



Be a Water Tester!

Join NepRWA's CWMN volunteer crew and serve as a Neponset water quality steward.

Citizen Water Monitoring Network (CWMN) volunteers sample water around the Neponset Watershed on pre-scheduled dates. This year's round of CWMN water sampling started in April and will take place once every six weeks. Volunteers are needed for the following:

- 1) Sampling water at Pine St. near Rt. 1 in Walpole, &
- 2) Driving processed samples to the MWRA lab in Winthrop. The driver would leave NepRWA's Canton office at 9AM to drive up the Southeast Expressway, past Logan airport, to Winthrop. The drive takes about an hour.

To learn more, contact Laura Hallowell at 781-575-0354 or hallowell@neponset.org.

water 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

May - June 2007

Reflecting on 40 Years of Neponset River Watershed Conservation

In August of 1967 when the Neponset River Watershed Association was first incorporated, the world was a very different place. The nation was undergoing extraordinary social upheavals. The president had been assassinated just a few years ago, the Vietnam War was intensifying, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy would both be dead in less than a year. Rachel Carson had published *Silent Spring* just a few years earlier. The Federal Endangered Species Act had just passed. In 18 months the Cuyahoga River would catch fire.

Closer to home in the Neponset Valley, water quality was poor. In the 17th and 18th centuries, dozens of small, water-powered mills had sprung up next to more than 100 dams on the Neponset River. In the 20th century, new fossil fuel-driven factories had grown up on those foundations. By 1967, industrial water demand had outstripped the supply available from the Neponset River, and factories banded together to buy-up water rights to artificially augment the river's flow.

With growing industrial activity, the Neponset was increasingly being used as a means of industrial waste disposal, with the river changing colors depending on the day's production. The population had grown, too, adding a substantial share of domestic sewage waste via an increasingly inadequate regional sewer system. The system was prone to regular overflows, and the sewage that made it to Quincy's Nut Island Treatment Plant received only crude primary treatment before discharging to Boston Harbor. It would be another year yet before the first incarnation of the

Deer Island Treatment Plant would begin providing treatment for sewage from what was then the Metropolitan District Commission's North Sewer System.

The Lower Neponset River through Hyde Park, Mattapan, Milton and Dorchester had just been dredged, straightened and armored and its floodplain had been filled-in by the Metropolitan District Commission as part of a "flood control" project that produced new land for development. The plan was to fill-in the river's floodplain all the way to Walpole to create new industrial land. Six-foot-high chain-link fences topped with barbed wire would soon be erected along both sides of almost the entire length of this section of the river.

In 1966, a small band of pioneers, including at least one current Watershed Association member, took a canoe trip down the Neponset River. The trip was reported in both the *Sharon Advocate* and the *Patriot Ledger*. The *Ledger's* reporter described the river this way:

"The moment we set our canoes into the putrid, murky water on Neponset Street, we were overwhelmed by the noxious odor caused by the industrial waste dumped into the river...Globs of sludge floated past us in the water...More gobs of raw paper, over a foot thick, so blocked our passage...that we were forced to carry the canoes for about a half mile until we found a clear area."

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Celebrate NepRWA's 40th Anniversary on June 14th!



Consider this your personal invitation to attend NepRWA's 40th Annual Meeting on Thursday, June 14!

Highlighting the evening will be two featured presentations by noted local historian Anthony Sammarco and Chief of Environmental and Energy Services for Boston, Jim Hunt. Sammarco will explore historical industrial development along the Neponset River, and Jim Hunt will broach the future of our river corridor.

You may have glimpsed Anthony Sammarco leading walking tours in Boston or Milton, and you may have read his words; he has written 50 books on the Boston area alone and authors the weekly history column "A Piece of Our History" for the *Milton Times*. He is also the curator of the Milton Historical

Society. Serving on Mayor Thomas Menino's Cabinet as Chief for Environmental and Energy Services for the City of Boston, Jim Hunt is the Mayor's lead advisor on Environmental and Energy policy and oversees City agencies including the Environmental Department, Parks Planning and Boston's Recycling Program. Jim Hunt has a special interest in how new projects along the Neponset River can increase protection of the river while also making it more accessible to the public.

Come, enjoy hors d'oeuvres and drinks, a brief business meeting, and a raffle in addition to the talks! The soiree will take place in a donated space at the modern, light-filled building of the Reebok International Headquarters in Canton. Our 40th Annual Meeting is made possible by the generous support of Kohler Co., and by the donations of many NepRWA Friends. Thank you for your support! To learn more or to reserve a seat, contact Carly at 781-575-0354 or visit www.neponset.org.

NepRWA Earth Day Happenings



Photo by Maureen Mazrimas

QEN event-organizers Courtney Perdios & Maura O'Gara haul trash from the Neponset marsh, in Quincy.

NepRWA took part in two exciting Earth Day events this year, one in Quincy and one in Canton.

NepRWA joined forces with the Quincy Environmental Network (QEN) to cleanup a segment of shoreline along the Neponset Estuary, by Commander Shea Blvd. Beneath wheeling gulls, cormorants and turkey vultures, 15 volunteers pulled a stunning amount of debris from the banks of the Estuary. Some of the more interesting finds included a rabbit cage, a rusted metal barrel, propane tanks, and a burglar alarm system (complete with wires)! Far too many plastic juice containers,

chunks of Styrofoam, cigarette lighters and cigar-holders, Styrofoam coffee cups and nip bottles littered the shore to provide added amusement. The area had become more of a landfill than the picturesque shoreline of a beloved estuary. NepRWA asks its members: If you find yourself walking along a waterway, please pick-up a few pieces of trash and leave behind an area more beautiful and safer for wildlife. It's mind-boggling to fathom all the

waste floating around in our watershed!



Coloring pictures of wildlife at the NepRWA booth, Canton Earth Day Fair.

In Canton, NepRWA staffed a booth at the Canton Earth Day Fair that was held at the Visual Arts Center and Mildred Morse Allen Wildlife Sanctuary. This event was organized by the Canton Interfaith Clergy Association. Hundreds of people, old and young, big and small, celebrated the natural world. Visitors browsed indoor and outdoor displays on alternative-fueled cars, backyard composting, community supported agriculture, home chemical use, hybrid cars, the Neponset Watershed, recycling, and solar energy. Live animal exhibits, nature walks and live music by Private

Circus added to the day's festive atmosphere. Jack Clarke, Director of Public Policy and Government Relations for Mass Audubon, gave a presentation on global warming and wildlife. We'd like to extend a big thank you to the Canton Interfaith Clergy Association and the event planning committee who worked so hard to make this event happen.

Protecting Water Quality, One Septic System (and Dog) at a Time

You may recall hearing that NepRWA has been working closely with two local towns to protect water quality over the last several years. This work has been funded by a grant from the S. 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution Grant Program. In either town, these projects have taken on very different forms.

In Walpole, NepRWA and the Walpole Board of Health have been working together to improve residents' septic system maintenance, thereby protecting local water quality and public health. A special taskforce considered implementing a septic system maintenance utility, and a public education campaign was (and continues to be) conducted.

The Walpole education campaign included an April 2004 informational canvas of septic system owners. Canvassers discussed with homeowners how and why to regularly maintain septic systems. Some homeowners then agreed to pledge to regularly maintain their systems from then on out.

Months later, those pledgers were sent postcard reminders to schedule system pump-outs. In spring 2006, pledgers received a phone call inquiring about their septic system maintenance. Lastly, septic system owners who, according to BOH records, have fallen behind in septic system maintenance will receive final maintenance reminder notices, this spring.

NepRWA looks forward to assessing the efficacy of these outreach methods and recommending the best for future use.



In Milton, the 319 project has focused on improving water quality in the neighborhood adjacent to Pine Tree Brook, between Blue Hills Pkwy. and Thacher St. Through an informational canvas and the posting of signage, NepRWA and the Milton Department of Public Works have been encouraging residents to pick-up after their pets and to use fewer chemicals on their lawns.

Additionally, bioretention cells have been built along the brook and a wooded wetland has been routed into the area's stormwater flow regime so that water draining from adjacent developments is filtered before it can enter the brook. In this way, fewer pollutants enter Pine Tree Brook, thereby protecting water quality and both ecosystem and public health.

Most recently, NepRWA and the DPW have been producing signage for and beautifying the Pine Tree Brook corridor. Several of the bioretention cells have been seeded and in addition, perennials have been (and will continue to be) planted in the cells with help from the Pine Tree Brook Neighborhood Association. This spring, street signs will also be posted along adjacent roads, reminding neighbors to pick-up after their pets. This signage augments the signs and mutt mitt stations already installed along the brook corridor. Additionally, stormdrain markers will be applied to catchbasins indicating drainage to local waterways and reminding neighbors to keep stormwater clean.

Questions? Contact Carly at 781-575-0354.

Westwood Station Could Harm Neponset Streamflows

The Westwood Station development proposed by Cabot, Cabot and Forbes (CC&F) is a "megaproject" that would be located on 134 acres of land next to the Westwood AMTRAK/MBTA station. It is considered a smart growth project due to its proximity to public transportation and its integration of residential, shopping and office components at a single location. It would create 4½ million square feet of floor space if both Phase I and Phase II are completed.

On March 28, NepRWA submitted comments on the project's Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIR). While praising its smart growth aspects, as well as CC&F's commitments to finance trails linking the development to Blue Hills Reservation (on the other side of Rte 128) and to rehabilitate a canoe launching ramp near the site, NepRWA also concluded that the project would have a negative impact on Neponset River streamflows. This is because a spring that currently discharges an estimated 35 million gallons of water a year into the Neponset River would be eliminated and its water used to recharge the aquifer. Unfortunately, all that extra groundwater would be pumped out by the Dedham-Westwood Water District (DWWD) to satisfy the additional demand for water that the project will create, and thus will not be augmenting streamflows in the River.

In its DEIR comments, NepRWA stated, "We believe the applicant can do more (to conserve water and/or increase recharge) at little or no additional expense.... Removal of water that now goes into the Neponset River ... and, in effect, transferring it into the kitchens and bathrooms of Westwood Station ... is unacceptable." NepRWA continues to talk to CC&F, as well as to Westwood officials who will have to permit the project, to convince them that additional groundwater recharge and water conservation measures are feasible and would eliminate the negative impact on the River. A Final Environmental Impact Report for Westwood Station is expected in the next few months. NepRWA will have the opportunity to comment on that, and intends to remain active in the permitting process.

Forty Years of Neponset Watershed Conservation, from page 1

During the midst of all this, the Federal Highway Administration was moving to finish the last leg of Route 95 on its way into Boston from Providence. The plan called for extending Rte 95 from its current terminus at Rte 128, through MDC parklands, and into the heart of the city roughly along the route of today's Orange Line subway. The plan would have relocated a mile of the Neponset River, placed a cloverleaf on the Milton-Readville line and then plowed its way through neighborhoods in Hyde Park, Jamaica Plain, Roxbury and the South End.

It was these two issues: the gross pollution of the Neponset River and the I-95 southwest corridor plan that galvanized citizens to create the Neponset Conservation Association in August 1967. Together the Association's members collected information, organized their communities, built coalitions, advocated for better laws and demanded that the laws be applied and upheld.

Ultimately the Legislature decided not to fund the final phase of filling-in the floodplain of the Neponset River. In 1972, under pressure from the Neponset Conservation Association and a broad-based coalition of community groups from across Greater Boston, Gov. Sargeant relented and abandoned plans for I-95 and other interstates inside Rte 128. That same year, the 1972

Get Active with NepRWA 

Become a NepRWA Member

Do you receive this newsletter but aren't a NepRWA member, yet? Please consider joining NepRWA. Member support helps to maintain and expand NepRWA's conservation work throughout the communities of the Neponset Watershed. It's easy to join! Just visit www.neponset.org or request membership materials at rocklen@neponset.org or 781-575-0354. We also suggest that you visit www.neponset.org to learn about upcoming opportunities—from workshops and classes, to hikes and canoe trips. Get in touch with some of the best aspects of the Neponset environment!

Outdoor Discovery Day, Sat., May 19

You're invited to the Blue Hills Outdoor Discovery Day on Sat., May 19, from 11AM – 3PM, at Houghton's Pond Recreation Area in the Blue Hills Reservation, 840 Hillside Street, Milton. *Take part in a NepRWA-led exploration of benthic macroinvertebrates!* A variety of organizations will offer family-friendly, participatory activities. Discovery Day is organized by the MA Department of Conservation & Recreation. It is the kick-off event for the DCR Great Parks Pursuit, a team challenge adventure activity that connects families with the outdoors and their state forests and park resources. For more information on how to participate, visit the DCR website at www.mass.gov/dcr or call the DCR Park rangers at 617-698-1802.

Amendments to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, now known as the Clean Water Act, were adopted and the Neponset Conservation Association began the long (and still ongoing) process of working to secure investments in wastewater and stormwater infrastructure.

In the 1980s, the Neponset Conservation Association changed its name to the Neponset River Watershed Association and slowly transformed into the organization it is today. While the name has changed and the issues have evolved, the Association continues to be a coalition of people who live or work in the watershed and share a vision of a clean, flowing, accessible watershed that enriches the social and economic fabric of our communities. In fact, even the tools we use today—scientific assessment, community outreach, education and advocacy—are the same.

Reflecting on the last 40 years of the Association's history, we are very grateful for the hard work of our predecessors. Their success means that a canoe trip down the Neponset is now "lovely" rather than "putrid." The watershed is still not as clean and accessible as it should be, but we are fortunate to stand on the foundation of their accomplishments as we continue striving to realize and even exceed their vision for the future of this very special place.