

WATERSHED

A Newsletter of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association

Volume 21 No. 4

FALL 2004

Invasive Blackhawks threaten Black Farm Wildlife Preserve

Lori Urso

The recent proposal of the RI National Guard to use Black Farm Management Area in Hopkinton for Blackhawk and UH-1 Air Ambulance helicopter training has come under fire from neighboring property owners, town officials, and WPWA.

The land was purchased from the Black family under the RI Department of Environmental Management Land Conservation and Acquisition Program in 1992. According to RIDEM this program operates to define, assess, develop plans and acquire land consistent with the Department's responsibility to provide recreational lands and save environmentally sensitive open space. The recently distributed fact sheet for the 2004 Open Space Bond Issue alludes to shrinking opportunities for public hiking, watching nature or pursuing other recreation. The Black Farm was acquired to provide 264 acres for these purposes. It is WPWA's position that allowing helicopter drills to the extent proposed will further inhibit recreational use on Black Farm, as marine helicopters by nature are clearly incompatible with passive

recreational use.

An equally serious concern is the potential of such a use to deter prospective land sellers or donors from working with RIDEM to preserve their lands in the future. If landowners courted by promises of preservation have these promises violated by incompatible use, how can potential future donors be expected to trust RIDEM to keep their word on preservation? WPWA maintains that the promised use of Black Farm for passive recreation and open space is violated by the newly proposed use for military training. How can the state expect others to come forward with their lands after such a precedent has been set?

With regard to the sanctity of Black Farm as wildlife preserve, WPWA contends the continuous approach and touchdown of helicopters in this area will seriously impair the quality of habitat. The proposed timing of the training drills coincides with hours such animals-- deer, bats, fox, weasels, and many rodents-- would forage for food. The extreme noise and wind turbulence created by the aircraft could permanently exclude them from all surrounding areas. During the summer,

nesting birds may abandon their nests, and in the winter, already stressed animals may opt to avoid such areas regardless of food supplies.

Finally, WPWA has concerns about the scope of the proposed use by the RI National Guard. Initially the property was targeted as a site for use in the event of a natural disaster or state emergency. However, in the weeks ensuing the first reports, the proposal has expanded to regular proficiency training on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday nights, low-level navigation training using night-vision devices, and once-a-month drills on weekends. We are justifiably concerned that over time, the scope of use will continue to escalate and soon the state's control of the management area for its intended passive use will be lost forever.

WPWA believes the purpose of management areas is to preserve open space, provide habitat to indigenous wildlife and game species, and provide recreational opportunities for the public. Regular use of a management area for helicopter approach and landing runs completely contrary to these objectives.

Small Dams and Habitat Quality in Low Order Streams

This summer, WPWA continued to study small, low-order streams in the watershed by examining the effects of dams on habitat quality. Low order streams are wadeable streams, averaging a maximum of 10 feet wide and 2 feet deep. They are perennial, often groundwater fed streams that rarely if ever dry up during summer months. Water enters the stream at a comfy 55° F (13° C). Their substrates vary from rocks and cobbles to sand and silt., and their sinuous runs vary in depth from shallow runs and deep pools. Water running over shallow rocky areas creates waves and splashing that mechanically incorporates oxygen into the water column. The colder temperature of the small streams helps retain dissolved

oxygen. For streams in forested areas, the shade from trees also helps to keep the water cool and hospitable to native brook trout and macroinvertebrates.

Almost all low order streams in our watershed, and throughout New England, host one or more small to medium sized impoundments such as dams, weirs, or poorly designed road culverts. These act as barriers to the movement of fish up and down the stream. They also create ponding which increases water temperature, decreases dissolved oxygen, and alters macroinvertebrate populations in that section of the stream. Sometimes the barriers are century-old artifacts constructed for farm irrigation ponds or even small mills—essentially obsolete.

Funded by the John Wald Science Grant and the Community

Foundation of Southeastern CT, the study focused on sites on the Queen, Beaver, and Shunock Rivers to examine a variety of conditions, including fish and macroinvertebrate assemblages, temperature, flow, and the physical parameters of the dam. Electrofishing was done above and below the impoundments, and macroinvertebrates sampled in those locations as well as in the ponds. Temperature loggers were installed along the streams, particularly around the dam and impounded areas.

Dr. Saul Saila served as principal investigator for the study. He will analyze the data over the next few months, and expects to report by March 2005. Special thanks goes out to volunteers Mal Grant, Sue Cerrulo, and Jeremy Leber.

2004 Open Space, Recreation, Bay and Watershed Protection Bond

Question 8 on the November 2nd, 2004 Ballot

The General Assembly approved the Governor's proposal to put a bond on the November 2nd ballot that will provide **\$70 million** in funding to: Ø **Preserve our land** Ø **Protect our water** Ø **Create recreation facilities**

Bond funding would be allocated as follows:

- **\$25 million** for **open space** and **farmland preservation** including:
 - **\$15 million** for use by DEM to acquire and protect greenways and other priority open space, forested lands, state parks, recreation lands, and working farmland (through the state's farmland protection program).
 - **\$10 million** for grants to municipalities, land trusts, conservation commissions, and other environmental non-profit organizations for preservation of communities' priority open spaces.
- **\$18 million** for **recreation development** ... the design, development, expansion, and renovation of new or existing public recreation facilities and parks including:
 - **\$8 million** for the development or renovation of state recreational facilities including
 - **\$3 million** for restoration of Fort Adams, and
 - **\$10 million** in grants to municipalities including
 - **\$4 million** for Roger Williams Park & Zoo
- **\$19 million** for **clean water projects** . . . anti-pollution projects and restoration activities for Narragansett Bay and the State's watersheds, including:
 - **\$10.5 million** to a **revolving loan fund** for **wastewater treatment plant improvements** through loans to municipalities for the design, construction, repair, and upgrade of wastewater treatment facilities.
 - **\$8.5 million** for **clean water grants** for projects to restore and protect the water quality of Narragansett Bay and the State's watersheds.
- **\$8 million** for **protection of groundwater and public drinking water supplies** through land acquisition by the RI Water Resources Board.

Chariho students donate kayaks to WPWA

Over the last several years Chariho Middle School science teacher Dan Potts has been following a curriculum involving water quality issues and river ecology. One of his goals has been to give each of his students a chance to kayak on the Wood River. According to Potts "you can see things from a kayak that you can't from just standing on the shore." With WPWA's collaboration, Potts wrote a grant to purchase additional kayaks to accommodate his science class. Unfortunately the request was de-



Dan Potts and his students deliver kayaks to WPWA campus.

nied. Mr. Potts students, unwilling to accept defeat, surprised everyone but themselves by raising funds during their summer vacation to purchase 10 kayaks to add to the WPWA fleet of 14. The students held car washes, sold candy bars, and wrote letters to potential donors. An article in the Providence Journal about their efforts brought an anonymous donation of \$1500. The students worked with URE Outfitters for purchase of the kayaks, and delivery to WPWA Campus on September 9, 2004.

All 24 kayaks are being used by the Orange Team students at Chariho Middle School to observe conditions around Meadowbrook Pond, and to identify natural features and possible pollution sources. Chemical and biological sampling is also being conducted by the team. Their data will be

used in future science lessons. Perhaps the best part for the students will come next May with a planned kayak trip along the Wood River.

The benefits to WPWA are obvious: a larger fleet of boats for greater educational and recreational opportunities, and a growing crew of water quality volunteers, hopefully for the long term.

The following Monday was a beautiful late summer day, perfect for a paddle around the Meadowbrook Pond. With the colorful kayaks scattered across the pond, commandeered by the ambitious students, the power of positive thinking was on display, and the dedication of students inspired by a creative learning experience was clearly evident. For this was one field trip made possible by the determination of the students themselves.

EPA grant awarded on RI World Water Monitoring Day

Linda Murphy, the director of USEPA Office of Ecosystem Protection, visited WPWA Campus on October 18 to mark World Water Monitoring Day in RI, and to present a grant award of \$5000 to WPWA for environmental education.



Denise and Lori accept a check from USEPA's Linda Murphy.

State and local officials, Chariho Middle School students, parents and educators, and members of the local media attended the afternoon program, led by WPWA ex-

ecutive director Lori Urso.

Sue Kiernan from RIDEM Office of Water Quality spoke about statewide monitoring initiatives. WPWA program director Denise Poyer talked about WPWA's role in volunteer monitoring and environmental education. Chariho Middle School science teacher Dan Potts and his students talked about their monitoring programs, and gave a demonstration on wa-



USEPA staff and display with Wood River as a backdrop.

the

work of Denise Poyer



Channel 10 camera captures student monitoring demonstration.

to standardize student monitoring methods in school curricula so the data

meets standards for use in state reports and impact assessments.

World Water Monitoring Day is intended to encourage the global reporting of data to a common internet site for worldwide access and information. Water monitoring kits and educational information were distributed by USEPA during the event.

From the President

Is it safe to drink water from your own well?

Most of us don't know. If our well water has been tested, that generally has been only for bacterial contamination, and that sort of testing gives no information on contamination from, say, petrochemicals leaking from garages. Indeed, there are no Rhode Island quality standards for water drawn from private wells. We might reasonably have expected that by now such standards would be in place, because in 2002, the Rhode Island General Assembly established in the Department of Health an Office of Private Well Water Contamination (RIGL 23-1-5.2) and authorized this Office to, among other things, set standards for drinking water from private wells, and require testing of water from all new wells and from existing wells when the property on which the well is located is sold. Unfortunately, the General Assembly neglected to provide funding for this responsibility, and so the Department of Health has, so far, been unable to carry out this mandate.

The lack of assurance of water quality from private wells is dramatically different from the care with which water quality from public wells is regulated. Public wells (those that serve 25 people for a minimum of 60 days/year), must be licensed by the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH). RIDOH reviews the siting of the well, requires well-head area protection of a 200 to 400 foot radius (depending on the type of the well) in which poten-

tial contamination sources are excluded, requires testing of water at least annually and for some contaminants, more frequently, and requires the reporting of all test results to RIDOH and to those drinking the water from the public system.

Recently, through investigations conducted by Ken Young, a WPWA member, we learned that the developer of more than seventy residential units was proposing to drill ten private wells, thus evading virtually all regulation of the water supply for approx. 200 residents. At a meeting convened by the Conservation Commission to discuss this issue, the Chief of the Drinking Water Quality Office of RIDOH advised that this development should be served by a public system, but lacked the authority to require that her recommendation be followed. When the Hopkinton Town Council learned of this recommendation during the re-zoning hearing, it took no action to require a water system that would be protected and tested regularly, with results reported to the residents.

This situation alone would be a matter of considerable concern, but it appears that the developers of these residential units are not alone in evading the regulations intended to guarantee safe drinking water. At an informational session on planning for affordable housing, the RIDOH engineer who has the responsibility for reviewing applications for public wells said that she had received virtually no applications over the past several years, despite the fact that there have been a number of developments that are not served

by existing public water systems. Clearly, this is a loophole that needs to be closed, and WPWA is working actively on this problem.

The proposed private water supply for the seventy-unit development described above raises other troubling issues. Ken Young also discovered that there are two known sites of groundwater contamination within less than a mile of the development and that both have been well-known to the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) for a decade or more. These lengthy delays in taking enforcement actions appear to be a result in part from an erroneous assumption that town government would act and in part because of substantial personnel cuts in the enforcement staff at RIDEM.

WPWA staff and board members intend to work with RIDOH on developing private well standards and with RIDEM to identify sites of potential groundwater contamination in our watershed where enforcement may have lagged. Meanwhile, we urge our members who may be aware of significant residential development to question whether the developer is using the private well evasive technique, and to let our office know what you learn. Also, we'd be interested in receiving any information on locations in our watershed where past contamination may not be receiving proper enforcement attention.

- - Harold Ward



WPWA Members 2004-2005

Thank you to all new and renewed members for your generous support of WPWA programs.

Currently renewals are at a disappointing level of less than 50%. Please renew your commitment to the local environment by sending in your dues today!

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(Cont'd page 6)

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Alton Community Action appeals to local officials

Alton Community Action (ACA) is now holding monthly meetings on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 7pm in the Episcopal church in Alton to assist in their efforts to fight pollution attributed to the presence of the Charbert industrial plant.

Attending the group's last meeting were numerous state officials, including state senators Dennis Algieri (Westerly) and Kevin Breene (Charlton); Tim Mooney

from Senator Chaffee's office; town councilors Deborah Carney and Katherine Waterman (Charlestown), Scott Bill Hurst (Hopkinton), and Mike Sullivan (Richmond); and Tom Getz from RIDEM.

Alton residents are seeking relief from air and water contamination attributed to the presence of the plant, which is currently under state investigation.

For more information, visit the ACA website at: <http://www.geocities.com/altoncommunityaction>.

Legislative grant provides funds for water quality work

WPWA has received a \$5000 community service grant from the RI General Assembly to fund volunteer water quality monitoring programs sponsored by WPWA in the watershed.

The grant, sponsored for the second year by RI State Senator Kevin Breene (Dist. 34), will help fund laboratory analysis of pond and stream samples collected throughout the region this year.

WPWA CANOE AND HIKING GUIDES

Order Form

Wood-Pawcatuck River Guide

By Charlie Hickox and Elly Heyder

\$4.50 per copy (\$3.50 members)

Navigate the Wood and Pawcatuck Rivers from source to sea with this colorful folded map.



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_____ *Wood-Pawcatuck River Routes Map*_____ *Walks in the Watershed*_____ *Pawcatuck Watershed Report (free)*Add \$1.50 postage and handling per item.

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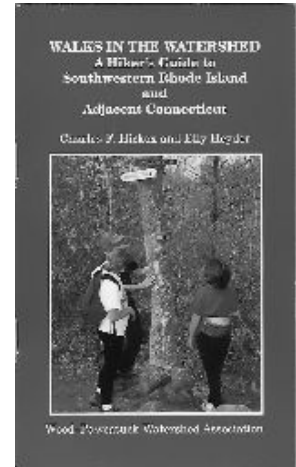
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Sixteen of the watershed's best loop hikes contained in a handy pocket-sized guide

****Upcoming Conferences******** FALL CANOE ******LAND TRUST ALLIANCE****Preserving Family Lands:
Protecting Your Land for
Future Generations**

Friday, October, 29 th

8:30 am - 12:30 pm

Rhode Island Convention Center
Providence, RI

This seminar is designed specifically for *landowners* who are interested in learning how to protect their land, and for newcomers to the land conservation field. Based on the Land Trust Alliance's publication, *Conservation Options: A Landowner's Guide* (LTA, 1993, 2002) and Stephen Small's *Preserving Family Lands* books, this seminar will walk landowners through a variety of land protection measures.

Free of charge to landowners.

Please call 202-638-4725.

**RI Environmental
Education Association
(RIEEA) presents...****Environmental Education is
a Walk in the Park**

Saturday, October 30, 2004

8:30 am - 3:00 pm

Roger Williams Park
Providence, RI

This conference is aimed at formal and informal educators looking to bring fresh ideas about environmental education into the teaching arena.

The fee is \$40 standard/
\$30 student.

Please call Tara Padula, 401-785-3510 or tpadula@rwpzoo.org.

Last of the Leaves Paddle

October 30, 2004

10:00 am to 12 noon

Meet at the WPWA office for a relaxing upstream paddle on the Wood River.

Enjoy the last of the fall foliage, and seasonal wildlife sightings.

\$5.00 per person

Kayaks available to rent for and additional \$10.00, or bring your own boat.

PFD's required.

Call or email to register
401-539-9017

Danielle@wpwa.org

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Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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- _____ Individual \$25
- _____ Family \$40
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In addition to my dues, I am enclosing an additional contribution of \$ _____

All but \$5.00 of your dues is tax deductible within the limits of the law.

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Wood-Pawcatuck
Watershed Association



Exeter-West Greenwich ninth grader
Todd Barber sorts and identifies
macroinvertebrates in our bug lab.

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