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Views: Protecting Indian Love Call

"Indian Love Call," located along the Rock River in southern Vermont, is becoming legendary. A popular recreation area, it is actually a group of three swimming holes about a mile upstream from that tributary's confluence with the West River. Like the more publicized "Ledges" in Wilmington, Indian Love Call's uppermost swim area is a beach for nude bathing that is definitely a much-loved gathering spot for members of the gay community.

Visitors must carefully pick their way along a somewhat iffy trail beside the swiftly flowing river, over tree roots, slippery rocks, and muddy riverlets — a hard trek when laden with supplies. That trip was one reason the swimming hole remained a secluded spot, used only by the initiated few.

Although there are no highway signs or trail markers, with national web exposure and outings in tourist books, its hide-a-way nature is luring many who hunger for the ultimate "true Vermont" experience. A recent survey showed that during summer holiday weekends over 90 percent of visitors there are from out-of-state. Unfortunately, such popularity brings problems.

The issues revolve around the environment and public health and safety, *not* the fact that it's a commonly known gay fun spot — annual spring surveys of the gay-favored area show no trash, suggesting that we are being very good stewards. Even though the site has sustained its beauty, it is becoming a threatened species. The swimming hole's natural capacity is being pushed to its limits by simply too many human bodies — gay or straight, local or non-local — congregating in a delicate, pristine area. Nature does have its limits.

Indian Love Call is not the only swimming hole in the West River Valley that is being threatened by overuse. There are many places along Route 30 from Brattleboro to Jamaica that are designated as "high use" public access areas by local government agencies. During the summer season these swimming holes face problems caused by too much traffic, too many parked cars, too many pedestrians sauntering down and across main highways, too much wear on access trails, too many feet trampling the aquatic habitat, too many white tissue "flowers" blooming in the forest, and too much trash left behind. Can we do something to address these problems? Yes, we can.

**em
richards**

The Rock River and Indian Love Call trail access is located on private property. Vermont law allows people to walk, hunt and fish on private land unless it is legally posted. The landowner ultimately controls what occurs on his or her property. All the landowners surrounding Indian Love Call agree with the idea of public access to their private property. However, signs proclaiming "Posted: No Trespassing" are becoming more common. As the limits of landowner hospitality are reached, there go *our* swimming holes. Is there a way to work with the landowners to keep these "sacred" swim holes open to the public over the long term? Yes, there is.

A few years ago, the Town of Newfane prohibited parking along the road that runs parallel to the Rock River. The safety restriction pushed Indian Love Call visitors to park along Route 30. Parking beside this heavily traveled road seems to be legal, but also blocks access to the breakdown lane for people with real emergencies. The primitive parking area adjacent to the hot dog stand, although off the road, is not a good option. Crossing Route 30 by foot is not safe. According to locals on the scene, there's a heart-stopping near-miss just about every summer weekend. So can we find a way to park and walk in relative safety? Yes, we can.

Rock River is still one of the prettiest of the West River tributaries, but it does have its share of environmental issues. Stream banks at many points along the river are severely eroded. Loose sediments accumulate in the streambed, smothering natural habitat for fish and aquatic insects. The access trail that runs along the Rock is eroding in numerous places. Sediments coupled with storm water runoff of nutrients from the surrounding land cause excessive algae growth. Generally, human and animal wastes contribute to the nutrient-loading problem.

Algae on submerged rocks — those yucky brown layers of slime

— make it hard for larval stages of aquatic insects to attach to the rocks. Water-quality monitoring this summer in Rock River has revealed bacterial levels of possible concern, especially after heavy rain. The presence of E.coli bacteria is definite evidence of fecal matter being deposited into the stream. Finally, oxygen levels in the water are often reduced, putting most aquatic creatures in peril. Can we do something about minimizing these water quality problems and sustaining the natural beauty of our river? Yes, we certainly can.

There are solutions.

Finding and implementing the solutions that *will work* require a concerted effort by everyone — including those who love Indian Love Call and the many wonderful places like it in nearby watersheds!

We can save swimming

**Is there
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Yes, there is!**

holes, create safer and more environmentally sound access, and keep the water clear by taking advantage of an opportunity to participate in a solution-oriented process. The West River Watershed Alliance's (WRWA) Basin Planning Committee in conjunction with the Windham Regional Commission (WRC) and the Windham County Natural Resources Conservation District (NRCD) is beginning a public dialogue concerning water quality and related watershed issues for the West, Williams, and Saxtons Rivers. These rivers and their watersheds are designated as 'Basin 11' under the Vermont's watershed management program. The first Basin 11 Management Plan, a living, working document not inclined to gather dust, will be