



Blackstone River Monitor

Spring 2008

Volume 8, Issue 1

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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.

Newsletter of the Blackstone River Watershed Association

From the President...

Spring is slowly arriving, even though as I write, we seem to be in the final days of winter! I stopped by the Blackstone Gorge, part of the Blackstone River and Canal State Park. The contractors are continuing the renovation work of the overlook area. If you have never visited this spot, it is the last remaining wild section of the Blackstone River and is well worth the trip. It has some very impressive rapids during high water conditions when the waters of the Blackstone squeeze through the narrow cliffs. The renovated overlook will have an improved boat

launch and wheel chair access to the viewing area.

In this newsletter is a list of several events and activities scheduled for this spring and summer. The Annual Canoe/Kayak Race will be Saturday May 17, 2008. The Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring program has begun and will continue on the second Saturday of each month through November

We are continuing our highly successful Environmental Outreach Program this year, thanks to generous grants from UniBank and the Mass
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It's Canoe/Kayak Race Time again!

That's right! The 32nd Annual BRWA Canoe and Kayak Race will be held Saturday, May 17, 2008.

Registration will open at 9:30AM with the first race class departing at 11:00AM. The starting line will remain at Fisherville Mill in South Grafton and the finish line will be determined closer to race day based on the River conditions, but will be in the vicinity of River Bend Farm in Uxbridge, MA. Food and entertainment will be provided after the race. We will also hold an award ceremony for our 1st, 2nd and 3rd place class winners. NECKRA and New England Downriver Championship points will be awarded to participants of those organizations.

Opportunities for volunteers exist in the weekends prior to the race and on race day. We need volunteers on

April 26, 2008, at Grafton Community Day. The BRWA will be at the starting line, Fisherville Mill in South Grafton, to clean-up the site for race day. Saturday May 3, 2008, we are looking for volunteers to tidy up the Riverdale Mill portage site as well as a tree clean-up along the race route. We may also have portage work in South Grafton at Depot Street as well.

Race day volunteers are needed for parking lot duty, clean-up after the race, timing, safety, registration and more. If you are interested in volunteering for any of the above, please contact Rosemary Longo at roseisarose@hotmail.com or 508-839-9548.

Entry forms for the race will be mailed out in April and will be available online at the BRWA website, www.thebrwa.org.

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Construction Continues at Blackstone Gorge

Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation is doing a major renovation of the Blackstone Gorge. The Gorge is part of the Blackstone River and Canal State Park. This is the last remaining “wild” section of the Blackstone River.

The BRWA, in partnership with the John H. Chaffee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission, which funded most of the effort, was instrumental in the design and planning of this project. Renovations will be completed later this spring and will include a small boat access, view area landscaping, and handicap access.

This is one of several public River access sites planned and constructed based on a cooperative agreement between BRWA and the Corridor.



The BRWA would like to welcome the following new members:

John Czebotar - Uxbridge
Bill Funk - Upton
Wallace & Sandra Neely - Bellingham
Mile Sperry – Bellingham

Letter to the Editor...

A Small Town Fights Back

by Shirley Smith

Does a state road run close to a pond, lake or stream in your Blackstone River Watershed town? Are the catch basins on that state road connected to pipes that pour storm runoff directly into your pond, lake or stream? There is a rising tide of outrage sweeping across the state and the time is right to voice your complaints to your political representatives. This is a situation that is prevalent throughout the state. Mass Highway has, for many years, used our water bodies as dumping grounds for storm run off that is loaded with tons of sand, along with salt, oil, grease, automotive fluids, and heavy metals.

Since this is all in violation of the Clean Water Act, the Charles River Watershed Association and the Conservation Law Foundation are suing Mass Highway in Federal Court. The trial began this past February 8, 2008.

One community that is speaking out is the Town of Mendon. State Highway Route 16 runs along side a scenic Great Pond in that town. It is called Lake Nipmuc. Numerous catch basins are hooked up to pipes that empty into this lake. The result is a long, wide, peninsula of sediment that has formed at the mouth of one of these pipes. In front of another, an inlet is filled with this road sediment. What are not visible, of course, are the many pollutants: the salt, oils, grease, automotive fluids and heavy metals that have washed off the highway. The very thought of this causes parents to exclaim in shock and disbelief, "And my children swim in that water!"

For ten long years the Mendon Highway Department implored Mass Highway to do something to alleviate this problem. Those pleas fell on deaf ears. However, when members of the newly formed Lake Nipmuc Association sent pictures of the sediment

sand bar to John Fernandes, the State Representative for this town, there were surprising results.

On March 26, 2008, at 10:30AM, a contingent from Mass Highway, including at least one engineer; Department of Environmental Protection Wetlands Chief Philip Nadeau, a Mendon Selectman, a member of the Conservation Commission, half dozen Mendon Lake Nipmuc Association members, and 2 reporters, all met with Representative Fernandes on the shores of Lake Nipmuc and surveyed the problem. After an hour and forty-five minutes of thorough investigation, Representative Fernandes told the assemblage that he wanted to know what they were going to do and when they were going to do it. He wanted dates. He wanted a timeline. This was not going to be empty rhetoric and broken promises. This is something that was actually going to happen.

Does a state road run close to a pond, lake or stream in your Blackstone River Watershed town? Are the catch basins on that state road connected to pipes that pour storm run off directly into your pond, lake or stream? If the small town of Mendon fought back, so can you. And the time is now!



From LakeNipmuc.com website showing one of the offending storm drains.

Editor's Note: We welcome letters on issues affecting the Watershed. Shirley is a Mendon resident, member of BRWA and a founder of Lake Nipmuc Association.

More than Just a Yard: Ecological Landscaping

by Maggie Plasse

Every year we anxiously await spring and summer, looking forward to spending more time outdoors. Our yards become an extension of our homes. A place where we cook, play and relax. By transforming our yard into a wildlife-friendly, water-saving, low-maintenance, naturally beautiful place to enjoy, we can preserve bio-diversity, conserve water and save ourselves time and money. Ecological landscaping has grown in popularity as people become more aware of the risks of using pesticides and become conscious of the ecosystems that surround them.

Ecological landscaping involves preserving existing native vegetation, landscaping with new native plants, shrubs and trees and, if desired, adding non-invasive ornamentals that complement and do not out-compete the native vegetation. The benefits are: environmental protection or enhancement, time and cost savings, lower health risks from chemical pesticides and fertilizers, and it creates a haven where nature can be viewed and enjoyed. Local species of birds and butterflies are attracted to native plants on which they feed.

Two good sources listing native plants and trees and where to purchase them are: <http://www.massnativeplants.org/> and <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rdsduse/ma.htm>.



Where have all the fireflies gone?

Many people have wonderful childhood memories of warm summer nights in meadows alive with the flashing of fireflies. But as adults, we rarely see them. Are fireflies disappearing from our landscape? If so, why, and what can we do about it?

Help researchers determine why fireflies seem to be declining in Massachusetts. The Citizen Science Firefly Project will show you how to collect scientific data in a manner both useful to firefly researchers and fun for the whole family. Using your own backyard as a data collection site, chart the occurrence of fireflies throughout the season (May through August) and add this data to that of hundreds of other Citizen Scientists to create a picture of the status of fireflies in the state.

Collecting large amounts of data is the only way scientists can learn why fireflies are declining in numbers and what can be done to reverse this trend. Using Citizen Scientists is the only way scientists can collect large amounts of data.

Becoming a Citizen Scientist is easy and fun. Whether you participate as an individual or family, it is a great way to foster a lifelong interest in science and a greater understanding of natural history.

For more info, log on to <http://www.mos.org/firefly>

Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Summit Held

by Tammy Gilpatrick

A Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast and Summit was held on February 9, 2008. The event is held annually to thank the volunteer water quality monitors for their efforts and to release the annual report card of the sampling results.

Eighty dedicated and trained volunteers sampled rivers and streams at 81 sites throughout the watershed on a monthly basis from April through November 2007. The Blackstone River Watershed Association is responsible for covering the 35 sites from Grafton, Massachusetts to the MA/RI state border.

“The data clearly shows that over consecutive years and under very diverse weather conditions, nutrient loads are at much higher levels than they should be in a healthy aquatic system,” explained Tammy Gilpatrick, the Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program’s Coordinator. “Excessive nutrients cause overly abundant vegetative growth in receiving lakes and ponds and result in decreases in the amounts of dissolved oxygen and sunlight that support vigorous aquatic life. We are clearly seeing those conditions manifested throughout the region’s lakes and ponds,” she said.

Each monitoring site was given a grade for aesthetics, water temperature, dissolved oxygen, and percent saturation for dissolved oxygen and nutrients. The site is then rated excellent, good, fair or poor for each category. Out of the 81 sites monitored, 32 (40%) received a poor grade for in the nutrient category. The nutrient grade is a combination of nitrates and phosphates.

“Nitrates and phosphates are generated from things like the fertilizers and chemicals we put on our lawns and from septic tanks that aren’t working properly,” Gilpatrick explained. “The increased development in the area correlates to a cumulative increase in the nitrates and phosphates entering our waterways. The good news is that simple measures can greatly reduce this pollution.”

Excess stormwater runoff – carrying nitrates and phosphates to the waterways – is the major source of today’s river pollution. When it rains or when snow melts, the runoff from roads, parking lots, driveways, rooftops, and landscaped areas picks up sand, road salt, oils, grease, chemicals and animal wastes and washes them into the nearest storm drain. From there, the runoff travels through the stormwater system and empties, untreated, directly into the nearest stream, river, pond or lake. This stormwater runoff is from a multitude of sources (non-point source) and contains the sediments and pollutants that threaten our water quality, wildlife habitat, and recreational activities throughout the Blackstone River and its watershed today.

Homeowners can limit the use of fertilizers and lawn chemicals, dispose of pet waste properly, maintain vehicles to stop oil and antifreeze leaks, maintain their septic systems, and redirect rooftop runoff to vegetated areas.

For more details and to view the Blackstone Watershed Water Quality Report Card, visit the BRC’s website: www.zaptheblackstone.org. For more information or to become a volunteer, contact Tammy Gilpatrick, Program Coordinator at 508-278-2080.



BRWA 2008 Outreach Initiatives

by Michelle Walsh

At a recent meeting, the BRWA and members of the community got together to create a plan of action for this year's outreach initiatives. Based on stream surveys conducted in conjunction with Mass Riverway's Adopt-a-Stream Program, we are now able to focus on areas of concern along the Mumford River, Mill River, and West River. The initiatives put forth are intended to increase awareness of our impact on the health of these rivers and what we can do to restore and maintain the health of their rivers.

A general lack of awareness or even concern is apparent in several areas along the Rivers. It is our obligation to make sure we reach out to our communities and educate them on the negative impacts that are happening.

We need your help! Your participation in the following activities will help us be successful with this year's outreach initiatives. These include:

- Clean-up along the rivers
- Educating landowners adjacent to each River on issues such as stormwater runoff, river buffers, lawn care, household hazardous waste, cleaning products, pet waste, and car care
- Presentations to municipal conservation commissions and potentially other town departments

Clean-up efforts: Please join us on **Saturday, April 26 at 9AM** at River Bend Farm to kick off the BRWA's Earth Day celebration. We will target several areas along the Mumford River in Sutton, Douglas, Northbridge, and Uxbridge and other areas as needed to remove trash. Supplies will be distributed. Pizza will be provided at noon. Rally up your family, neighbors, scout troops, classmates, and pitch in!

Landowner Outreach: We are in the process of creating a target list of households and business owners that, based upon their location and/or activities, could have the most negative impact on the rivers. We need volunteers to drop off educational materials to each household and business on the target list.

We'll kick off our door-to-door drop-offs at River Bend Farm on **Saturday, May 3 at 9AM**. Breakfast will be provided along with a quick orientation. We'll meet again for lunch at noon to conclude the day's events. Help us raise community awareness with these river-friendly tips!

Residents along the River have the most impact on various types of runoff going into the water. We will provide The Blackstone River Coalition's (BRC) "A Homeowners Guide to Protecting Water Quality in the Blackstone River Watershed" that will help homeowners understand their role in improving water quality in the watershed. Some actions that homeowners can take include: limiting use of lawn chemicals, disposing of pet waste properly, maintaining septic systems, and properly disposing of household hazardous materials. Additional information will include the Water Quality Monitoring Program "report card" showing the quality of the waterways.

Businesses along the River can also directly impact water quality with polluted stormwater runoff. The BRC offers the "In Business for the Blackstone" program to encourage small to mid-size companies to adopt good housekeeping practices to minimize the risk of contaminants in stormwater runoff. These practices include: maintaining storm drains, keeping the parking lot clean, washing vehicles responsibly, practicing good dumpster management, and storing inventory in a protected area.

An electronic version of the **Homeowner's Guide** and water quality monitoring results, as well as highlights of the "In Business" program, can be found at www.zaptheblackstone.com.

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Town Meetings: Join us at local conservation commission meetings to lend your support. We will be scheduling meetings beginning in **late April or early May**. Our goal is to work in collaboration with towns including Sutton, Douglas, Northbridge, Upton, Uxbridge, Mendon, Hopedale, and Blackstone by presenting the stream survey findings and working together to come up with solutions. This is a chance to let your town leaders know how important the rivers are to the residents! Contact Michelle Walsh, Environmental Outreach Coordinator, at michelle@reed-walsh.com or 508-422-9391 for more info.

Each river has its own set on unique characteristics with many recreational opportunities for everyone to enjoy, however, many concerns are also evident including

- ◆ Erosion
- ◆ Invasive plant species
- ◆ Stormwater runoff
- ◆ Runoff from pipes discharging into water
- ◆ Vegetative buffer zone issues
- ◆ Trash including old construction materials, machinery, booms, litter



Top Left: No stream buffer lawn area, Hopedale Pond Top Right: Runoff at Hopedale Beach Bottom Left: Trash Dumped along West River Bottom Right: Lack of buffer at Hopedale Golf Course

from the President, continued from front page...

Department of Fish and Game/Riverways Program. Volunteers will be working to correct problems discovered during the shoreline surveys of the Mumford, West and Mill Rivers. These tributaries to the Blackstone are threatened in some areas by polluted runoff, riverbank erosion and discarded trash. The Stream Team volunteers will be soliciting help from residents, businesses, and towns to correct some of the discovered threats to these rivers

Thanks again to all of you for continuing to support the BRWA. Everyone is encouraged to attend the monthly BRWA meetings at the River Bend Farm Visitor Center on the second Thursday of each month. New ideas are always welcomed. Your input and support is essential to the continued growth and success of this organization.

Jim Plasse, March 2008

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 33 sites in the mid-reach section of the Blackstone River.
- **STREAM TEAMS** – BRWA established Stream Teams made up of volunteer River advocates. The volunteers conduct shoreline surveys, develop action plans, and work on resolving problem areas.
- **RIVER CLEAN-UPS** – BRWA regularly schedules riverbank clean-ups.
- **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 two newsletters per year in the spring and fall.
- **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 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. You can now join by credit card from our website.

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Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZipCode _____

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