



Blackstone River Monitor

Fall 2006

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Newsletter of the Blackstone River Watershed Association

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The Blackstone River Watershed Association (BRWA) was founded in 1976 and is dedicated to restoring, enhancing and preserving the Blackstone River system and its watershed.

From the President...

By Jim Plasse

This has been a very busy summer for the Blackstone River Watershed Association.

In May, the BRWA organized a group of concerned citizens, named the "Mumford River Stream Team". The group conducted a shoreline survey of the entire Mumford River. This survey identified potential environmental problems along the River. This information was included in a report to be submitted to local and state officials. The Stream Team members continue to be active, either by addressing these problems or by bringing them to the attention to local and state government officials.

With help from dedicated volunteers

and generous grants from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, the New England Grassroots Environmental Foundation and The Greater Worcester Community Foundation, the BRWA was able to attack the severe infestation of invasive Asian Water Chestnuts in a 12 acre section of the West River. These invasive plants had grown so dense in recent years they prevented all boating and fishing in the River during the summer months. Through a combination of volunteer hand-pulling and mechanical harvesting, an estimated 1,200 tons of weeds were removed and then hauled to an upland composting area by the Uxbridge Department of Public Works.

We have just renewed our Cooperative Agreement with the John
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Annual Meeting 2006

The BRWA Annual Meeting will be held on **Tuesday, November 14, 7:00 – 9:00 pm** at the Brigham Hill Community Barn, 37 Wheeler Road, N. Grafton, and all members and friends are encouraged to attend.

After a short business meeting, BRWA Board Member Dona Neely will present the Blackstone River Coalition's new campaign to encourage companies in the Blackstone River Watershed to be "***In Business for the Blackstone.***" During October, informational workshops have been held throughout the valley to urge businesses to adopt good housekeeping practices

that will have a direct impact on the area's stormwater management.

According to program coordinator Neely, polluted runoff from roofs, parking lots and roads has been identified as the most significant cause of water quality problems in the Blackstone River's watershed today. This voluntary program will go far to minimize the pollution associated with stormwater runoff from rain and snowmelt and will help keep the river clean. The Blackstone River Coalition and guest speakers will demonstrate how -- by making small, *no-cost* changes to their daily routines --
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Watershed Program

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Stream Team Program

Nicole Wenger - Attleboro

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Annual Meeting- continued from front page

businesses can play a major role in protecting the valley's waterways to further support the goal of making the Blackstone "Fishable and Swimmable by 2015." BRWA members can help spread the word about "In Business" to local businesses whose services they use.

"*In Business for the Blackstone*" is one component of the BRC's initiative of tackling stormwater in the Blackstone River watershed. The other three target local decision makers, developers, and homeowners. The BRWA is a member of the Blackstone River Coalition.

After the presentation, folks can enjoy a social hour and learn more about BRWA's projects including water chestnut removal on the West River, watershed-wide water quality monitoring and the Blackstone River Report Card, stream teams on the Mumford River and others, stormwater management and rain barrels, canoe access along the mainstem, and the Touchstone School Blackstone watershed film.

Annual Meeting Agenda:

7:00 Business Meeting
7:30 "In Business for the Blackstone"
Presentation
8:00 Social Hour and Project Poster Session
9:00 Adjourn

The proposed slate of Officers and Directors is:

Officers:

Jim Plasse, President
Dona Neely, Vice President
Maggie Plasse, Treasurer
Donna Williams, Secretary

Directors:

Spaulding Aldrich
Kathy Craig
Michele B. Decoteau
Rosemary Longo
Steve MacIndoe
Andy Myers
Phil Neeland
John Pelczarski
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Bad Bugs and the BRWA

By Shirley Smith

There they were: *E. coli*, *Legionella*, *Cryptosporidium*, *Giardi*, and *Noroviruses*, complete with magnified mug shots, criminal histories, and profiles. This first handout at the September 27th EPA funded Groundwater Foundation Workshop in Attleboro, was cleverly modeled after the most wanted posters you might find on the walls of your local police station. These waterborne pathogens with their tangled bodies and hairy appendages can, like human predators, attack unnoticed and unseen. As the Foundation's Jennifer Wernhoff described the devastating effects of the sometimes deadly microbes, a few people could be seen regarding their bottles of Poland Springs with more than a little suspicion.

Next on the agenda was a presentation by Kathleen Romero of MA Department of Environmental Protection (MADEP) entitled "Potential Sources in Your Backyard." The familiar list included storm water, failing septic systems, farming, sprawl, geese, and pets. The latter mention promptly set off a spirited discussion on the responsibilities of dog owners and the 200 million colonies of *E. coli* found in each deposit of what was referred to as *canus poopus*.

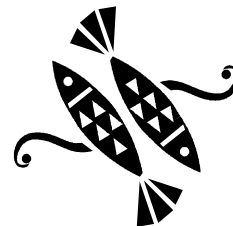
Rebekah McDermott of Mass Rural Water, Lorraine Joubert from the University of Rhode Island (URI) and the MA Executive Office of Environmental Affairs' (EOEA) Vandana Rao spoke about prevention strategies. Of particular interest was the information on how to overcome stakeholder resistance to water supply protection land use and zoning. The common denominator in all of these was education, education, and education. This substantiates the importance of following through with the primary goals of the Blackstone River Watershed's 5 Year Action Plan. Much of what was said at the workshop we have heard before. And therein lies the problem. It is not enough for us to

have this information. We have to spread the word. We have to do more to reach out to schools. We have to do more to reach out to local boards and officials. As stated in the second statement of the action plan, we have to "Increase the public's involvement through educational and recreational opportunities."

In order to accomplish this, however, we must do whatever it takes to work on the first goal: "Strengthen the organization's leadership capacity, financial stability, and membership base" with the underlying key factor being that membership base.

There was some new and creative information that came from both the speakers and the audience. One Cape town's approach to education was placing a poster in a bar and planting a Cape Cod Commission member in that bar to initiate discussion. Another recommended getting Garden Clubs and Horseman's Associations involved. Some related success stories. Timothy Cranston told how North Kingstown, RI had no desire for any municipal sewer, but had 10,000 septic systems contributing to ground water pollution. Along with his talk, Mr. Cranston passed out a 25-page booklet explaining how they solved the problem with a mandatory inspection program. And to ask those pertinent and probing questions that occasionally stumped the speakers was MA Riverways' Russ Cohen.

One of the most valuable aspects of attending these workshops and conferences is the opportunity for networking, getting to know people who share our common interest, people who might be in a position to help us achieve our goal of making the Blackstone Valley a Better Place to Live.



How Clean is Clean?

You've heard over and over again that the Blackstone River is much cleaned that it was 30 years ago. You might be asking yourself, how clean is clean and what does it mean to me? Can I go boating in the River without risking my health if I get wet? Also, what's all this talk about making the River fishable and swimmable by 2015? Don't people fish in the River now?

You may go on line and read the Water Quality Monitoring Report Cards. Your eyes glaze over from all those numbers and mysterious terms like turbidity, nitrates and orthophosphates, when all you want to know is if you can safely put your boat in the water.

Well here the answers to several frequently asked questions.

1. Is the water safe for boating?

Yes, feel free to paddle the river in your canoe or kayak. While, the levels of *E. coli* and coliform bacteria are higher than the levels recommended by health officials for prolonged skin contact (swimming), especially after heavy rains, it is safe to go boating on the River. You should however, take a shower afterwards to wash off the River water.

2. Can I fish in the River?

Yes, the fish have returned to the Blackstone River, though survival can be tough for them in some sections of the River. Please release any fish that you catch back into the River. Two hundred years of industrial pollution have embedded toxic chemicals and heavy metals like lead, copper and cadmium into the sediment at the bottom of the River. For that reason, health officials recommend that you avoid eating fish from the River. You however can eat the fish caught from several of the streams and tributaries of the Blackstone River.

3. What is turbidity?

Turbidity is the particles of sand, dirt and organic material suspended in the River water making it look cloudy. Not only does it make the water look dirty, it makes it hard for the fish to find food and to reproduce. High turbidity levels come from untreated stormwater run off from roads and parking lots during rainy weather.

4. What are nitrates and orthophosphates and why should I be concerned?

Nitrates and orthophosphates are nutrients, much like in garden fertilizer. The problem is that while nutrients are needed for plants to grow, high nutrient levels result in a larger amount of weeds clogging the River. When these weeds decay, they use up the oxygen dissolved in the water, making it difficult for the fish to breath. High nutrient levels in the water reaching Narragansett Bay have been blamed for the death of many fish and other aquatic life in the Bay.

5. What are people doing to fix these problems?

Several state and federal efforts have been undertaken to improve water quality in the River. Wastewater treatment plants along the river have been directed to reduce the nutrient levels in the treated water that they return to the River.

The Massachusetts law, known as Title 5, ensures proper maintenance of private septic systems. Failing septic systems have been a major source of pathogenic bacteria in the river.

The EPA and state agencies, such as MA DEP and RI DEM, have imposed tighter stormwater management regulations. Storm water is not allowed to empty directly into streams or rivers, without filtering out dirt, animal waste, and petroleum products.

Finally, you as a concerned citizen need to keep an eye out for sources of pollution and report them to the legal authorities such as your local conservation commission, MA DEP, RI DEM, or your local watershed organization.

Get Your Company *In Business for the Blackstone*



The Blackstone River Coalition is inviting small to medium sized companies in the Blackstone River Watershed to be ***In Business for the Blackstone***. The program provides multiple forms of public recognition to businesses that adopt good housekeeping practices that minimize the risk of contaminants being collected in rainwater and snowmelt. As stormwater travels across impervious surfaces, it collects litter, debris, oil, metals, and chemicals; this runoff is directed into stormdrains, which discharge water into local waterways. Polluted runoff from roofs, parking lots and roads is the most significant cause of water quality problems today.

Simple, no/low-cost changes in daily operational routines can prevent polluted runoff from spilling into our lakes and rivers and provide economic savings to the company. These good housekeeping measures can safeguard material inventories, decrease maintenance costs, reduce operational risks, and ease the municipality's tax burden. Companies can be ***In Business for the Blackstone*** by implementing at least five good housekeeping

practices, which include:

1. *Clean and maintain storm drains and catch basins*
2. *Keep parking lot, loading area clean*
3. *Apply low impact development practices*
4. *Use green landscaping practices*
5. *Maintain dumpsters and compactors*
6. *Move stored materials indoors or keep properly covered*
7. *Wash vehicles, equipment carefully*
8. *Properly maintain vehicles*
9. *Establish a spill response plan*
10. *Conduct employee training*

In return, the business will receive a window decal, certificate, award photo, publicity in local papers, and more. This recognition impresses employees, customers, suppliers, community members, and helps the business gain a competitive niche.

Additional information can be accessed at www.zaptheblackstone.org or by contacting dona.neely@zaptheblackstone.org.

Get your business ***In Business*** today!



By redirecting a drain spout from the parking lot to a vegetated area, Lampin Corporation of Uxbridge diverted more than 73,000 gallons of stormwater runoff per year.

It's Never Too Soon To Start Planning... for the 31st Annual BRWA Canoe and Kayak Race. Plans are in place for next years race. Save the date – Saturday, May 12, 2007. If you would like to participate planning or have comments or suggestions please contact Rosemary Longo at roseisarose@hotmail.com.

Mumford River Stream Team Survey Update

On September 6, 2006 stream team volunteers sat down for a final meeting to discuss the results from the 13.5-mile survey of the Mumford River conducted in the spring of 2006. The team, comprised of local community members, is energetic and dedicated in protecting and preserving rivers, streams, lakes and lands along the waterway. The overall goal is to bring awareness and activation to local citizens and organizations impacting the health of the water. This project also provides opportunities for citizens to take action and inform others of how they can improve land use, water quality, wildlife and recreational opportunities.

Stream team volunteers assessed the River for signs of pollution, trash, erosion, and structural factors effecting storm drains and dams. The final plan and action items may be reviewed on the BRWA's website at www.thebrwa@verizon.net. Action items will aid in the protection, preservation and clean-up efforts throughout the surveyed communities. If you are interested in participating in the

next stream team survey in the spring of 2007, please contact Nicole Wenger at the BRWA at (508) 278-5200 or via email at brwa@verizon.net.

A very special thank you to UNIBANK for funding the project, local town conservation commissions, MassRiverways - Adopt-A-Stream Program, the Blackstone Heritage and Canal State Park, neighbors and businesses abutting the Mumford River and the following survey volunteers: Sam and Douglas Bowen, Nancy DeMers, Olivia/Glenn/Evan Herbert, Cal Koorster, Barbara and Jennifer Lonergan, Shelley and Mitchel McGonagle, Beth and Paul Milke, Howard and Nancy Perkson, Maggie and Jim Plasse, Michael Pouliot, Jean and Valerie Sahakian, and Valerie and Guylan Qudsieh.



from the President, continued from front page...

H. Chaffee Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor Commission to coordinate the design and construction of River access sites along the Blackstone River. This will guarantee perpetual public access to the River for recreational activities like boating and fishing. We will also be assisting the National Park Service with the development of trail maps for boaters, showing recommended day trips and "put in" and "take out" locations along the River. Several of these maps have already been developed and are available at visitor centers in the Valley and on line at the JHCBRVNHCC Web site at www.nps.gov/archive/blac/discover/getontheriver.htm.

As a member of the Blackstone River Coalition (BRC), the BRWA has been working more closely with all the other watershed groups in the Blackstone Valley to help increase our influence on environmental issues affecting the whole Blackstone River Watershed. This year, we will have completed our third year of water quality monitoring of the entire Blackstone River Watershed. This October, the BRWA, the Blackstone Headwaters Coalition (BHC), the Rhode Island based Blackstone River Watershed Council (BRWC) and several other local environmental groups officially applied to incorporate the Blackstone River Coalition as an organization of organizations dedicated to protecting and improving water quality and habitat in the entire Blackstone River Corridor.

I encourage all of you to explore and enjoy all the natural wonders the Blackstone River Valley has to offer and become *actively* involved in protecting and improving our vital natural resources.

Harvesting Asian Water Chestnuts on the West River

The West River is rich with native wildlife and scenic beauty. There are many places to swim, fish, paddle or bird watch. There is a bird banding station on the West River, testament to the diversity of recreational uses and richness of the surrounding habitat. There are drinking water watersheds and sensitive marshland habitats adjacent to the West River. These important areas have many regulations protecting them, but regulations could not keep out the invasive Asian Water Chestnut.



Asian Water Chestnut was brought to the United States from Asia in the late 1800s. Having no natural enemies, the plants have spread throughout Massachusetts and the Northeastern United States. This invasive plant has infested a part of the West River, covering the water with a dense mat of vegetation, reducing the flow of the River, displacing native species, and impeding boating and fishing in the area.

Thanks to generous grants from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA), the New England Grassroots Environmental Foundation (NEGREF), and the Greater Worcester Community Foundation (GWCF), BRWA has cleaned up the infestation on a 12-acre section of the West River near the Uxbridge Italian-American Club on Rt. 16.

BRWA hired Lycott Environmental to mechanically harvest these invasive plants in most of the affected area. Lycott Environmental began the removal in late June, after the plants had



sprouted, but before the seeds for next year's "crop" matured. The two mechanical harvesters finished harvesting the weeds in early August. When the job was done, **1200 TONS** of weeds had been removed.

Many thanks to the 30 volunteers who came out on July 8, and July 22, 2006 to pull many of the weeds in the shallow areas, where the mechanical harvesters were not able to reach.

Thanks also go out to Wild Bird Gardens and the Friends of the Blackstone for donating the use of canoes, the Italian-American Club of Uxbridge for allowing the weeds to be dumped on their property, the Uxbridge DPW for supplying a dump truck and a driver to tote the weeds away, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the National Park Service for their help with this project.



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Why Join BRWA?

The Blackstone River Watershed Association (BRWA) is dedicated to enhancing and preserving the Blackstone River system and its watershed. To support this commitment, the BRWA monitors conditions, identifies areas of concern, and engages local citizens in the protection and enjoyment of our natural resources. This is accomplished through a variety of activities to which the organization is committed to continue for the long term. They include:

- ➔ **WATER QUALITY MONITORING** – BRWA participates in the Blackstone River Coalition Watershed-wide Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program. Forty volunteers monitor 32 sites in the mid-reach section of the Blackstone River.
- ➔ **STREAM TEAMS** – BRWA established Stream Teams made up of volunteer river advocates. The volunteers developed action plans for the Mumford River. Next year the program will be extended to include the West River and Mill River.
- ➔ **RIVER CLEANUPS** – BRWA scheduled river cleanups in April and May. Hand pulling of water chestnuts was done two Saturdays in July when 30 volunteers pulled 1 ton of weeds from the River.
- ➔ **EDUCATIONAL FORUMS** – BRWA provides public workshops to increase public understanding and community stewardship of the ecological resources of the Blackstone River watershed.
- ➔ **NEWSLETTER** – BRWA publishes three newsletters per year, February, June and October.
- ➔ **MEETINGS** – BRWA holds monthly board meetings on the second Thursday of every month from 7:00-9:00PM at River Bend Farm Visitor Center. Visit our website for the meeting agenda and directions to River Bend Farm. Meetings are open to the general public.

The BRWA is a volunteer organization. We rely on grants, donations and membership dues to support our programs. Donations to BRWA are tax deductible.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZipCode _____

Phone # _____ Email _____

Please send only email newsletters and notices.

\$ 10.00 Student/Senior

\$ 1000.00 Stream Steward

\$ 20.00 Individual

\$ 2500.00 River Steward

\$ 35.00 Family

\$ 5000.00 Watershed Steward

\$ 100.00 Benefactor/Corporate

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