



Of Note

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Consider joining NepRWA if you aren't already a member. Member support helps to maintain and expand environmental protection throughout the communities of the Neponset River Watershed. It's easy to become a member. Sign-up at www.neponset.org or request a membership application from Kristina at 781-575-0354 or lafrance@neponset.org.

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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.

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. Assistant
Steve Pearlman, Advocacy Dir.
Carly Rocklen, Outreach Dir. & Restoration Manager

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

January - February 2008

Public Meeting Launches Next Stage in Efforts to Restore Lower Neponset River

In the past two months, press coverage of efforts by NepRWA and others to restore the lower Neponset River has exploded. There were three articles in the Boston Globe alone between December 6 and January 13, in addition to articles in the Hyde Park, Dorchester, Milton, Norwood and Canton newspapers. This coverage is indicative of the fact that a critical stage has been reached in our decades-long struggle to return the Neponset to a healthy, free-flowing river from Walpole to the sea.



Efforts to restore the River's "anadromous" fish runs (anadromous fish live in the ocean but lay their eggs in fresh water) and improve the river's overall habitat and recreational value began over 10 years ago with a study by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, commissioned by the state Department of Fish & Game's Riverways Program. This work was delayed, however, when extremely high levels of toxic PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) were discovered behind the two lower Neponset River dams that block fish and canoe passage—the Baker Dam in Lower Mills (Dorchester and Milton) and the Tileston & Hollingsworth (T&H) Dam in Milton and Hyde Park.

Now, after 10 years and five additional reports commissioned by Riverways, restoration efforts are finally moving beyond the study stage and into action. On the evening of January 9, over 200 people attended a public meeting held by the Riverways Program to discuss the findings and recommendations of its final two studies.

The first presentation was by Rob Breault of the U.S. Geological Survey, who has been studying PCBs in the sediments and

water column of the Neponset River. Breault found large quantities and high concentrations of PCBs beginning at Mother Brook (a canal that connects the Neponset and Charles Rivers) in Hyde Park and continuing into the Estuary and the mouth of the River at Dorchester Bay. Most of the PCBs are located in sediments behind the two dams. Breault discovered that these sediments are not stable and regularly migrate over the dams and into the estuary. Moreover, these toxic chemicals were found to be moving up the food chain. Breault discovered PCBs in the flesh of certain species of freshwater Neponset fish to be three times higher than is considered safe for human consumption. PCBs were also found in some salt water species.

Everyone now agrees that restoration of a free-flowing Neponset River cannot proceed unless it is combined with a comprehensive cleanup of PCBs. If the dams were removed without cleaning up the PCBs, not only would vast quantities of the chemicals pour into the estuary, but because water levels would be lowered, PCB-laden sediments now under water would be exposed, potentially further increasing the risk to human health.

Based on the fact that river restoration and PCB remediation are inextricably linked, Jim MacBroom, a river restoration expert hired by the Riverways Program, spoke about his exhaustive analysis of the alternatives for cleaning up the PCBs and restoring fish passage on the Neponset River. His conclusion is that PCB cleanup and removal of both dams would best achieve these twin goals and would cost far less than other alternatives.

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River Fund Campaign Charges Ahead

NepRWA has received a tremendous response to its year-end fundraising campaign, known as the River Fund. Support through the river fund from local individuals and small businesses underpins the success of all NepRWA's programs to protect and restore the river. The success of the River Fund campaign in particular helps determine what projects NepRWA is able to take on during the new year.

NepRWA is grateful for the generous support we have received from hundreds of members and friends over the last two months. "We set a goal of increasing citizen contributions via the River Fund by 20% this year," said Ian Cooke,

NepRWA Executive Director, adding, "Based on the results so far, it looks like we are on track to meet that goal."

All proceeds from the River Fund campaign go directly into efforts to cleanup water pollution, protect natural areas, conserve water, and open up the watershed for recreational use.

If you have been considering a River Fund gift, there is still time to make a difference. NepRWA will continue to accept River Fund gifts through the end of its fiscal year in March. You can find more information on the River Fund Campaign at www.neponset.org.

Citizen Water Monitoring Network Year in Review

One of the most important tools used by NepRWA to identify water quality problem areas is the Citizen Water Monitoring Network, or CWMN program.

CWMN volunteers take water quality samples at 41 locations throughout the Neponset River Watershed six times a year during the spring, summer and fall. The samples are analyzed for a host of chemical and biological characteristics that help to identify areas consistently failing to meet state and federal water quality standards.

In 2007, changes were made to the CWMN program to incorporate a seasonal approach to sampling. Previously, samples were taken once every two months throughout the entire year. Now there is more emphasis on sampling during the warmer months when bacteria testing is most effective at locating pollution sources. Bacteria growth increases as temperatures rise. Having less time between sampling events also creates a clearer picture of potential problems.



CWMN Volunteer Peter Jackson takes a water sample

This year's data indicated that many of the locations previously believed to be problematic are indeed compromised. Areas such as Unquity Brook and Pine Tree Brook in Milton, Meadow Brook in Norwood, and the lowermost reaches of the Neponset River itself have been shown to have distinct water quality issues, some because of high bacteria levels. Many of these areas were included in follow-up sampling efforts in 2007. Follow-up sampling revealed five outfall pipes along the Neponset River with suspected illicit sewage connections, as well as an outfall along Pine Tree Brook subject to illegal dumping of wash water.

Public Meeting on Lower Neponset River Restoration, from page 1

For example, in addition to the \$7 million or so that will be needed for PCB remediation, retaining the dams for the next 30 years would cost an additional \$7.2 million in rebuilding and operation and maintenance (O&M) costs. On the other hand, removing the dams would cost less than \$2 million and eliminate the need for future O&M. Fish passage alternatives such as fish ladders and rock ramps were found by MacBroom to be highly problematic and very expensive.

Last to speak was NepRWA's Executive Director Ian Cooke, who noted that obtaining government funding for any of the alternatives (including PCB cleanup) will be impossible unless the affected communities can come to a general consensus on how to proceed. To try to find a solution that most people can live with, NepRWA has hired a professional facilitator to run a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) consisting of representative neighborhood associations and other organizations. The CAC is expected to begin its work in late February.

The sites along the Neponset River are now being investigated by the Boston Water and Sewer Commission, and some progress has been made in fixing illicit connections. Investigations are ongoing as not all of the specific problems have been identified. In Milton, the illegal dumping has been identified, and NepRWA has worked with the Milton Department of Public Works and Milton High School to ensure it is not repeated. Meadow Brook in Norwood was excluded from follow-up sampling in 2007 because of efforts by the Town of Norwood to identify and rectify sewage entering the brook through underdrains. NepRWA continues to monitor Meadow Brook.

In addition to these areas, the data from 2007 have highlighted other areas in need of more thorough investigation. Germany and Hawes Brooks in Norwood consistently failed to meet the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for bacteria in the Neponset River and its tributaries, as did Pequit Brook in Canton and Purgatory Brook in Westwood. These areas are being considered for follow-up sampling in 2008 to identify possible illicit connections and pollution sources.

So far the target reaches for follow-up sampling in 2008 are Hawes, Germany and Purgatory Brooks, with continued investigation planned for the lower Neponset River and Unquity Brook. These areas were identified by data from the CWMN program to have the most severe problems with bacterial pollution. Without the data obtained by the CWMN program many of these areas might not have been identified! NepRWA thanks all CWMN volunteers for their hard work and commitment. Because of these individuals, polluted areas can be identified and fixed!

CWMN volunteers are now being sought for the 2008 sampling season. If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about this opportunity, contact Bill Guenther or Laura Hollowell at (781) 575-0354 or visit www.neponset.org.

NepRWA is also taking the lead to get money earmarked for Neponset River Restoration in the Environmental Bond bill currently before the state Legislature and is working with local legislators to get this done. However, even if we get the money earmarked in the Environmental Bond, the Governor has discretion as to whether or not to spend it. Furthermore, a portion of the funding will have to be obtained from the federal government and, perhaps, from private companies if they are found responsible for some of the original PCB contamination.

The real work has just begun, and NepRWA will be asking all Friends of the Neponset to continue working with us to restore a healthy, free-flowing Neponset River. To learn more, visit www.neponset.org or contact Steve Pearlman at 781-575-0354 or pearlman@neponset.org. Please also visit www.neponset.org to take the river restoration survey. Join our project update e-mail list by writing to rocklen@neponset.org and asking to be kept abreast of the river restoration project.

NepRWA and Town of Sharon to Partner on Push for Water Conservation

The Town of Sharon sits at the headwaters of the Neponset and Taunton Watersheds, and supplies all of its own public drinking water from local sources. Sharon is looking ahead to substantial residential and commercial growth over the next few years. As we're well familiar, with new growth comes demand for more water, as well as the prospect that Sharon could outgrow its current water supplies.



One option for Sharon to meet growing demand would be to import additional water from the MWRA water system halfway across the state. However, before looking to that costly and environmentally problematic solution, Sharon has decided to explore water conservation as a

way to meet new demands, while controlling costs and better protecting streams both locally and on the other side of the state.

Recently the Sharon Department of Public works and NepRWA worked together to secure seed funding for a dramatic expansion of water conservation efforts in the town using a MassDEP Water Conservation Grant.

The grant, along with matching funds from the town, will allow for the development of a detailed water conservation plan for the town and the implementation of a variety of conservation measures. Under the plan, NepRWA would hire a part-time Water Conservation Coordinator to focus on jump-starting the Sharon program. Some of the early actions items include direct outreach to water users, working with local civic groups, and enlisting the assistance of professionals such as plumbers, landscape contractors and irrigation system installers.

The project would also include implementing demonstration projects around town, such as high-efficiency toilets and improved irrigation system controllers at public locations. Other important components include conducting educational outreach to young people through the school system and developing town-specific performance standards for water-saving devices.

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



Get Active with NepRWA 

Seeking Water Conservation Coordinator

NepRWA seeks a Water Conservation Coordinator ("WCC") to lead a pilot program in the Town of Sharon. The WCC will work to educate residents of the Town of Sharon about the need and opportunities to conserve water in their homes, businesses and landscapes. This includes outreach through newspaper articles, mailings, an informational website, classroom visits, presentations to community groups, demonstration projects, interpretive signage and partnerships with local water-related businesses. This is a part-time position, 20 hours per week, with a flexible schedule. The position is initially funded for one year with the potential to become permanent and/or full-time. Learn more at www.neponset.org or by calling Ian Cooke at 781-575-0354.

NepRWA Open House!

You're invited to attend a late-February presentation on the conservation projects, programs and volunteer opportunities at NepRWA. The Open House is free and open to the public. The date, time and location of this event are yet to be announced; expect an e-mail update (or visit www.neponset.org) for more information! To join our electronic update list, write to rocklen@neponset.org with "subscribe" in the subject line and contact information in the message.

A Call for Water Sampling Volunteers

NepRWA's water sampling program ("CWMN") seeks volunteers. The following volunteer positions are available (training is provided):

- Driver from Canton to MWRA in Winthrop, leaving Canton at 9AM
- Water sampler for a site off Elm St., Canton
- Water sampler for a site off Pine St., Canton
- Water sampler for Hawes Brook on the Walpole/Norwood line
- Sampler to take dissolved oxygen readings at sites in Milton and Canton
- Volunteers to fill-in as water samplers or dissolved oxygen samplers in each town

We will start off the 2008 sampling season with annual trainings in March. Following the trainings, we will sample once every six weeks on Wednesday mornings, between 6AM and 7:30AM, before the work day starts. Our first sampling event will be on April 2. To learn more, contact Laura Hollowell at 781-575-0354 or hallowell@neponset.org.