

News From the Neponset

A Publication of the Neponset River Watershed Association

July - August 2004

A RiverWalk Vision for Quincy

Over the last decade, the Neponset River Estuary has undergone a recreational renaissance, with the creation of the state's Neponset Greenway Trail, the renovation of the Pope John Paul II Park, and now the groundbreaking for the "Neponset II" Park at Granite Avenue. Where once there were fences and piles of junk, now there are people enjoying the waterfront at all hours of the day. However, this progress has had a distinctly one-sided character, with an incredible transformation on the Dorchester side of the River, and continued neglect on the Quincy side.

Boulevard to the MBTA Bridge, follows the river's edge under the MBTA Bridge across the waterfront at the former Neponset Flea Market and under Route 3A, to the Adams Inn. It follows the shore around the Inn, crossing two other properties to reach the State Street South Complex where it leaps over Sagamore Creek to reach the Milton Salt Marsh Conservation Area and link with Granite Avenue to join the existing Neponset Greenway.

While implementing this parkland vision will undoubtedly be just as complex in Quincy as it was in Dorchester, the basic strategy will be different, relying much more on parcel-by-parcel improvements to the shoreline as property along the river is redeveloped, and less on the outright state acquisition and restoration of land.

The most tantalizing thing about the Quincy RiverWalk is the fact that most of the elements of the route are already in place, just waiting to be developed to their full potential. Boston Scientific and the Adams Inn have already created walking trails along the River. Blue Cross Blue Shield, which recently acquired much of the waterfront in the State Street area, has

See "Quincy RiverWalk," Page 3



NepRWA Pounds the Pavement for Clean Water in Milton & Walpole

NepRWA is working with the Milton Department of Public Works (DPW), Milton's Pine Tree Brook Neighborhood Association (PTBNA), and the Walpole Board of Health on a water quality-improvement effort in part of Milton and in Walpole.

helped to restore the Brook. In the near future, the Pine Tree Brook neighborhood will also see construction of stormwater treatment structures and an improved pathway; anti-pollution catch basin stenciling; installation of interpretive signage, garbage cans and mutt mitt stations; and distribution of bill-stuffers.

A door-to-door canvass of Milton neighborhoods adjacent to the stretch of Pine Tree Brook between Blue Hills Parkway and Thacher Street communicated the links between residents' daily activities and the quality of water in Pine Tree Brook. Canvassers distributed informational brochures to all houses and special dog tags to dog-owners who agreed to pick-up their pet's waste. 69% of the residents with whom the canvassers spoke pledged to minimize damaging activities.

An April canvass of Walpole septic system-owners communicated the link between septic system maintenance and the health of local waterbodies. Residents received an informational brochure about septic system care and a reminder magnet. 75% of the residents spoken with pledged to properly maintain their septic systems. In the near future, these residents will also receive reminder postcards and phone calls. All Walpole septic system-owners will receive a notice about septic system care. There will also be septic system pump-out parties, and work will be done on an initiative to make caring for septic systems easier, town-wide.

A May 8th Pine Tree Brook clean-up led by the PTBNA with the help of the Milton DPW, local residents and NepRWA, has also

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wait • Sited (n): 1. the area of land draining into a particular body of water

Neponset River Watershed Association

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Many thanks to NepRWA Friends

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

Do you yearn to apply your special skills to watershed conservation?



NepRWA is looking for:

- Citizen Water Monitoring Network volunteers
 - Website assistance
 - Digital photographs of the Neponset River
 - Donation of a digital camera
 - Rain garden maintenance volunteer
- Contact Cary to learn more:
781-575-0354,
rocklen@neponset.org

2004 Neponset River Watershed Assessment & Action Plan

NepRWA is coordinating the work of five organizations to produce the 2004 Boston Harbor Watershed Assessment and Action Plan for the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA).

The Plan consists of five sections, covering the Neponset, Weir, Fore, and Back River watersheds, as well as direct discharges into the Harbor from the City of Boston. The Mystic and Charles River Watersheds are covered in separate plans.

The Boston Harbor Plan is designed to advise EOEA on priority actions to improve water quality and the aquatic environment, increase summer stream flows, and increase recreational opportunities.

The Plan will be completed in July 2004.

NepRWA is basing its Action Plan recommendations for the Neponset Watershed on Citizen Water Quality Monitoring Network (CWMN) data, gathered from 1999 through March 2003. The CWMN data have highlighted problems heretofore unknown to state and federal environmental agencies. NepRWA has formally requested that these issues be added to the state 303(d) List of impaired waters. The most significant issues indicated by CWMN data include:

- Bacterial pollution, mostly from human and animal wastes (from sanitary sewer overflows, stormwater runoff, illicit sewer and storm drain connections, and poorly maintained sewers and septic systems);
- Excessive nutrients (same causes as bacterial pollution, plus fertilizer-laden runoff from lawns and golf courses);
- Low streamflows (caused by dams; infiltration and inflow of groundwater into broken sewer pipes; water withdrawals and net export of water from Neponset River Watershed directly into Boston Harbor via the sewer system); and
- Generally poor riparian habitat (caused by pollution, low water flow, creation of culverts, river channelization, unnecessary dams, and unsustainable lawn and shoreline management practices).

NepRWA's Action Plan for the next five years calls for the following:

Action Items for State & Federal Government and the MWRA

- Increased grants and loans for

watershed protection; creation of a dedicated revenue source for wastewater maintenance (comparable to gasoline tax funding of highway maintenance);

- Increased enforcement of existing laws;
- Removal of the two most downstream dams on the Neponset River (Baker Dam, Lower Mills; Tileston & Hollingsworth Dam, Hyde Park);
- Classification of the entire Neponset River Watershed as "highly stressed," thereby subjecting it to the strictest water conservation standards;
- Consideration of cumulative watershed impacts for proposed water withdrawals;
- Increased public access to waterways.

Action Items for Municipalities

- Implementation of federal "Stormwater II" requirements and recommendations of MA Water Resources Authority (MWRA) Infiltration & Inflow Task Force;
- Creation of bylaws allowing, encouraging, or requiring "low impact" development;
- Requirements for biannual septic system pumping and maintenance;
- Limitations on sewer expansions until sewers are properly maintained;
- Requirements that new development mitigate existing stormwater and sewer problems at a four-to-one ratio to their wastewater quantity;
- Voluntary implementation of state's strictest water conservation standards.
- Creation of multi-town collaboratives to reduce municipal costs.

Action Items for Citizen Groups and "Multi-Town Collaboratives"

- Assistance in the education of citizens, homeowners, municipal officials, etc.;
- Drafting model bylaws and conducting pilot projects;
- Helping to identify local problems;
- Implementing continuous monitoring of shorelines and pollutant levels;
- Implementing awards, "green" certifications and report cards for municipalities and businesses.

For more information about the Action Plan, contact Steve Pearman at 781-575-0354 or pearman@neponset.org.

A Change for State Wetlands Buffer Zone Regulations?

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has proposed easing regulations for construction sited in the outer 50 feet of the 100-foot regulated "buffer zone" surrounding surface waters and "bordering vegetated wetlands" (swamps, marshes, bogs, etc.).

Under the proposal, a person building solely in the outer 50 ft. of the 100-ft. regulated "buffer zone" would not need the currently required Conservation Commission review, provided that the person "certifies" that s/he will meet state stormwater and erosion standards.

"We are hoping that it [the regulation change] will encourage people to stay away from the inner land around water," said Cynthia Giles, DEP Associate Commissioner for Resource Protection. DEP has indicated that recent budget cuts have yielded a lack of money and staff to oversee proposed projects within the 100-ft. buffer zone.

At a June Public Hearing on the proposal, environmentalists and municipal conservation administrators testified against the proposal, noting that it would not prohibit people from applying for a permit to build in the inner 50 ft. of the buffer zone after they complete construction in the outer 50 ft.

Heidi Ricci, Massachusetts Audubon Society's Senior Policy Specialist, noted, "It is possible these changes will lead to more violations, by allowing people to self-certify their projects without any sort of review from Conservation Commissions."

NepRWA has submitted comments on the proposed revisions. DEP expects to finalize the revisions by the end of the summer.



Neponset River Restoration Project

Over the past several months, NepRWA has met with stakeholders, submitted articles to newsletters, and given presentations to diverse groups in the communities adjacent to Lower Mills' Walter Baker Dam and Hyde Park's Tileston & Hollingsworth (T&H) Dam. Funded by a MA Riverways Programs grant, local residents are learning more about the river restoration opportunities being considered around each of the two dams. Options being considered for each dam are:

- **Repair or Rebuild the Dam.** Contaminated river-bottom sediment would remain in the River. Fish swimming into the Neponset from Dorchester Bay would continue to be blocked from the rest of the River system at Lower Mills/Hyde Park. Water quality would remain low. Tax money would pay for the management, repair and possible replacement of the dam, yielding a high long-term cost.
- **Repair or Rebuild the Dam & Install a Fish Ladder.** Polluted river-bottom sediment would remain in the River. A select few species of fish would swim up the fish ladder, over the dam, and up the Neponset River, while the rest would remain blocked. Water quality would remain low. Tax money would pay for the management, repair and possible replacement of the dam and fish ladder, yielding a high long-term cost.
- **Partially Remove the Dam & Build a Rock Ramp.** The section of the dam extending above the water would be removed. To ease fish passage over the dam remnant, a rock ramp would be built from the River bottom to the top of the remaining dam. Contaminated river-bottom sediment would be remediated. Many fish species would swim past Lower Mills/Hyde Park, up the River. Water quality would improve. Long-term cost of maintaining the dam would be minimal. Short-term cost of the dam removal and rock ramp construction would be moderate.
- **Completely Remove the Dam.** The dam would be completely removed. Contaminated river-bottom sediment would be remediated. All fish species would swim past Lower Mills/Hyde Park, up the River. Water quality would improve. There would be no long-term dam maintenance cost. Short-term cost to remove the dam would be high.

Quincy Riverwalk, continued from Page 1

pledged to do the same — plus, existing public open spaces already anchor the route, the State's Squantum Point to the north and the Milton Salt Marshes to the south. The biggest challenges along the route will be making the link through the former flea market site and bridging Sagamore Creek.

The State, the City of Quincy and many of the property-owners along the route have already come out in favor of the plan. The next steps are to focus on filling in the few gaps in the route and to begin building trails along the segments already in place. NepRWA is currently in the process of soliciting grant funds and working with property owners to get these elements of the project underway.

Special thanks goes to Wendy Ingram, who got the ball rolling by volunteering to write-up the Plan and prepare extensive maps.

View the RiverWalk Conceptual Plan at: www.neponset.org. To volunteer your help with this effort, contact Ian at 781-575-0354.

Save the Date! October 15th, Fall Fest 2004

Live jazz, a silent auction, and a sumptuous buffet are sure to spice-up this year's Fall Fest '03 was a huge success, raising more than \$10,000. This year we hope to raise even more, and we need your help!

In addition to saving the date, please consider donating an auction item. Last year's donations were varied, and included gift certificates to local restaurants, hand-painted furniture, autographed baseballs, a weekend at a Bed & Breakfast, wine, quilts, specialty baskets, museum passes and various excursions. Creative, one-of-a-kind items were a big hit! For a Donor Form, please contact Cary at rocklen@neponset.org or 781-575-0354, or download a form at www.neponset.org/DonorForm.pdf.

Welcome to New Staffer, Steven Pearlman

This past April, Steven Pearlman joined the NepRWA staff as the Water Resource Analyst. Previously employed for 17 years with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, and before that, primarily in environmental law in Washington DC, Steve brings tremendous knowledge and skill to NepRWA. Steve is looking forward to getting know NepRWA's members and volunteers over the coming months.

Teamwork Cleans the Estuary

NepRWA would like to express our appreciation for the volunteers and donors who made the May 15th Friends of the Neponset Estuary (FNE) Quincy river clean-up so effective. Special thanks to: John Kovich of the MA Department of Conservation & Recreation, for hours of hard labor, equipment and advice; to Boston Scientific, for the dumpster; to the Stop & Shop at 65 Newport Ave., Quincy, for donated food; and to the watershed volunteers, members and staff of UMass Water Watch and FNE, for all of their hard work.

RiverArt 2004: Plein Air Art of the Neponset

RiverArt 2004 is just around the corner! *Feeling creative?* Make some art outdoors ("plein air art") this summer, using any part of the Neponset River Watershed as your subject. Then, submit your work September 19-21, to the Forbes House Museum, 215 Adams St., Milton. Selected works will be exhibited at the Museum. Ribbons and prizes will be awarded in four categories: Oil & Acrylic, Watercolor, Photography and Various (mixed media, pastels, etc.). For more information about RiverArt 2004, view the *Call for Entries*. Visit www.neponset.org/RiverArt.htm to download the form, or contact Cary, 781-575-0354, rocklen@neponset.org.

RiverSmart: Mass Media Campaign

Thanks to a generous grant from River Network and the Environmental Protection Agency, NepRWA will soon launch a multi-media campaign to build awareness in the Neponset Watershed about how residents can take care of our waterways. Look for NepRWA's public service announcements — now through September 2004 — in your local newspaper, on television and radio. Also, be sure to check the forthcoming RiverSmart web page at www.neponset.org. Also, if you'd like to lend a hand with this effort, please contact Cary at 781-575-0354 or rocklen@neponset.org.