river, which runs three miles through North Lawrence, from Stevens Pond in the northeast corner all the way across to where it empties into the Merrimack River, close to Lawrence General Hospital.

Karina said she had to throw out a pair of white sneakers after accidentally dunking them in the river. She and Anibal, along with four other students and Clay Groves, a science teacher at Family Development Charter School in Lawrence, spent over 50 hours this summer studying the Spicket. The teens agree city residents must learn to value the river, and clean it up.

But the teens -- members of The Green Team, a project sponsored by Groundwork Lawrence, a nonprofit organization championing a river clean-up effort Saturday -- have no illusions about the difficulty in getting area adults to care.

"It will take a long time and a lot of teamwork, but it can be done," Karina said from her eighth-grade science classroom at the charter school. "We just have to work together."

Anibal is more skeptical.

"I don't think people in Lawrence will try to clean the river," she said. "I think they will back out when they see what they have to do. The people in Lawrence are lazy."

But maybe the people of Lawrence just need an opportunity to get involved, Marianne Paley, executive director of Groundwork Lawrence, said. The layers of trash in the river may just represent a layer of "disinvestment," since people do not yet understand the river might be worth saving, especially as a recreational retreat for residents of North Lawrence, the most economically disadvantaged and most densely populated part of the city, she said.

"People just don't see its value," said Paley, who hopes about 300 people will show for the clean-up. "I think we need a community dialogue."

Paley's vision includes creating a "continuous greenway" along the Spicket, a bike path or walkway connecting city parks. She said there is a "growing cadre" of people who see the river as a potential place for canoe and kayak runs or a spot where elementary classes could study art or science.

Unfortunately, Paley said, people traditionally see the Spicket as more of a nuisance than a potential source of beauty. Residents who live in the Arlington area of the Spicket may hold it accountable for flooding and property damage, she said. Three elementary schools along the Spicket have created high fences to protect children from the river. Other people may simply be oblivious to the river, she said.

These perceptions are about to change, according to kayak enthusiast David Lacroix, a Lawrence businessman who has teamed with Groundwork Lawrence in the bid to bring back the Spicket. Over the past year, Lacroix has kayaked the river about 10 times, most recently over Columbus Day weekend with a group of a half dozen people.

"The river gets a little bit of a bad rap," he said. "There's a lot of stuff in the river, there's no doubt about that. But one of the reasons I take people into the river to kayak is to show it's not a lost cause."

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