

WATERSHED

A Newsletter of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association

Volume 25 No. 2

SPRING 2008

WPWA Bids A Fond Farewell To Long Time Director Lori Urso

By Meg Kerr

I have had the pleasure to work with Lori for many years and consider her a respected colleague and personal friend. During her years as Executive Director of WPWA, Lori has been a strong and effective voice for the rivers and watershed that we all love. But she has also contributed her talents to regional and statewide projects and is respected throughout the state as a leading watershed activist, a regional leader in watershed management, and a leader in promoting regional government.

Lori likes to remind us that the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed has a strong hold on her and that she has twice served as WPWA's Executive Director. In 1992, when she first came to the organization, WPWA was a small watershed organization with about 300 members. Under her leadership, WPWA has grown into strong organization with about 1,000 members, known throughout the state and region for its programs, research, and advocacy. WPWA has a glorious campus on the banks of the

Wood River, where staff and visitors can watch heron, otters, and other wildlife and can take a lunch time paddle to relax and unwind. WPWA's board includes experts from Rhode Island's universities, government, and business who oversee talented staff that lead scientific studies of water quality and fisheries, provide extensive recreational programs including boating, fishing and hiking, and coordinate riparian habitat and fisheries restoration projects.



Lori Urso, Long
Time WPWA
Exec. Director

Throughout her years at WPWA, Lori has had a panoramic vision for watershed management statewide and she has promoted WPWA as a model for other organizations to follow. WPWA was the first watershed organization in Rhode Island to receive designation by the RI Rivers Council as a state recognized watershed council. Lori has mentored other watershed organizations, helping them understand the obligations and opportunities presented by grassroots watershed management.

Lori and WPWA have also helped other watershed groups and land trusts by contributing time and expertise to a collaborative learning network that is developing and testing administrative support structures for small non-profit conservation organizations.

Lori's work for WPWA would have kept any other person more than busy, but in November 2000, Lori was elected for a two year term on the Westerly Town Council. During her tenure, she served as Westerly's representative to the newly formed Washington County Regional Planning Council (WCRPC). I was also working with the WCRPC through my job at the URI Coastal Resources Center, and was constantly impressed with the energy, vision, and leadership that Lori brought to the Council's work.

For Earth Day, 2008, the Environmental Protection Agency in Boston recognized Lori for her many accomplishments, giving her a Lifetime Achievement Environmental Merit Award. I had the pleasure of introducing her and told the group that Lori

(Continued on page 7)

From the Executive Director

It was an honor to be selected by the WPWA Board of Directors as the new Executive Director of this outstanding watershed council. Upon taking over the reins from former director Lori Urso, I quickly learned I had large shoes to fill. WPWA is an ever evolving and growing grass roots watershed association charged with a multitude of missions. Most of which were shaped by Ms. Urso in an effort to protect and preserve the pristine lands and waters that comprise the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed. As the new director I hope to maintain and eventually build upon the broad range of initiatives the association is engaged in. Eventually I hope to implement new and innovative programs that further engage the watershed's youth with the goal of cultivating the next generation of land and water stewards in Rhode Island. Over the coming months WPWA will acquire a new cargo van and trailer to better serve our many kayak and canoe programs. I am particularly looking forward to redesigning our website. This new and interactive website is expected to further increase WPWA's ability to bring valuable information to its constituency and increase the efficiency of our organization. I look forward to meeting you all over the coming months and humbly serving as your new leader in watershed protection.



Vernal Pool Inventory and Assessment in the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed



Volunteers hard at work assessing a pool

For many of us, spring is heralded by the sound of wood frogs and spring peepers calling to mates from vernal pools throughout the woods. Vernal pools are important, somewhat enigmatic, breeding habitats for many amphibians and invertebrates. Vernal pools are small basins, usually less than 1 acre in size, and tend to dry up during the summer months. This dry period generally eliminates the possibility of fish presence within the pools and greatly reduces predation upon the amphibian eggs and tadpoles. Certain amphibians, such as the wood frog and spotted salamander, can only successfully breed in vernal pools. This spring over 80 WPWA volunteers, ranging in age from 7 to 70, ventured into the woods to locate and assess vernal pools throughout the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed.

Several years ago, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) initiated a project that sought to identify, through the use of aerial survey maps, potential vernal pools in the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed. That project identified over 1,400 possible vernal pools, of which only about 300 had already been assessed during various studies conducted by the University of

Rhode Island and RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM). RIDEM, in conjunction with the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWPCC), decided to assess, or "field check", as many pools as possible. An estimated 500 pools were located within protected lands leaving over 600 pools residing on private unprotected land. The latter group was deemed to be high priorities for assessment due to their unprotected locations. A lack of available staff researchers within RIDEM prompted WPWA to develop a volunteer program to help accomplish their goal.

While only two training sessions were initially planned, the response to volunteer recruitment was so tremendous that a third session was added. During these sessions volunteers learned about vernal pools, their important role in the landscape, and the need for their protection. In addition, volunteers were instructed on how to perform a vernal pool assessment and accurately fill out data sheets. While conducting their field studies, volunteers were asked to look for any evidence of the creatures that depend on vernal pools for their life cycles - wood frogs, spotted salamanders, marbled salamanders, and fairy shrimp. After locating their assigned pool from



Spotted Salamander Egg Mass

aerial maps provided by RIDEM, volunteers looked
(Continued next page)

for egg masses attached to branches and grasses in the sunny areas of the pool. WPWA volunteers were provided with equipment, including nets used to determine the presence of tadpoles, fairy shrimp, and any other aquatic lifeforms. Some participants were also given meters to measure temperature, pH, and dissolved solids. Lastly, they took measurements of the pools and photographed everything of interest.

The vernal pool study will be coming to a close in the middle of May. The results so far have been very enlightening. Some sites were discovered to have no water in them; some sites contained fish; others were located too close to roads and buildings to support any lifeforms. However, many of the assessed pools were found to have wood frogs or spotted salamander eggs. In fact, several pools known to have permanent water were found to contain amphibian eggs. Approximately 120 pools were assessed by WPWA volunteers with the same number or more conducted by RIDEM. A final report of the findings is expected to be released in late summer.

The keys to successfully conducting this project have been the cooperation of the land owners who allowed volunteers to access their property and the high level of enthusiasm and commitment from so many volunteers. Most volunteers were surprised at how much fun they had while conducting their studies, in addition to just how much they had learned about vernal

pools. Of significant importance to the volunteers was that their efforts as citizen scientists are contributing to the understanding of vernal pools in our area.

WPWA was supported in this project by generous grants from the Rhode Island Rivers Council, Cornell Douglas Foundation, and Kayla Jean Ricci Memorial Foundation.

WPWA Celebrates Opening Day

As dawn broke on the morning of April 12th, 2008 anglers gathered from all over Rhode Island to make their first cast of the fishing season. As the clock neared the 6am start time, the masses readied their poles, made a last check of their bait, and wondered what their haul might be. Those fishing at WPWA headquarters at Barberville Dam and the newly restored Switch Road Landing were greeted by volunteers and offered a free coffee or hot chocolate refill for their re-useable mugs. A warm drink was a welcomed relief to many as the skies unleashed a brief morning downpour. The lightning, and in some areas of the watershed hail, sent fisherman scrambling for cover, offering a brief respite for the fish and anglers alike. In true Rhode Island fashion, the sun quickly returned and it was back to the business of fishing.

DEM Director Michael Sullivan made his rounds of our local fishing holes with Environmental Police Officer Richard Browning. While Browning checked anglers for valid fishing licenses Director

Sullivan took the opportunity to interact with fishermen in an effort to gain a better understanding of how DEM may better serve the recreational fishing community. While speaking with WPWA's new leader, Chris Fox, Sullivan pointed to an elementary aged fisherman stating "that is what this day is all about, getting children involved in outdoor recreation". Director Sullivan was impressed as he surveyed the new Switch Road Landing which WPWA played the lead role in creating and implementing as part of our ongoing public access and stream bank restoration efforts.

Many anglers live by the expression "a bad day fishing is better than a good day working" and that proved true for some on opening day. Fishermen gave mixed reports on their success which most indicated had more to do with bait selection than location. There were many paddlers in attendance who preferred to cast their lines away from the crowds, seeking refuge in areas of the Wood and Pawcatuck Rivers accessible only by boat. Regardless of the location, the weather, the bait, or the crowds there was an overwhelming sentiment that it was just nice to get outside and fish.

Each year the WPWA staff look forward to Opening Day as it signals the start of our outdoor recreation season, and all are excited to reconnect with all our angling friends after the long winter hibernation.



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Shannock Fishway Restoration

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Bradford Fishway Rehabilitation

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Conservation Service (WHIP)
Switch Road Landing River Access

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Conservation Service (WHIP)
Shannock Fishway Restoration

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RI State Senate
Water Quality Monitoring

\$4600
RI Rivers Council
Vernal Pool Inventory

Municipal Government

Town of West Greenwich \$400
Town of Charlestown \$600
Town of Hopkinton \$1000
Town of No. Kingstown \$250
Town of Richmond \$500
Town of So. Kingstown \$1000
Town of Stonington \$1000

Property Tax Exemptions granted by towns of Richmond & Hopkinton for river access areas.

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The Patnod Family
.4-acres on the Pawcatuck River
at River Rd.



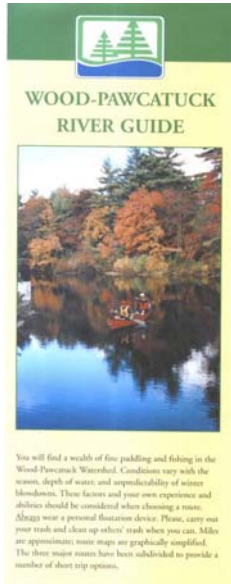
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WPWA CANOE AND HIKING GUIDES

Order Form

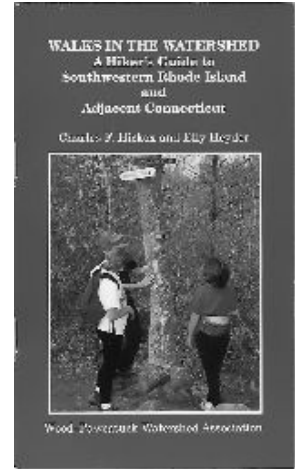
Wood-Pawcatuck River Guide (2nd edition)

By Charlie Hickox and Elly Heyder
 \$ 4.00 members (\$5.00 non-members)
 Navigate the Wood and Pawcatuck Rivers from source to sea with this colorful folded map.



Walks in the Watershed

By Charlie Hickox and Elly Heyder
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 Sixteen of the watershed's best loop hikes contained in a handy pocket-sized guide



Quantity:
 _____ Wood-Pawcatuck River Routes Map
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 Add \$1.50 postage and handling per item.

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- River trail maintenance
- Susan Cerullo
- Garden maintenance
- Marty Richards
- Lawn Care

Fond Farewell

(cont'd from Pg 1)

seems too young to receive an award recognizing a lifetime of work. But Lori Urso packs a lot into her work. I know that wherever the winds blow her, we will be hearing of her accomplishments and we should expect to read about another lifetime achievement award for Lori in 2018.

Lori, thank you for all you have done for WPWA and Rhode Island. We will miss you!

-Meg Kerr, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program



You are cordially invited to attend...

The
25th Annual Meeting of the
 Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Association
 Wednesday, May 21, 2008
 6:00-7:30 p.m.

AGENDA

Welcome and Remarks
 Presentation of Annual Report
 Election of Trustees

Fifth annual presentation of
The Salomon Award
 To
 Sen. Kevin Breene
 Kevin Essington
 Kathleen Wainwright

Boucher's Wood River Inn
 Rte. 3 and 138
 Wyoming, Rhode Island

Cash Food and Bar Optional

R.S.V.P. by May 14th
 401-539-9017 / info@wpwa.org

Application for Membership

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City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone/Email _____

- ____ Individual \$25
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**Wood-Pawcatuck
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