

# Northeastern students repair Eliot Bridge



Mark Thomson

The Charles River Conservancy and Northeastern students made repairs to the land near Eliot Bridge in Allston, putting in new steps and retaining walls to stop erosion and make it easier to navigate along the riverbank.

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Allston, Mass. - The abutment on the Allston side of the Eliot Bridge is eroding. A rock-covered pathway cuts down a hill beside the bridge, and exposed roots from adjacent trees threaten to trip even the most cautious of passersby.

If you brave the way down the slope and take a right turn into the tunnel beneath the bridge, you're greeted with the opposite circumstances when you come out the other side.

The Charles River Conservancy and the Northeastern University American Society of Civil Engineers recently finished work on a set of stairs and retaining walls that stopped a similar situation and will preserve the bridge abutment. In September, native grasses and blueberry bushes will be planted as part of the second phase of the project, and if there's money left over, there might be a similar project for the treacherous slope on the other side.

"It went from dangerous to this," said Northeastern Senior Ryan St. Martin as he pointed to the 16 brand-new wood and gravel steps. "It's completely night and day."

Now, the hourglass-shaped staircase provides safe access to the Dr. Paul Dudley White Pathway, where runners and cyclists regularly zip by all day. The stairs and forthcoming garden were the brainchild of Evan Moss from Charles River Conservancy, who noticed the terrible erosion and the imminent danger to the bridge.

"There was a huge erosion problem on the bridge embankment, and if it went any further, it would ruin the abutment and support structures," Moss said. "In two years, that area lost 3 feet of soil. The bridge would have been in danger, as we know now there are several problems with bridges."

Eliot Bridge was built in 1950, spanning the Charles from Soldiers Field Road in North Allston to Greenough Boulevard in Cambridge. The bridge was last inspected in December 2005 and was rated in satisfactory condition, according to the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

For the project, Moss called in the help of project designer Catherine Melina from the Melina/Hyland design group. Funding came from the Blossum Fund, a plan was drawn up and approved by the DCR, and it was presented to the NU students, who were left to build it on their own, with Moss's supervision.

"We get the design and go," said engineering student Zach Shapiro, who chaired the project along with St. Martin. "Not that many places let a kid at 21 years old manage a \$10,000 budget."

Added St. Martin, the president of the Northeastern group, "Community service is one of the things we do. Our motto is to use what we learn in the community."

A relaxed ribbon-cutting was held on the steps last Thursday, Aug. 10, where Moss, St. Martin and Shapiro cut through a length of caution tape to officially open the steps.

The next phase of the project is to plant native grass and blueberry bushes along the steps, a project Moss hopes to get going in mid-September and finish before the Head of the Charles in October.

The exposed roots that remain on the opposite side of the bridge are a reminder of what needs to be done to save the eroding Charles River Basin. More than 100 parks workers used to focus on the Charles, but now there are only 24 staffers with a myriad responsibilities, Moss said.

"The workers get pulled this way, that way and another way. There's little wonder that people find their public space to be woefully inadequate," he said.

The Charles River Conservancy works to preserve the Charles River Basin and has close to 7,000 volunteers contribute 150,000 hours a year to conservancy projects like this one.

"It's been a lot of fun and I'm really passionate about it," said Moss. "The sad thing is it's not being done — if I wasn't here doing this it wouldn't be getting done. I love doing it and I wish I wasn't the only one."