

NepRWA Seeks Hedge Trimmer Donation

NepRWA seeks a hedge trimmer (second-hand would be fine!) to help keep the grounds at 2173 Washington St. looking spiffy. Please contact Ian Cooke if interested: 781-575-0354, cooke@neponset.org.

NepRWA Membership

Please consider joining NepRWA if you haven't already. Member support helps to maintain and expand our conservation work throughout the communities of the Watershed. It's easy to become a member! Just visit www.neponset.org or request an application at rocklen@neponset.org or 781-575-0354.

Unsubscribe

To be removed from our newsletter mailing list, please contact Carly at rocklen@neponset.org or 781-575-0354.

wat • er • shed (n): 1. the area of land draining into a particular body of water

Neponset River Watershed Association

NepRWA is a nonprofit conservation group founded in 1967 to protect and restore the Neponset River, its tributaries and their watershed lands. *News from the Neponset* is published six times each year. Printing by Blue Hill Press, Canton.

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2. a crucial turning point, 3. communities connected by water

September - October 2007

Governor's New Bond Spending Priorities Shortchange Rivers

As MassAudubon, The Nature Conservancy, and the Environmental League of Massachusetts wrote to Secretary of Energy & Environmental Affairs Ian Bowles last July, "[O]f top priority to the Commonwealth's conservation advocates this legislative session, is passage of a new Environmental Bond bill." So environmentalists have rightly cheered the commitment which Governor Patrick made in August to spend at least \$50 million per year for the next five years in bond funds on land acquisition, a 64% increase over spending levels during the Romney Administration.

Unfortunately, under Patrick's proposal bond funding for aquatic and terrestrial habitat restoration programs would actually decrease. NepRWA and others are working hard to get this changed before the Administration formally submits its Environmental Bond bill to the legislature in September or October 2007. Of particular concern to NepRWA is that bond funds be available to clean-up highly toxic PCB contamination, restore anadromous fish runs, and improve the aquatic habitat in the lower Neponset River.

Environmental Bonds authorize the Governor to float bonds for specific purposes over a multi-year period (in this case, five years) to pay for expensive, one-time "capital" projects. Depending on the fiscal health of the state government, Governor Patrick may issue bonds for all or for only a portion of the authorized amounts. But if aquatic restoration programs are not specifically included in the final authorizing legislation this year, the Administration will not have the option of undertaking water resource projects for many years to come. That's why NepRWA will be continuing its advocacy when the state Legislature drafts its Bond legislation in the fall and why we will undoubtedly be asking our members to contact state Representatives and Senators about this matter at the appropriate time.

Please contact Steve Pearlman, Advocacy Director, to learn more: 781-575-0354 or pearlman@neponset.org.



NepRWA Fights DEP Proposal to Limit Citizen Wetland Appeals



The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has proposed eliminating the right of "ten-resident groups" to appeal for Adjudicatory Hearings on wetland decisions issued by DEP (the right to appeal local conservation commission decisions to the DEP Wetlands Program would not be affected). In the preamble to the proposed wetland regulations, DEP also stated point blank that it was considering eliminating certain citizen appeal rights under other environmental laws as well. The proposal is part of Governor Patrick's effort to speed up permitting "to the speed of business," but appears to run counter to his campaign pledge to get citizens more involved in government.

NepRWA and other watershed and environmental organizations throughout the state were outraged by the proposal and have reacted strongly. In addition to submitting comments and testifying at public hearings, over 500 people have emailed the Governor to ask him to reconsider (thanks to all the NepRWA members who were among them!). Although the ultimate success or failure of our effort won't be known for a few more weeks or months, NepRWA has had a significant impact already.

On July 2, 2007, NepRWA Advocacy Director Steve Pearlman wrote to the Secretary of Energy & Environmental Affairs asking for an Advisory Opinion as to whether DEP should be required to file an Environmental Notification Form (ENF) under the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act (MEPA). MEPA requires an ENF for regulations that "significantly reduce environmental protection" or "opportunities for public participation." Although the Secretary ruled that an ENF was not required, he stated,

I have been advised by counsel that groups such as the Neponset River Watershed Association may qualify as "aggrieved persons" when they can demonstrate that a project will harm a resource area within the watershed that the group was established to protect.

NepRWA and other watershed groups have made clear that this concession is inadequate because not every watershed has a watershed association and even where they exist, they don't always have the resources to get involved in local wetlands disputes. We remain hopeful, but by no means fully confident, that the Governor and DEP will reconsider and retain the full appeal rights of 10-resident groups. Learn how you can make a difference at: <http://www.neponset.org/AdvocacyPage.htm>.

Padding, Wading & Bushwacking in Search of Illicit Connections!

This summer, in response to sampling data generated by NepRWA's Citizen Water Monitoring Network (CWMN) that signaled sites repeatedly failing to meet state and federal water quality standards, NepRWA elected to do follow-up water sampling at several locations. Sites on Unquity and Pine Tree Brooks in Milton, Mother Brook in Dedham and Boston, and the lower main stem of the Neponset River were chosen.

Follow-up sampling differs from the testing done within the CWMN program in the number and frequency of samples taken. Typically, streams will have only one or two CWMN sampling locations. During follow-up sampling, however, stream reach sampling areas are shortened and sampling frequency is increased. Whereas a CWMN site would be sampled once every six weeks, during follow-up sampling, sites are typically sampled at least twice per month, if not more.

This year, a focus of follow-up sampling has been to locate stormwater outfalls that may have illicit sewer connections. An "illicit connection" is an illegal connection of sewage from a home or business to the stormwater system. The connection discharges sewage into the stormwater system to drain directly into streams, instead of directing the wastewater to flow to sewage treatment facilities.

There are physical and chemical signatures that we look for when locating illicit connections. At outfall pipes, we search for running water during dry weather, overgrowth of algae, and toilet paper and other household debris at the base of the outfall. Chemical parameters often are more subtle than the physical appearance of an outfall. Bacteria levels, specifically *E.coli*, ammonia, detergents, and conductivity are all indicators of illicit connections.

This summer, with the help of NepRWA Intern Ashley Brady Lyons and Extern JoAnne Merchant, staff conducted follow-up sampling to locate illicit connections. Initial efforts along Mother Brook revealed no outfalls flowing during dry weather—an indication that there may be no illicit connections along this brook. Efforts along Pine Tree Brook and the lower main stem of the Neponset River yielded different results, however.

Pine Tree Brook has at least two outfalls that may transport wastewater from illicit connections. Another outfall along Pine Tree Brook is connected to the Milton High School stormwater system and has been indicating high levels of

detergents and ammonia. This outfall was monitored a number of times, and catchbasins behind the high school were also sampled. Data pointed toward the dumping of wash water into the catchbasins behind the high school. The Milton DPW worked with NepRWA to identify the source of the pollution and steps are now being made to ensure that this dumping at the high school does not occur again. This area will remain on NepRWA's watch list until we are satisfied that the problem has been remedied.



Outfall pipe along Pine Tree Brook discharging turbid water from Milton High School grounds.



Lower Neponset River outfall pipe discharging water into the Neponset River.

The lower main stem of the Neponset River was also monitored for illicit connections. An initial survey along the stretch of river between Paul's Bridge in Milton and the Tileston & Hollingsworth Dam in Hyde Park and Milton revealed at least five possible illicit connections which may be the source of longstanding complaints about foam in the river at Lower Mills. Another five outfalls in this area were found to flow during dry weather, but their discharge appears to be from groundwater rather than from illicit connections. We will continue to sample this stretch of river throughout the rest of the summer, and data from the outfalls with suspected illicit connections will be forwarded to the MA Department of Environmental Protection as well as to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in an effort to get the illicit connections fixed as soon as possible.

Finally, Unquity Brook has been a water quality "trouble spot" for some time, confirmed by recent CWMN results. Because initial surveys of the outfalls along the brook did not identify any obvious pollution sources, the stream is now being sampled in segments in hopes that this method will point to specific sources of pollution. The first two rounds of this "segmented" approach have been completed and the initial results point to a couple of areas that may have illicit connections or other pollutant sources. These areas will be monitored a couple more times this season and reevaluated at the end of the sampling season.

As much as we would like there to be no illicit connections, it is common to find such problems in communities with aging sewer and drain infrastructure.

If you witness a stormwater outfall pipe along the river discharging water during dry weather or would like to know more about illicit connections and how NepRWA and other groups work to identify and fix these problems, please contact Environmental Scientist Bill Guenther at 781-575-0354.

Be a Water Monitoring Volunteer!

NepRWA seeks a volunteer to take water samples at Hawes Brook in south Norwood, near the Endean Park. NepRWA seeks another volunteer to take readings of dissolved oxygen levels in three brooks near Gillette Stadium in Foxborough and in south Walpole. Other sampling positions may also be open. We will be sampling early Wednesday morning, September 19 and October 24, between 6:00 and 7:30AM—a peaceful time to be out at the brooks before work. Please contact Bill Guenther or Laura Hallowell to learn more: 781-575-0354, or guenther@neponset.org or hallowell@neponset.org.

Searching for Wetland Restoration Opportunities

Did you know that wetlands in the Neponset River Watershed work around the clock to maintain local biodiversity and water quality? They provide nurseries for young fish and also feeding grounds and shelter for a variety of animal species. They protect homes and streets from flooding, recharge local water supplies, and provide a place of quiet beauty and learning for residents.

With these benefits in mind and also grant funding in our pocket, NepRWA has been searching for wetland restoration opportunities around the Watershed. NepRWA Outreach Director and Restoration Manager, Carly Rocklen, has been contacting town conservation departments and residents to find wetlands ripe for repair. NepRWA plans to restore the function of at least one wetland over the next several years, and then to continually restore wetlands over an indefinite period of time.

What exactly is a wetland, and why would it need to be restored? Wetlands have characteristics of both terrestrial and aquatic environments. Some wetlands are constantly wet while others are wet only at certain times of the year. Wetlands can have water either on the surface of the ground or in the root zone. These high water levels produce special types of soils and also support an array of plants adapted to saturated environments. Swamps, marshes and bogs are wetland types common in Massachusetts. People value wetlands' ability to absorb stormwater and then release it slowly, preventing flooding in adjacent areas and recharging groundwater. Wetlands also trap sediment, excess nutrients and pollutants, protecting surrounding areas.

Unfortunately, Neponset wetlands have been degraded through dumping, filling-in (for development purposes), ditching (to lower water levels for mosquito control or for agricultural or development purposes), exclusion of salt water, manipulation of water levels, and the invasion of exotic, aggressive plant species.

We invite NepRWA Members to become involved in this project. Please tell us about any wetlands in your town that people would like to fix up. We would also like to hear about any dams that you may

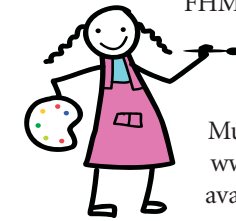


know of that the dam-owner and/or neighbors would like to see removed. We will consider these sites for future ecological restoration projects. Please contact Carly Rocklen with this information at rocklen@neponset.org or 781-575-0354.

September 15th Fall Family Day

This outdoor celebration of art and nature will take place on the grounds of the Forbes House Museum, 215 Adams St., Milton, from 10AM–4PM on Sat., Sept. 15. Enjoy art demonstrations, guided nature walks, boat rides, live music, children's nature-oriented and craft-making activities, and an Artisan Festival offering high-quality fine art and crafts for sale. The entrance fee to all of the Fall Family Day festivities, including the children's crafts, is \$5 per person or \$20 per family to support host organizations NepRWA and the Forbes House Museum. Food will be available for an additional charge. The rain date is

Sunday, Sept. 16, 10AM–4PM. Following tradition, FHM and NepRWA are co-organizing Fall Family



Day. To learn more, or if you are interested in selling your art at the Festival, please contact Lauren Pauly at the Forbes House Museum at 617-696-1815 or visit www.forbeshousemuseum.org. Exhibit space is available for \$75 per artist.

Volunteer for Lower Neponset Restoration

Flood hazards, highly toxic sediments, lost herring and shad runs, fish unsafe to eat, canoeing hindered by an over-wide flood control channel and two malfunctioning state-owned dams. All these issues and more are now coming to a head on the lower Neponset River in Hyde Park, Mattapan, Dorchester and Milton.

Over the next few months, the state will be completing long awaited technical feasibility studies on options for managing all these issues on the lower Neponset. While the community has heard bits and pieces about efforts to restore the troubled lower Neponset River, there hasn't been a forum for the community to delve into the details of this complex set of issues and make their own recommendations on how to proceed.

By late September, NepRWA expects to convene the Lower Neponset Restoration Project Community Advisory Committee to fill this gap. We plan to recruit a panel of 25 to 30 community leaders for a detailed discussion of the options and how folks at the local level would like to see these problems solved. The CAC will hold four to five evening meetings over a period of two and a half months, with the goal of developing a single preferred alternative for the project that meets the needs of the community as a whole.

Over the next few weeks, NepRWA will be recruiting Boston and Milton community representatives willing to serve on the committee. If you think you or someone you know may be interested in serving as a member of the CAC, or if your group would like NepRWA to come speak about the challenges and opportunities facing the Lower Neponset, please contact Ian Cooke (781-575-0354 or cooke@neponset.org) or Steve Pearlman (781-575-0354 or pearlman@neponset.org).