



Host a House Party!

We're inviting NepRWA members to host a House Party—a fun and simple way to help spread the word about watershed protection. *Here's how it works:* A House Party host decides on the event 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 introduces the NepRWA staffperson to the party-goers. Then NepRWA 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 help NepRWA to grow and better protect the Watershed. They are simple events that make a big difference. *Contact Carly to participate: (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.

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NepRWA Weighs in on Development Projects in Westwood & Lower Mills

NepRWA has been actively involved in two important development projects, one very large and one fairly small, that have been making their way through the permitting process.

In Westwood, the massive Westwood Station project is going through the environmental impact review process. The project involves redevelopment of more than 75 acres along University Avenue into a mixed-use residential/commercial/office complex. The developer, Cabot, Cabot and Forbes, has appropriately advanced the project as a smart-growth initiative because of its proximity to the Rt. 128 train station and because the mixed-use nature of the project should help to minimize traffic generation as residents walk, rather than drive, to a grocery store that's right next door, for example.

"This is a site that is long overdue for redevelopment," said Steve Pearlman, NepRWA's Advocacy Director, "and the site is generally well-suited to the type of high-density development being proposed." NepRWA's primary concern has been to ensure that the project restores the hydrology and groundwater recharge of the site to something like its original condition, and that the project helps re-establish pedestrian links to the Blue Hills to the north and the Warner Trail to the south.

On the Milton side of Lower Mills, NepRWA has also delved into the permitting process for proposed expanded residences at 2 Adams St., also known as the Extra Space site. This site abuts

a significant length of the river and involves converting two unoccupied former mill buildings that extend across the river to residential use and adding

a new building away from the river, fronting on Adams St.



Photograph by Tom Palmer

Buildings at Lower Mills

ensure the public's access to the waterfront, and to make sure that uses that depend on being located next to water are not squeezed out. The regulations require that both of the existing buildings be dedicated to uses that are "water-dependent" and "public" in nature, hence the variance request.

"Variances from Chapter 91 are very unusual, and this developer has asked for three," said Pearlman. "To qualify for the variance, the developer must prove that he can't find water-dependent and/or commercial uses for at least part of the buildings, and he simply hasn't done this. The developer has proposed to provide access to the shore which would be very positive, but an all-residential development will tend to discourage the public from actually using the area."

Attention, CWMN Volunteers: New Water Monitoring Schedule for 2007!

In years past, the Citizen Water Monitoring Network (CWMN) sampling schedule has been a year-round endeavor in which

volunteers took samples on a once-every-other-month basis. This year, there'll be a change.

In 2007, NepRWA will have a seasonal CWMN schedule focused on taking samples in the spring, summer and fall. (Chipping ice during the winter months and going out into the field on brutally cold mornings is over, at least for 2007!)

The scheduling change is a result of modifications made by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection to



Kristina LaFrance and Laura Hallowell find the perfect fit in waders.

the Massachusetts Surface Water Quality Standards. Essentially, the state has decided that bacteria samples need to be taken at least 5 times within a six-month period, for regulatory purposes. For this to happen at NepRWA, the dates of the CWMN water-sampling program had to be compressed. By modifying our program, NepRWA aims to ensure that our findings continue to be used to support state and town cleanup efforts.

Besides enabling NepRWA to follow the new water quality standards, the new water-testing schedule will also increase our understanding of water-related issues occurring during the time of year when the most people are impacted.

Starting on April 4, the CWMN schedule will be on a once-every-six-weeks basis. Sampling events will take place on April 4, May 16, June 27, August 8, September 19 and October 24.

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New CWMN Water-Testing Schedule, from page 1

There will also be another twist in sampling due to concerns about sterility with bucket-sampling. We will implement a new piece of sampling equipment—the Bridge Buddy—that will eliminate bucket-sampling and ensure that our samples are sterile and of the highest quality in regard to *E.coli* bacteria analysis.

Because of the many changes in the water-testing program, each volunteer will need to attend one of the annual volunteer training sessions to ensure that everyone is following the same procedures in the field. Training sessions have been scheduled for March 16, 19, 20 and 22. Each session will start at 7:00PM and run for approximately an hour and a half to two hours.

Volunteers will be invited via email to attend the training sessions, but anyone else who would like to become a water-testing

volunteer or who would just like to see how our water sampling is conducted, should contact Bill Guenther (guenther@neponset.org or 781-575-0354) or Laura Hallowell (hallowell@neponset.org or 781-575-0354).

For more information about the CWMN program or to see past water-testing results, please visit www.neponset.org.

Officials Search for Source of Suspected Illicit Discharge to Mill Brook



When the Neponset River Watershed Association's Environmental Scientist saw the storm drain running into Mill Brook at the end of Sunrise Road, he knew something wasn't right. Bright green strands of algae wafted gently in the stream and a feathery white substance was strewn on the bottom of the brook below the pipe. Samples of *E. coli* bacteria found levels up to 100 times the allowable state standards coming out of the pipe.

The Association's water-testing volunteers had been finding elevated *E. coli* levels downstream on Mill Brook, which is otherwise quite a healthy stream. "The conditions at the end of the pipe are all classic signs of what we call an illicit connection," said Bill Guenther, the Association's Environmental Scientist. "It would seem that sewage is somehow finding its way into the drain system and getting carried to the stream."

Several months ago Chris Gallagher, Westwood's Assistant Town Engineer, and NepRWA took water samples from each of the manholes along the drain line to try to zero in on the problem, but the results were inconclusive. Then the Department of Public Works (DPW) inspected the inside of the drain pipe with a miniature video camera, but again no obvious source of the pollution was found.

Over the next few weeks the DPW and Watershed Association will be going house to house in the neighborhood to try to find the source of the problem. We will be checking that plumbing appears to be hooked-up correctly and may use dye to confirm that sewage is going into the sewer. "It seems to be a relatively small amount of sewage we're looking for," said Gallagher. "It could be a problem with plumbing at just one house, or it could even be a sewer that is leaking into the ground, with sewage then finding its way into a crack in the drain pipe."

Guenther added, "Over the last 30 years, we've succeeded in eliminating many of the major sewer overflows that used to affect the Neponset and its tributaries, but situations like this—where there are less obvious problems with sewer leaks and mixed-up plumbing—are still more common than we'd like. These kinds of problems are usually straightforward to fix once you find the exact source, but it can be a real challenge finding that source."

The cooperative effort to find the source is part of a new partnership between the Watershed Association and the Westwood DPW to work together on water quality issues. New rules issued by the EPA several years ago require all the towns in the Neponset Watershed area to take additional steps to prevent pollution of streams by town-owned sewers and town drain systems.

The Watershed Association uses a volunteer-based water-testing program to take samples and find pollution problems areas across the entire 14-town watershed. Ian Cooke, Executive Director of the Watershed Association, said, "Because we get so much help from volunteers and because we're doing the same thing across 14 towns, it is much more efficient for us to do the water-testing than for each town to have to go out and develop a program with their own staff or with consultants. From our point of view, it is great to work more closely with the towns because it helps ensure that problems get followed-up sooner and fixed faster."

The Watershed Association has similar cooperative agreements with the Town of Milton and the Boston Water and Sewer Commission, and is exploring the possibility of partnering with several other towns as well.

For more information about the water-testing program or if you'd like to become a water-testing volunteer, contact Bill Guenther at 781-575-0354 or guenther@neponset.org.



NepRWA Partners with Wellesley College on a Sediment Study



By now most NepRWA members probably know that there is a very serious problem with PCB contamination of river-bottom sediments on the Lower Neponset River in Hyde Park, Mattapan, Dorchester and Milton. Other sediment contamination hotspots in the Neponset have included the Grant Gear site on Meadow Brook in Norwood and the Neponset Reservoir in Foxborough.

In many cases, contaminated sediments are the lingering result of pollution discharges that were eliminated years ago. These sediments potentially present an enormous challenge as NepRWA works to restore recreation and aquatic life in the Neponset Watershed.

In spite of the river's long industrial history, there has never been a comprehensive screening to try to determine how serious and widespread sediment pollution problems are across the watershed as a whole.

In February, NepRWA signed a formal partnership agreement with Wellesley College and Professor Daniel Brabander to work together over the next four years to begin filling in the missing pieces of the contaminated sediment puzzle.

NepRWA and Wellesley have been starting to explore these issues together over the last few years, identifying what seem to be hotspots at Factory Pond downstream of the former Plymouth Rubber plant on the East Branch in Canton, and downstream of the former Winslow Brothers and Smith Tannery on Hawes Brook in Norwood.

The new partnership will make a more comprehensive and methodical survey of these and other areas possible. It will also involve pilot testing an emerging approach to "finger-printing" the contribution of different pollution sources to present-day sediment pollution by examining changes in the ratios of various chemical elements in the sediment.

"Polluted sediments are a big issue for a river like the Neponset, and it's an issue that we don't have a handle on yet, by any means," said Ian Cooke, NepRWA's Executive Director. Cooke added, "by partnering with Wellesley, we're gaining access to Dr. Brabander's specialized technical expertise while providing hands-on learning experiences for students at the college on a project in which they can make a real difference."

For more information about this project, contact Ian Cooke at cooke@neponset.org or 781-575-0354.

Get Active with NepRWA



Exciting Opportunity for Boston Residents



Are you a resident of Mattapan, Hyde Park or Dorchester? If so, consider participating in an engaging opportunity—a chance to get your hands wet with river protection! Come this spring, NepRWA will be organizing several events for residents to get down by the water.

Activities may include a canoe trip, learning to take water samples, and examining the organisms living in this section of the Neponset River. Residents interested in participating in this Healthy Communities Program should contact Carly to learn more and to sign up (rocklen@neponset.org or 781-575-0354).

Help Plan NepRWA's 40th Annual Meeting!

The Annual Meeting planning committee is hard at work producing a 40th Anniversary Annual Meeting to remember! Keep an eye out for an invitation this spring, and get ready for an intriguing featured presentation, an elegant setting and a delicious spread of food. Volunteers are needed to help plan and publicize the Annual Meeting, locate event sponsors, and set-up the day of the event. Please contact Carly to get involved (rocklen@neponset.org or 781-575-0354).

Presenting on the Neponset

NepRWA welcomes the chance to speak with the public about protecting the Neponset River Watershed. To inquire about having a NepRWA staff member make a presentation to your civic group, contact Carly (rocklen@neponset.org or 781-575-0354).

Opportunities for Discovery!

NepRWA maintains an exciting list of upcoming environmental events around the Neponset River Watershed—and beyond. View listings from a variety of organizations. In fact, we recommend bookmarking this webpage! Check it out: <http://neponset.org/Events-BeyondNepRWA.htm>