

## Host a House Party!

Bring NepRWA to *your* community! Host a House Party—a fun and simple way to help spread the word about watershed protection.

*What exactly is a House Party?* The party host(s) decides on a date with NepRWA. Then the host invites neighbors and friends to a gathering at her/his house. The host provides refreshments, sets-up the space, and is responsible for introducing the NepRWA staff member at the event. Then a NepRWA staff person gives a colorful presentation about NepRWA and local environmental issues, and a question and answer period follows. After the event, the host sends thank you notes to invitees. *House Parties are simple events that make a big difference. Contact Carly to learn more: 781-575-0354 or rocklen@neponset.org.*

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.

2173 Washington St., Canton, MA 02021  
p 781-575-0354, f 781-575-9971  
staff@neponset.org, www.neponset.org

### Staff

Ian Cooke, *Executive Director*  
Bill Guenther, *Env. Scientist*  
Laura Hallowell, *CWMN Assist., Willett Pond Manager*  
Kristina LaFrance, *Admin. Assist.*  
Steve Pearlman, *Advocacy Dir.*  
Carly Rocklen, *Outreach Dir., Restoration Manager*

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January - February 2007

## Buckmaster Pond to be Norwood Secondary Water Supply?

It is rare for one municipality to own land in a neighboring town, but Buckmaster Pond is one such unusual case.

For more than a year the Town of Norwood has been pursuing the development of a new drinking water supply well at Buckmaster Pond in Westwood. The new source, located at the headwaters of both Germany and Mill Brooks, is intended to reduce Norwood's current dependence on relatively expensive MWRA water.

In addition to serving as a back-up to the MWRA supply, it was hoped that the cost savings from reducing MWRA water usage would be large enough to pay for the well and even reduce Norwood's water rates—this in spite of the added cost of treating the water to remove dry cleaning chemicals that had previously been found in the aquifer.

While NepRWA is supportive of providing a backup water source for Norwood, we had raised concerns about the plan as the proposed withdrawal threatened to substantially lower water levels in the spring-fed kettle pond and the nearby Mill Brook, a suspected cold water trout stream. The initially proposed withdrawal rate amounted to 90% of annual precipitation in

the watershed of the pond, and greatly exceeded the DEP's pre-screening criteria for potential environmental impact.

Earlier this fall, Norwood's consultants completed the analysis of a "pump test" at the proposed well, and were poised to file an environmental impact report for the project. Instead, last month the consultants announced the results of additional water quality testing indicating elevated levels of perchlorate in the water. Perchlorate is a chemical found primarily in explosives, which is highly soluble in water and which can damage the thyroid gland. Massachusetts is one of the first states in the country to begin regulating perchlorate levels in drinking water. A potential source of the contamination is residue from fireworks set off over the pond in years past.

Shortly after the revelations about perchlorate contamination, which is expensive to remove from drinking



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## Quincy Mayor Begins to Take Interest in Neponset Riverwalk

About 5 years ago, Quincy attorney Bryan Stevens, Ian Cooke of NepRWA, Steve Perdios of the Quincy Environmental Network (QEN) and Wendy Ingram of Milton began to envision a pedestrian walkway and bicycle path extending along the entire Neponset River waterfront in Quincy.

It is hoped that the "Quincy Riverwalk" will begin at Wollaston Beach and conclude across the Granite Ave. Bridge between Milton and Dorchester, linking with the walkway in Neponset II Park, on the other side of the Neponset River.

Slowly, isolated pieces of the Riverwalk have fallen into place—for example, at Squantum Point Park, Boston Scientific Corporation and the Adams Inn. Agreements have also been signed with developers at Blue



Nature walk participants gaze out over the Neponset River from the Quincy shore

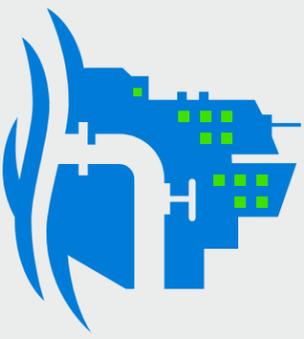
Cross/Blue Shield and 2 Hancock St. to continue the Riverwalk across their properties.

Unfortunately, a major stumbling block occurred after NepRWA and the Conroy Development Corporation, which owns waterfront property at 2 Hancock St., signed an agreement under which Conroy would build an 8-foot-wide, 1,000-foot-long walkway/bicycle path connecting the Riverwalk at Adams Inn with Commander Shea Blvd. The agreement included a landscaped waterfront park with benches, a fishing pier and a canoe-launching ramp. When the project was brought before the Quincy Conservation Commission, however, the Commission felt that it would be too intrusive. The entire project was denied except for a 4-foot-wide walkway.

Quincy attorney Bryan Stevens and NepRWA appealed to the Department of Environmental Protection and filed a lawsuit against the City of Quincy over this decision. Quincy Mayor William Phelan's office stepped in. They decided that unless a clear vision and plan for the Riverwalk as a whole were established up front, piecemeal efforts to build portions of it on

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## NepRWA Leads 17 Environmental Groups Against DEP Wastewater Proposals



Today, only about 5% of the rivers in Massachusetts are known to be fully meeting state surface water quality standards. The state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is not even monitoring a large percentage of our rivers and streams (the only monitoring in the Neponset Watershed is done by NepRWA). Thus the DEP has little real data on what pollutants—particularly toxic pollutants—are present, much less where they come from.

One important pollution source in Massachusetts watersheds may be sewage that is inadequately treated at a *publicly owned treatment plant* (POTW) before being discharged into a river. Pollutants that a POTW does *not* remove can contaminate the receiving waterbody. Why might a POTW not remove all pollutants? A POTW may not remove industrial chemicals that it is unaware are being pumped into the sewer. For this reason, it's important that POTWs be informed of—and able to treat—all chemicals pumped into the sewer system.

For at least 30 years, DEP regulations have required permits for all industrial and commercial sewer users as well as for residential users who discharge 15,000 *gallons per day* (gpd) or more sewage.

Suddenly, with 3 months remaining before a new Governor would be sworn in, the Romney Administration proposed eliminating state permitting for 90% of sewer users, along with the right of the public to review draft permits. Under the proposal, only the very largest dischargers would still need permits, regardless of the level of toxicity of their wastewater. A medium-sized chemical manufacturer or a new subdivision of up to 150 three-bedroom houses would no longer have to get state approval to tie into the sewer system. Even worse, the few who would still have to file a permit application, would receive their permits automatically if DEP failed to act on it within 45 days.

DEP claimed that since all sewage is ultimately treated by a POTW before being discharged into our surface waters, state permitting is just redundant of the review provided by local sewer departments and POTWs themselves. Fortunately, NepRWA's Advocacy Director, Steve Pearlman, had worked at DEP for 17 years and knew that comprehensive review of sewer discharges by local treatment plant staff is a fiction. And he knew that DEP knew it is a fiction. Steve pointed out that:

- POTWs are only required by DEP and by the federal EPA to assess sewage for specified pollutants. Many very toxic chemicals may be “passing through” a POTW untreated with nobody even testing for them.

- DEP's own wastewater staff has concluded that many if not most POTWs are not fully complying with environmental requirements. Although DEP has for years had the authority to “delegate” its permitting authority to competent POTWs, with the exception of MWRA it has never done so. Thus DEP's confidence in the abilities of POTWs is really not very high.

Most importantly, Steve knew that DEP had violated the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act (MEPA) with its proposed regulatory changes, and that DEP no longer had the time to comply before the Romney Administration left office on January 4<sup>th</sup>. MEPA requires review of proposed regulations that would “significantly reduce standards for environmental protection” or “opportunities for public participation in permit review.” Steve enlisted lawyers from the Conservation Law Foundation (CLF) is the group that sued the State to clean up Boston Harbor, New England Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) and the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions (MACC) and threatened to stop the new rules in court if DEP didn't substantially revise them. Knowing that such a lawsuit would likely succeed, DEP agreed to negotiate.

In total, 16 environmental and watershed organizations, including Massachusetts Audubon Society and the Sierra Club, joined NepRWA in demanding changes in the proposed rules. The most important issue was ensuring that DEP be informed of any dangerous levels of toxics that industries might introduce into the sewers. DEP can use this information as necessary to set discharge limits and pre-treatment requirements for problematic industries.

An agreement was finally reached between NepRWA and DEP four days before the deadline for finalizing the regulations. Among other concessions, DEP:

1. Dropped the proposal to automatically issue permits if it failed to act on an application within a specific time;
2. Restored public participation to the permitting process;
3. Clarified that, with good cause, it can make any sewer user file a permit application even if such user is otherwise exempted by regulation;
4. Required more industrial dischargers to obtain permits or “certify” their compliance with DEP rules every 5 years; and
5. Required industries such as manufacturers, carpet cleaners, garages, and laboratories to report toxic sewer discharges to DEP and to their POTWs.

On the negative side, the great majority of sewer dischargers will be exempt from permitting, and DEP was allowed to ignore MEPA filing requirements in this case. All in all, though, Steve's hard work and coalition-building resulted in regulations that will be much more protective of water quality than DEP had originally proposed. *Contact Steve Pearlman for more information at 781-575-0354 or pearlman@neponset.org.*

## Bill Guenther, Environmental Scientist

Bill Guenther recently joined the NepRWA staff as Environmental Scientist. Bill's academic and work focus has been aquatic ecology, as well as fisheries and their role in the overall health of ecosystems. Bill is currently finishing his Master of Science in Biology at the State University of New York—Brockport. His thesis work focuses on algal toxins and their fate in freshwater environments. Bill has a BS in Environmental Science with a concentration in Aquatic Ecology also from SUNY College at Brockport. An avid angler, Bill has spent the last 10 years in upstate New York, fishing for everything from carp and yellow perch to musky and chinook salmon. He is looking forward to experiencing all the fishing opportunities that Massachusetts has to offer, especially the striper and bluefish. In addition to fishing, Bill enjoys camping and canoeing. *Contact Bill at guenther@neponset.org.*

## Blue Ribbon Panel

NepRWA's work as a member of the Legislature's Blue Ribbon Panel reviewing DEP's new water conservation requirements under the Water Management Act is rapidly coming to a close. The policy was adopted by DEP as a stopgap measure in 2004 to minimize the impact of water supply activities on a growing number of streams across the state in recent years. Some water suppliers objected to the policy which would require suppliers to conserve for the first time in Massachusetts history.

Since September, the Panel has been debating the scientific underpinnings, legality and economic impact of the policy. In November and early December, the state's Office of Commonwealth Development attempted to negotiate a redesign of the policy that would satisfy all the parties. However, these discussions broke-down in mid-December when it became apparent that the various stakeholders were simply too far apart to reach consensus. “When the water suppliers on the panel came back with a proposal for unlimited water use and no outdoor water restrictions during summers when affected streams had zero flow, it became obvious to me that we were not going to come together,” said Ian Cooke, who has been serving on the Panel for NepRWA.

The Panel planned to finalize its report to the Legislature by the end of 2006. The initial impetus for the panel grew out of an effort by some water suppliers to have the Legislature overturn the policy. “It is unclear what the Legislature will do with the report now,” said Cooke. “I would not be at all surprised to see water suppliers ask the legislature to overturn the policy again in the new year, but to my mind, the expert testimony presented to the Panel only bolstered the case for an aggressive stance on water conservation. Whether you want to protect rivers, hold down water bills, or ensure that Eastern Mass has water for economic development over the next 20 years, you need to make existing water supplies stretch farther.”

## Buckmaster Pond, from page 1

water, the Town of Norwood announced that the project may not go forward as a result of the added cost. Shortly thereafter, the MWRA announced plans to design a new redundant pipeline that would provide a backup for Norwood and several other area towns. Given these developments, the future of the proposal is unclear. NepRWA will continue to work to ensure that appropriate environmental protections are incorporated into all water supply permitting decisions in the Neponset Valley.

## Get Active with NepRWA



### Lend a Helping Hand Through River Fund

It's that time of the year when we look to our NepRWA members to help move local environmental conservation forward by making a special donation. We encourage you to make a donation through NepRWA's River Fund Campaign. Donating is simpler and quicker than ever! Just visit [www.neponset.org](http://www.neponset.org) and click on the “River Fund” button. You can donate on-line or via snail mail. *Please contact Carly with questions, 781-575-0354 or rocklen@neponset.org. Thank you for your support!*

### NepRWA Winter Fair!

You're invited to NepRWA's Winter Activity Fair! *Save the date: 7:00PM, Tuesday, Feb. 27, Community Room, Canton Public Library, 786 Washington St., Canton, MA.* Attend mini-presentations by NepRWA staff, including Ian Cooke, Executive Director; Steve Pearlman, Advocacy Director; Carly Rocklen, Outreach Director and Staff Naturalist; Laura Hallowell, CWMN Assistant and Willett Pond Manager; Bill Guenther, NepRWA's new Environmental Scientist; and Kristina LaFrance, Administrative Assistant. Then, get your questions answered! Attendees will learn about diverse subjects from Neponset dam removal to water conservation efforts, from septic system maintenance to the restoration of wetlands, streams and waterside properties, from water quality testing to volunteer and internship opportunities. A variety of handouts will be available, in addition to raffle tickets and NepRWA T-shirts, totebags, notecards and memberships. *To sign up for our event mailing list, send your e-mail address to Carly at rocklen@neponset.org.*

### Quincy Riverwalk, from page 1

isolated properties would only result in a poorly designed path with varying widths, building materials, and amenities.

For this reason, the Mayor's office decided to help develop the route and set design standards for the Riverwalk. Mayor Phelan has also promised to join us in asking other Neponset waterfront landowners for easements across their properties to accommodate the Riverwalk. NepRWA truly appreciates the Mayor's efforts, and is hopeful that they will lead to the development of an integrated and vital new attraction along Quincy's Neponset River waterfront.

*For more information, contact Steve Pearlman at pearlman@neponset.org, 781-575-0354.*