

Pembroke

It's not the flooding, it's the silt

3 feet's worth covers contractor's yard

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When the Suncook River charted a new course last month, it tore through trees and land, including a gravel and sand pit. When the river water flooded homes, it also dumped the eroded silt along the Suncook's banks. Since the floods ended, the Suncook's waters in Epsom, Pembroke and Allenstown have remained brown.

In Pembroke, the Suncook turns at Tom Baumeister's house. In the 29 years he has lived there, Baumeister, a contractor and amateur landscaper, has made a boat launch, constructed a stone stairway leading down to a stone deck, and planted a garden with azaleas and rhododendrons. His house, like most on the river, was flooded. When the water level finally dropped, he saw he had up to 3 feet of silt around his property.

"I'm on the corner here, and the river wants to go straight through,"he said.

All that silt had to go somewhere, and a chunk of it ended up at Baumeister's house. To be sure, others got silt. It ruined the vegetable garden of his neighbors, the Spoffords. But Baumeister has been told by Pembroke town officials that he's the only one who has complained about the silt, not the flooding.

"The outside has devastated me so much that it makes the damage inside seem so minimal,"he said, "as stupid as that sounds."

Baumeister, 50, said that his flood insurance will cover some of the things ruined inside. He mentions that he's about to retire from his job as a heavy machine operator, sidelined by a spinal disorder that restricts his neck from turning.

What he's complaining about is the \$8,000 he has paid contractors to dig up the mud.

"I'm not bitching about the disability," said Baumeister. "I'm not bitching about the flood. What did put me over the line, mentally and physically, was having the outside destroyed by the mud."

He shows a photo of him standing in a hole the silt in his backyard. The dirt comes up to his knees in the photo.

He points to remnants of his stone work, which includes a wall with a boulder of quartz taken from Alstead, where he worked after October's floods. He had plans to install a

waterfall beside the rocks.

He also points out the river, now brown, aside from the coves of Bear Brook State Park, located on the east side of the river, across from his house.

From his porch, he can see two of the park's coves, hundreds of trees and no other houses.

"Osprey will sit up there," he said, pointing skyward, "with its 8-foot wingspan. It will dive in and come out with a pickle. Otters, when the river opens up but ice is still there, will sit on top of the ice and go in and catch fish and the sit on the ice and eat it."

His biggest worry is that river won't be the same now that it's filled with mud. He's hoping for two things: federal assistance to pay for the cleanup of his yard and for someone to make sure the river's clean, so that the fish he and the birds hope to catch will survive.

"Forget my personal damage, because this river needs a lot of help right now," he said.

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