

WATERSHED

A Newsletter of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association

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WINTER 2008

Attractive Switch Road Landing replaces a riverside eyesore

By Dante Ionata

Switch Road and the Wood River flow south out of the village of Hope Valley mostly together with the river here and there tucking in close under the shoulder of the road.

A couple of hundred yards south of the Interstate 95 overpass, the river drifts away from the road leaving a wide sandy area between the two, a dusty, ugly scar along the forested river bank.

The trees and brush had been scraped away more than 130 years earlier when the land had been cleared to build the Wood River Branch Railroad. Since the railroad was abandoned in 1947, the space has been used as



Erosion at the site is now under control, and the ground replanted with native species.

an access to the Wood River by recreationists and others. Unfortunately, it had also been used for too long to launch vehicular assaults and other abuses against the river. It was raw, bare ground, cold and un-

friendly, hostile to the river.

The eyesore between the Wood River and Switch Road is not there anymore. It has been transformed into an attractive river access, tastefully landscaped with native plantings, that embraces visitors, welcomes them to the river, and invites them to use it. The new access harmonizes with and is comfortable with the lovely stream.

Lori Urso, WPWA's Executive Director, initiated the project to create the river access more than five years ago "primarily to prevent erosion, upgrade the water quality and protect the river from the abuse it was suffering. Cars were being driven into the river, spinning wheels on the river bank and in the water. Wheel ruts were being plowed in the sandy bank leading directly into the water



View from the parking area looking down the pathway to the Wood River.

causing really severe erosion."

"Not only was the river being badly abused but the land was also being abused. Cars were being driven and parked all over that piece of land seemingly with no regard to the environmental damage being caused. We decided to do something about it."

Bob Schiedler, WPWA President, said,

"Development of a proper access would not only protect the river, it was consistent with WPWA's policy of encouraging and improving the quality of recreational use of rivers in our watershed."

Working with Lori and state officials, the engineering firm of Cherenzia & Associates of Westerly designed the new access to prevent cars from driving into the water and to eliminate or at least minimize the thoughtless abuse of the land caused by driving cars and other vehicles all over the landscape there. A line of vertical timbers confines autos to a gravel parking area. Large boulders have been placed

(See Switch Road Landing Page 3)

Volunteer this spring

Vernal Pool Field Assessment and Inventory

This spring WPWA is launching a new project to inventory vernal pools in the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed. Volunteers are needed between March and May to locate and assess selected sites of potential vernal pools. Assessment includes verifying the presence or absence of pools and amphibious species, recording physical data, taking digital photos, and recording GPS data points.

Two training sessions will be offered. Volunteers need attend only one. The dates are Saturday, February 23, 2 to 5pm, or Tuesday, February 26, 6 to 9pm.

This is an ideal project for those who enjoy working outdoors and walking in the woods. Waders will be needed. If you don't have your own, WPWA has some to lend. Also helpful would be extra hand-held GPS units and digital cameras.

Please contact Denise Poyer at denisep@wpwa.org or 401-539-9017 to inquire.

Paddle guides, worm-hookers and litter-pickers

As the warmer weather approaches, so do events such as the annual Earth Day River Clean-Up, the Source-to-Sea Paddle, and Family Fun Fishing. Each of these great events has room for some helping hands. Read on for more information about these opportunities.

Our annual Earth Day Cleanup

is on Saturday, April 26 from 9am to noon. This is a great outing for families and community groups who would enjoy working as a team to clean a particular site. It is also fine for volunteers flying solo. WPWA and RI Department of Environmental Management provide the trash bags, gloves and other supplies, and E-Z Waste helps with the disposal. You simply clean your site, and deliver your bags to our campus when finished. Our cleanups take place at popular river access areas—thirty in all throughout nine towns. So there is likely to be a location convenient to you.

If you enjoy paddling and prefer an on-river opportunity, then how about being a volunteer river leader for one of our four Source-to-Sea Paddles in June? Those with paddling experience are needed to help guide a group that includes paddlers of a range of skill levels including novice. If you have a Saturday free in June, consider getting involved with this annual event. To see the weekly locations, you can visit www.wpwa.org and click "Events 2008".

Finally, for the anglers out there, WPWA could use your help to teach kids the basics of fishing at our Family Fun Fishing event. From 10am to 1pm on Friday July 11 and 18, around twenty five kids and their parents will join us at an informal pond-side setting to learn how to hook a worm and cast their line. WPWA needs patient and knowledgeable volunteers to help kids learn how to do it

right, in hopes of landing a hungry Blue-gill. Being able to efficiently unhook fish and release to the water is also important.

If any of these opportunities tug at your heart, please give us a call! Or send an email Danielle@wpwa.org. We welcome your participation.

North Stonington PZC denies 408-unit Garden Ct

The mandate by vocal opponents resonated with North Stonington Planning and Zoning Commission in December when it denied the proposed 408-unit Garden Court affordable housing proposal at Boombridge Road.

WPWA members in attendance cited water supply concerns, sewage treatment alternatives, road and safety issues, and school crowding as repeated arguments made in opposition to the plan at recent public hearings.

To inject more local control over future high-density proposals, the board approved a moratorium on some types of subdivision applications. The Board will study the issue of how best to balance the need for affordable housing stock with the desire to maintain rural character.

Detractors also found the proposal to be inconsistent with the character of rural North Stonington. Most felt a 408-unit, 3-story garden apartment complex would not blend into the quiet riverside landscape surrounded by historically agricultural lands at the location.

Switch Road Landing

(Continued from Page 1)

to form a natural barrier to keep cars from driving across a planted area into the water. A smaller parking area ensures that the river will not be overwhelmed at that spot.

Stone dust paths accessible to wheelchairs zig-zag and meander down to the river so fishermen, paddlers and wildlife viewers can easily reach the river. Grass has been planted throughout to prevent erosion and native shrubs and trees enhance the beauty of the new access.

"Much of the Wood River is pristine and extraordinarily beautiful", Lori said. "It is considered by most to be the cleanest river in the State of Rhode Island. Our objective was to create an access that would communicate with the river, respect it, and be worthy of its importance to us as a natural and recreational resource."

The total project cost for design, construction, plantings and project management is an estimated \$94,000 and has been financed in part by a federal TEA-21 grant through RI Department of Transportation (DOT) of \$50,000, and a grant of \$24,000 from USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service under the WHIP program. WPWA provided project management ser-

vices, and Cherenzia and Associates provided free and reduced cost design services and consultation.

WPWA President Schiedler said, "It was a genuine pleasure working with Jerome Williams to develop this marvelous river access. Without the extraordinarily valuable assistance afforded to us by Jerry and his department, we could never have accomplished this project, which so beautifully benefits the riverscape as well as the streetscape."

Bob also warmly praised DEM Director W. Michael Sullivan for his help. "In order to convert this piece of land to such an attractive access for the citizens of Rhode Island", Bob said, "we needed his department's full support and cooperation, and Mike was super in ensuring that we got all the help that we needed."

"This is a small but wonderful example of how public and private sectors can work together to improve environmental quality in our watershed," Bob concluded."

Central Nurseries of Johnston began work on the new access in mid-November and by mid-December the project was completed. WPWA will join with the Rhode Island Departments of Transportation and Environmental Management to dedicate the access in the spring.

The Wood River Branch Rail-

road was built in 1874 between Hope Valley and the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad, connecting to the main line at Richmond Switch in Wood River Junction, providing passenger service and also freight service to a number of mills in the village. It was seven miles long and ran basically parallel to Switch Road on one of its flanks and the river on the other.

One of the mills it served was a feed mill owned by a former RI Speaker of the House Roy Rawlings, who produced cattle and chicken feeds. When the mill burned down in 1947, the railroad also went out of business.

Riverside cottage for rent

The three-bedroom cottage located on our Barberville campus aside the Wood River is currently available to lease.

Close to Arcadia and to Route 95, it has a living room with view, eat-in kitchen, full bath, basement storage, and a carport. Rent is \$1250 per month plus utilities. Call 401-539-9017.

Thanking our river monitors in Avondale

In our last issue of *Watershed*, volunteer Stephen Leinhass was omitted from the list of Watershed Watchers. Stephen monitored the Pawcatuck River at Avondale in 2007. Marie Leinhass also volunteered at this location. Our thanks to both Stephen & Marie.



We're squandering our "wet wealth"

By Harold R. Ward

The Providence Journal editorial of November 9, 2007 ("Our wet wealth") correctly identified Rhode Island's abundant supply of fresh water as a potential advantage in the competition for economic development. Unfortunately, the perception of abundance and the artificially low price of water (well under the true cost) have led us to squander our "wet wealth." We are in danger of losing this competitive advantage.

Our use of water in the autumn, winter and spring months has been level or in some cases decreasing over the last several decades. Our summer use, on the other hand, has shown a steady increase. Use in the non-summer months includes all of our essential needs - for drinking, cooking and sanitation. The summer increase results almost entirely from outdoor use - mostly for lawn irrigation. In many communities, monthly summer use is double the winter demand. In the summer of 2005 (a dry summer, but not a drought year), water demand in Warwick was *triple* the winter monthly demand. The impact of the summer peak is most dramatic in systems supplied by groundwater. North Kingstown, for example, depends entirely on water withdrawn from the Hunt, Annaquatucket and Pettaquamscutt (HAP) aquifer. In the summer of 2005, and again this year, the Hunt River, drained by seasonal

demand, all but stopped flowing.

In order to use our "wet wealth" to attract economic development, water supply must be dependable. Generally, industrial demand is relatively constant, and can't be curtailed when droughts occur. When a bio-tech firm considered—and decided against—locating at the Quonset Development Park, it could not have helped that the significant amount of water its plant required was not reliably available from the HAP aquifer - at least not without further draining the Hunt River.

A responsible water budget would set our expectations for water use based on what is available in a dry year. Restricting use only in the time of drought is too late to protect our rivers and streams and to provide the reliable supply we need to foster economic development.

The extremes of summer water use drain away water that could be used for economic vitality. Even worse, they are unnecessary. Rhode Island's turf farmers tell us that established lawns never require more than one inch of water per week. Yet even during the moderate drought of late summer this year, most water suppliers took no action to reduce demand. Of the five suppliers with mandatory restrictions on lawn watering, four imposed an "odd-even" system - a practice that has been shown to *increase* water consumption, apparently because when this is instituted some residents conclude that they *should* water their lawns every other day. And in spring 2007, faced with the prospect of a stagnant

Hunt River, the North Kingstown Town Council refused to approve the proposal by the manager of its water supply to mandate once-per-week lawn irrigation.

In order to take full advantage of our "wet wealth," we need to budget that resource, and allocate it to our essential needs. First, the Department of Environmental Management, which for at least three years has been studying the amount of water necessary to maintain healthy streams, needs to set standards that will provide the baseline for our water budget. Then the Water Resources Board needs to allocate that water amongst competing uses, giving priority to essential household uses and the efficient use of water by industrial and commercial interests, including agriculture. Until we establish sound water budgets based on enforceable water supply plans, our "wet wealth" will not provide an effective economic development advantage.

Harold Ward is the Policy Director for the Coalition for Water Security, and a WPWA Trustee. This opinion piece appeared in the Providence Journal on November 25.

Potter Hill Mill on the web

The new vision for the Potter Hill Mill site in Westerly is illustrated in renderings, video and text on a new web page.

Architectural firm Chris Fagan Design of Providence is hosting the page on their site. Find it at <http://chrisfagandesign.com/id9.html>. A link to a 3D site study video on YouTube is provided.

Partner News & Events

Land & Water Conservation Summit

Saturday, March 15, 2008
8:30 AM - 4:00 PM

URI Memorial Student Union
Kingston, RI

The Land and Water Summit is premier gathering of Rhode Island's grassroots conservation leaders: Land Trusts, Watershed Councils & Conservation Commissions.

Presented by the Land and Water Partnership, this day-long conference will provide the skills, information and connections you need to be an effective conservationist.

The conference offers thirty workshops with practical "how to" techniques and the latest information for community conservation leaders. It is also an excellent opportunity for networking with conservation leaders from across Rhode Island.

Keynote Speaker:

Gina McCarthy, Commissioner
Connecticut Department of
Environmental Protection:
"No Child Left Inside"

Gina McCarthy will discuss the importance of connecting families and children to the landscapes and watersheds that we are trying to protect.

No Child Left Inside is a response to the best selling book "Last Child in the Forest." The trend is that children don't go outside and play much anymore. They don't ride bikes, climb trees, or catch frogs as often as their parents did.

The goal of *No Child Left Inside* is

to unplug our kids and families from their computers, televisions, and electronic games and reconnect them to the natural world.

Registration information:
Visit landandwaterpartnership.org for additional information. Or contact Rupert Friday 401-331-7110 x39 rfri-day@tnc.org, or Meg Kerr 401-874-6525 megkerr@cox.net

The Summit is sponsored by the RI Land Trust Council, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program and the RI Association of Conservation Commissions.

John H. Chafee Conservation Leadership Award 2008

Call for Nominations

The Environment Council of Rhode Island Education Fund is honored to announce that it is accepting applications for the John H. Chafee Conservation Leadership Awards for 2008. Honoring the memory of the late Senator and his dedication to the Rhode Island environment, the ECRI Ed Fund honors four Rhode Island organizations each year for their work in improving the health of the Rhode Island environment. Winners are picked by an independent panel of judges based on applications received from RI businesses, non-profit organizations, and municipalities that highlight specific actions related to conservation. Past winners include businesses that eliminated pollution discharges, successful recycling programs, renewable energy projects, upgrades to sewage treatment facilities, successful land conservation

initiatives, and projects providing hands-on environmental education for Rhode Island children.

Applications are due at the Environment Council office by February 16, and may be obtained on the Environment Council website www.environmentcouncilri.org or by calling 401-621-8048.

ECRI meetings to be held in Providence

ECRI has changed the time and location of its monthly meetings to Monday nights at 5:30 PM in Conference Room B at the Department of Administration building on Smith Hill in Providence. All are welcome.

Wednesday Morning Fly-Tying In Hope Valley

On Wednesday mornings around 9 am, a group of anglers from Trout Unlimited and Wood River Fly Fishing Club meets for a casual two-hour fly-tying session at the WPWA campus on Arcadia Road.

The group, which includes many familiar faces, welcomes fly-tyers of all abilities to drop by for an impromptu lesson, or to share their own skills.

Bring your own tools and materials if you have them. For additional information, call Lawson Cary at 401-828-2866.



Lawson Cary and friends tie flies at WPWA on Wednesdays.

RI, CT drop in broodstock for winter angling

RIDEM stocks Atlantic salmon and trout for ice fishing season

The RI Department of Environmental Management (DEM) announced that the Division of Fish and Wildlife stocked about 450 surplus domestic Atlantic salmon broodstock in five ponds statewide in early January in anticipation of the winter ice-fishing season. Winter trout stocking will take place later in the month.

Salmon stocking locations will include Olney Pond in Lincoln, Stafford Pond in Tiverton, Barber Pond in South Kingstown, Meadowbrook Pond in Richmond, and Carbuncle Pond in Coventry. The salmon, mostly between five and twelve pounds each, are from the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Nashua and White River Junction National Fish Hatcheries in Vermont.

"This is the greatest number of salmon that we have received for stocking in several years, a great New Year's gift for our anglers," says division chief Michael Lapisky.

A current fishing license and a Trout Conservation Stamp are required to keep or possess a salmon. The daily creel and possession limit for domestic Atlantic salmon is two fish as part of the daily trout limit, which currently stands at two per day.

Tests by the US Fish and Wildlife Service indicate that domestic Atlantic salmon produced by national fish hatcheries in the Northeast do have low levels of PCB contamination, but the PCB levels do not exceed existing federal

consumption safety levels. To protect public health, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, in conjunction with the US Environmental Protection Agency, recommends that those eating these salmon restrict themselves to one meal per month.

At present, there is no safe ice. As the winter season progresses, anglers should check with individual communities about safe ice conditions on local ponds before ice fishing. Ice must have a uniform thickness of at least six inches before it is considered safe by DEM. It generally takes at least five to seven consecutive days of temperatures in the low 20s before ice may become safe. Even then, the strength of the ice is determined by a number of factors such as the size and depth of a pond, presence of springs or currents, and local temperature fluctuations. DEM has an ice safety guide that can be found online at its website, www.dem.ri.gov, by clicking on "Parks and Recreation" under "Offices and Divisions."

CTDEP stocks brown trout in lakes and ponds statewide

In anticipation of this winter's freeze, the CT Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has completed its annual winter stocking of surplus broodstock brown trout. The DEP stocked approximately 1,100 surplus See-forellen-strain broodstock brown trout into fifteen lakes and ponds scattered throughout the State during the last two weeks of 2007. The fish released this winter were raised at the Kensington State Fish Hatchery and weigh between 1 and 15 pounds each. "These trout are spawned at the hatchery in the

late fall and are then stocked out in the winter to provide additional opportunities for ice anglers to catch a large trout," said Ed Parker, Chief of DEP's Bureau of Natural Resources.

In eastern Connecticut, Black Pond (Middlefield/Meriden), Black Pond (Woodstock), Crystal Lake, Mashapaug Lake and Quonnipaug Lake each received 50 fish, and Amos Lake, Bashan Lake, Cedar Lake and Long Pond were stocked with 75 fish each. In western Connecticut, a total of 545 broodstock were released into the following waters: Tyler Lake, West Hill Pond, Stillwater Pond, Mohawk Pond, Mt. Tom Pond, and Westside Pond.

DEP reminds winter anglers to be aware that ice thickness varies on CT water bodies due to a number of environmental factors. Please check the ice carefully before venturing out and check repeatedly to make sure that ice thickness is sufficient.

Anglers are reminded that the 2008 fishing and hunting licenses are now available and can be purchased at town halls, bait and tackle shops, and many stores that sell outdoor sporting equipment. Anglers will also soon be able to purchase their licenses online. The new *2008 Connecticut Angler's Guide*. Guides are available from Town Clerks, many bait & tackle stores, by contacting the DEP Inland Fisheries Division (860-424-FISH) or can be accessed on the DEP web site at www.ct.gov/dep/fishing.

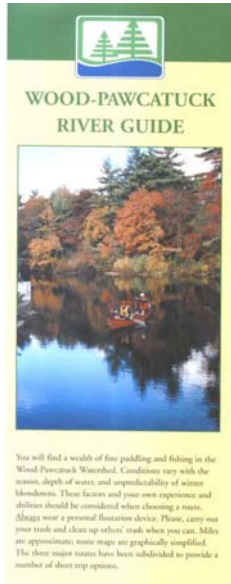


WPWA CANOE AND HIKING GUIDES

Order Form

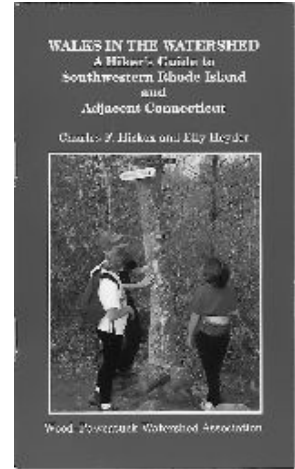
Wood-Pawcatuck River Guide (2nd edition)

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
 \$4.00 members (\$5.00 non-members)
 Sixteen of the watershed's best loop hikes contained in a handy pocket-sized guide



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Mail form with payment to:
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 203 Arcadia Road
 Hope Valley, RI 02832

Phantom Bog joins the ranks of protected riverside acreage

Another significant parcel of land fronting the Pawcatuck River in Bradford has been permanently preserved, thanks to the Grills Family, the Hopkinton Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and RI Department of Environmental Management (DEM).

The 670-acre property on the Hopkinton side of the Pawcatuck River was transferred to the town on December 21 by Richard Grills.

The property includes the area known as Phantom Bog which, according to The Nature Conservancy, is one of the most environmentally significant bogs in New England in terms of rare and endangered species.

An open space bond passed by Hopkinton voters in 2006 provided more than a half-million



Richard Grills signs land transfer documents in December on an historical piece of furniture.

dollars toward the acquisition. Additional funds came from the state and TNC, which received grant funds from Champlin Foundations toward the purchase.

Ownership of the parcel will ultimately be shared by the town and DEM, which will take approximately 250 acres of the land that includes the bog.

In an interesting and historic twist, Mr. Grills brought to the ceremony a table on which the town's founding fathers signed the historical documents estab-

lishing the town 250 years ago. Mr. Grills signed the land transfer documents on the table, then gifted the table to the town.

For the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed, the preservation of the land is highly beneficial.

The parcel sits across the river from a 480-acre piece on the Westerly side of the river, also acquired from the Grills Family. Together the acquisitions represent a significant length of protected riparian corridor, and a sizeable acreage of protected wetland and recharge area. The parcel includes approximately five miles of river frontage.

The protected land is intended to serve as a nature preserve and passive recreation area for public enjoyment. River access areas will be incorporated into the site in the future.

Application for Membership

Name(s) _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone/Email _____

- ___ Individual \$25
- ___ Family \$40
- ___ Contributor \$50
- ___ Corporate \$100
- ___ Supporter \$100
- ___ Sponsor \$250
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In addition to my dues, I am enclosing an extra contribution of \$ _____

*Your contribution is tax deductible .
Thank you for your support!*

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Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association



Dr. Saul Saila (accordion), with Marty Richards (drums) and Marty Ballou (bass), entertain WPWA staff and trustees over the holidays.

Opinions expressed in *Watershed* are not necessarily those of WPWA, its Board of Trustees, or staff.

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