

# WATERSHED

A Newsletter of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association

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Winter 2009

## Water Quality Data Comes to Cyberspace

By Chris Fox

For 23 years the Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Association has been monitoring the quality of our inland waters. Today we monitor over 45 sites within the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed. The biggest challenge in amassing this data has been determining how to organize, analyze, and format the information in order to put you in touch with it. The data has always been available in spreadsheets and on paper from WPWA and URI's Watershed Watch, but it hasn't been very "user friendly". Elise Torello, graduate student at the University of Rhode Island, seems to have found the answer. In 2008 this multi-talented WPWA volunteer saw the potential of GIS mapping to unify and present our years of data to the public in a web-based format. The idea blossomed into a master's thesis which Ms. Torello is now working to complete.

Through her masters project Elise has organized a small portion of WPWA's historic data and put it on a test website. Some of RI's leading experts in water quality, as well as typical users of the data, have been engaged to review the format in an effort to present the information in the most comprehensible way. Elise will analyze the results of the survey to come up

with the most efficient and interesting way to visually present the data.

As excitement over this revolutionary project built, WPWA sought funding to continue Ms. Torello's work beyond her masters thesis. WPWA decided to elevate this effort into a regionally important project by including the Salt Ponds Coalition (SPC) and Save The Bay's South County Office (STB). The *Water Quality Data Management Project* attracted the interest of The Forrest and Frances Lattner Foundation when they learned that data collected by SPC in their coastal ponds and STB in Little Narragansett Bay were to be included. "The sharing of resources and knowledge in these hard financial times is the best way to fulfill our missions to protect the local environment" says Dave Prescott of STB. WPWA recognizes that the water quality of our inland waterways directly affects the quality of Little Narragansett Bay and the surrounding estuaries and coastal ponds. This ground breaking project is the perfect opportunity for our three conservation organizations to begin to work cooperatively for the benefit of the environment and all Rhode Islanders.

(Cont. on Page 3)

## Watershed Science Course for Teachers



*Teaching the Teachers  
2009 Watershed Course*

In partnership with the Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA), WPWA is conducting a graduate level Water-

shed Course for teachers this spring. When WPWA began advertising for the *Watershed Science for Educators Course*, we expected a good response but were surprised by the tremendous interest from educators all over the state. Teachers of all disciplines are taking part in the Watershed Course. Materials in this course are primarily aimed at middle school grades. However, much of the material can be adapted to elementary and high school levels. Subjects taught by the participants include science, geography, current events, US history, business and computers, as well as all the topics taught to elementary and special needs students. Besides the background information on watersheds, teachers are learning skills and participating in activities that they can bring back to their classrooms. (Cont. on Page 3)

## From the Executive Director

While the temperatures outside dropped this winter the WPWA staff and board members rolled up their sleeves inside to bring you a host of new programs and technology in 2009. WPWA will offer over 25 recreational programs in 2009! The program expansion is all part of our adoption of the "No Child Left Inside" initiative this year. Our goal is to engage more children in watershed education and recreation this year than ever before. Why not pick a few days this summer to turn off your computers, tv's, and video games and join WPWA in experiencing all our watershed has to offer!

On the chilly, wet days of spring when going outside just isn't in the forecast you can stay up to date on a host of river-wide activities by visiting the all new WPWA blog. Created by WPWA board member Peter August, this is just one of the technology upgrades ongoing at WPWA in 2009. Our blog includes color photos and stories you won't find in our quarterly Newsletter.

WPWA is now knee deep in the waters of web site design. This year we will unveil our new WPWA website full of new features. Online registration, fishing and river condition reports, photos and links galore are just a few of the new additions to the site. Soon our beautiful campus on the banks of the Wood River will be your new wireless zone! The addition of wireless capability to our headquarters means you can blend your love for the outdoors with that of technology. On your next fishing trip to Barberville, bring your lap top and cruise the web for the best fly ties or check your email while you wait for that big fish to bite.

-Chris Fox



## The Wood and Pawcatuck Rivers in the Blogosphere

*By Peter August, WPWA Trustee and Professor of Natural Resources Science, URI*

Are you tech savvy and love the outdoors? Check out the WPWA's new blogging site called River Watch. The web address is <http://wpwariverwatch.blogspot.com>. The theme of River Watch is interesting news on the natural history of the Wood and Pawcatuck Rivers. Our vision is to create a place to go to learn about wildlife sightings on the River, fishing news, paddling conditions, and other topics of general interest to WPWA members. We want the banter on this blog to be light, interesting, and informative. It is not a place to engage in contentious debate over environmental issues in the watershed, there are other forums for that. We do, however, encourage friendly debate over the best lure or fly to use to land those big lunkers!

Using the blog is simple. Just point your browser to the web site and the rest should be pretty intuitive. Simply scroll down the page and read the postings and view the pictures. At the bottom of each posting is a white box with the word "comments" on the right. If you wish to leave a comment to a posting, simply click the comments button and a box will pop up for you to enter your observations.

Are you a closet author looking for a place to put your observations on the natural history of the Rivers? Let us know and we will register you as an author to the River Watch blog. Only registered authors can post to the blog. The value of the blog is totally a product of the number of interesting postings to it. So, if you have a golden pen and want to share your observations of

the Rivers, contact us and we will sign you up as a blog author.

How do you know when a new blog posting has been made? The simplest way is to check the blog site regularly and see if anything new has been entered. A more efficient way is to use the River Watch RSS feed. RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication and it works like this. When a new posting is made to the blog, the RSS system automatically sends an alert to your RSS feed reader software. Your feed reader will let you know that a new posting has been made and will make it easy for you to navigate to the blog to view it. There are a lot of free feed readers out there. One of the simplest is Google's feed reader. If you have a Google account (free) simply google "Google Reader." It will take you there. To have River Watch let your feed reader know when postings have been made, simply subscribe to River Watch by going to the bottom of the right panel on the blog site and click Posts, Add to Google.

If you want to be a blog author or have questions about the blog, contact us at [info@wpwa.org](mailto:info@wpwa.org). Happy Blogging!

## A Gift From The Salt Ponds Coalition

Special thanks to the Salt Ponds Coalition for their generous contribution of a gently used photocopier to the WPWA. Their offer came after learning that our archaic copier finally met its maker in early 2009. Gifted to WPWA by long time WPWA accountants Pucci & Greene Associates (Westerly), the copier lasted nearly 18years. It was laid to rest at a proper recycling facility at no cost. Just another technological step forward for WPWA, free of charge.

## **Water Quality Data Comes to Cyberspace** *(Cont from Page 1)*

Later this year when the information goes public, web users will be able to access the data with just few clicks of their mouse. Included will be data tables, graphs showing how the data correlates across the years, pictures of the sites, and other pertinent information. Along with the data, links to other water quality related websites such as beach and shellfish bed closures will be included. WPWA expects this new web application to be an overwhelming success and will be utilized by policy makers, researchers, recreational enthusiasts, students, and most importantly.....you!

## **Werner Wiskari, Water Quality Monitor, Remembered at 90**

WPWA would like to note the passing of another longtime volunteer and supporter, Werner Wiskari. Werner, a former foreign correspondent and editor of international news for The New York Times, died on Dec. 8, 2008, near his home on Pasquisett Pond in Charlestown, RI. Werner was also an invaluable environmental advocate until his death at age 90. Up until the last year of his life, Werner continued writing and remained active in his community and church. WPWA is grateful to him for the many years he faithfully monitored Pasquisett Pond. He will be remembered fondly as an ardent supporter of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed and local politics who was not afraid to speak his mind. He will be missed by all who knew him.

## **Watershed Science Course for Teachers** *(Cont from Page 1)*

The course is based on the Active Watershed Education (AWESome!) curriculum, which was originally developed by the Southern Rhode Island Conservation District in 1993. It is designed to help teachers understand the dynamics of a watershed and how to transfer this information to their students. Denise Poyer, WPWA's Program Director, has conducted the Watershed Course nine times over the last twelve years. She has continued to update and expand the course to reflect the current understanding of watershed issues. A presentation by former WPWA Executive Director, Lori Urso, will discuss the role of mills in the Pawcatuck Watershed.

Funding for the Watershed Course has been provided by the Rhode Island Rivers Council and allows teachers to participate free of charge. The grant also covers all of the cost for course materials and most of Ms. Poyer's time. Twenty-five teachers are enrolled in the course with volunteers from NRPA helping out in the classroom. The class meets once a week at the URI Bay Campus to learn about watershed delineation, hydrology, geology, soils, wetlands, water quality, and the complex issues created by the interaction of humans with their environment. The participants will venture outside to tour the Narrow River Watershed and investigate the problems and solutions to waste water treatment and stormwater runoff. On a second field trip to a new preserve in West Greenwich teachers will learn how to sample and assess water quality in wetlands.

WPWA, NRPA, and the RI Rivers Council are providing this exciting and informative course to help develop an environmentally

literate student population in RI. The No Child Left Inside Act, currently making its way through Congress, emphasizes the need for children to learn about their environment. This Act will require states to have Environmental Literacy Plans in place in order to receive certain educational funding. WPWA and NRPA want our local schools to educate their students about the watersheds in which they live, work and play so that they and their families will make sound choices about their effects on the environment. The twenty-five teachers taking the Watershed Course have the potential to reach over 2,000 students this year alone!

## **2009 Land & Water Summit**

Each year the Land & water Partnership holds its annual conference at the University of Rhode Island's Kingston Campus. This gathering of like minded RI conservationist is set for March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009. Anyone involved in land trusts, conservation commissions, and watershed groups are encouraged to attend. For more information or to register go to [www.landandwaterpartnership.org/summit.htm](http://www.landandwaterpartnership.org/summit.htm).

*WPWA will be hosting two workshops at the summit this year:*

### **Getting Dam Removal into the River Restoration Mix**

Tom Ardito

*Narragansett Bay Estuary Program*

Chris Fox

*Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association*

### **How Not to Trip-up When You are Trip-leading**

Denise Poyer

**Application for Membership**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

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City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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In addition to my dues, I am enclosing an extra contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Your contribution is tax deductible.  
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