



Watershed News

December 2014

President's message

The early nor'easter just prior to Thanksgiving covered the landscape in a beautiful white gown and seemed to speed up the arrival of winter this year. In many ways, it's been a great year and there is a lot to be thankful for here in the watershed. First and foremost, we on the WRWA board are thankful for your continued support and your dedication to this very special place on Earth. We are thankful too for your participation in the events we put on – from the spring symposium, to the cleanups, canoe-cruise, fly-fishing workshop, and Demo Day. It has been great to spend time with you all and to put into practice in tangible ways the values of good stewardship we share. I think of the words of Wendell Berry, the great 'Sage of Kentucky,' when he wrote: 'The care of the Earth is our most ancient and most worthy, and after all our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it and to foster its renewal is our only hope.'

News on the global environment continues to depress and there is often little to inspire hope that we as a species will be able to cooperate with one another enough 'to foster its renewal' in ways commensurate with the challenges we face. Nevertheless, I feel inspired by the dedication of my fellow board members and by the membership of the WRWA. As people who have chosen to inhabit a place, you accept the responsibilities that come along with that, and you relish the opportunity to participate in this 'most pleasing' of responsibilities. I hope you will continue to support our efforts as you have done in the past, and in doing so help ensure a vital community of Earth stewards in the future.

Sincerely,
Brian W. Conz, WRWA President

WRWA launches internship program

By Brian Conz

Over the past year, thanks to the efforts of the Conservation Law Foundation (CLF), the WRWA has been named as the recipient of two Supplemental Environmental Payments (SEP). The CLF is a non-profit advocacy organization working to protect New England's environment through a variety of strategies including litigation. SEPs form part of legal settlements in which a defendant agrees to make a payment to a local non-profit organization.

In our case, the CLF uncovered local violations of the Clean Water Act and pursued litigation leading to the SEPs. CLF identified the WRWA as a local environmental organization worthy of the funds and we happily accepted! The payments have begun to come in and will total \$18,000 when received in full.

One important use of the funds will be to support an internship position for a Westfield State University student, who will serve the Association in a variety of capacities. The work of the intern will change over the years in response

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to the needs of the organization. In this first incarnation, the intern will catalogue existing studies of the watershed in order to create a database that can be made available to the public and can serve the needs of various stakeholder groups. The intern will then use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software to illustrate the spatial contours of scientific data on the River's conditions, potentially helping to identify areas to focus future research efforts.

In order to accomplish this the intern will work closely with the WRWA board and with the Westfield River Wild and Scenic committee, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Massachusetts Fish and Wildlife as well as faculty members from diverse departments of the University. This should help to facilitate greater coordination between these key stakeholders to the long-term benefit of the watershed.

Funds for the internship include a dollar for dollar match from Westfield State University Academic Affairs.

We are deeply grateful to the CLF for its work and for its recognition of our local role as environmental stewards.

Disposal of unused/unwanted medications

By Mike Young

Until fairly recently people were told to dispose of unused medications by flushing them. However, studies by the US Geological Survey have shown that low levels of a variety of pharmaceuticals are now present in many natural waters, and that there have been some adverse effects on fish and other aquatic organisms. In addition, there's the possibility that long-term exposure to low levels of antibiotics could result in the evolution of drug-resistant bacteria, a concern in other contexts as well. So, don't flush old medications or just throw them in the trash. Instead, take your expired or unwanted prescription and over-the-counter medications to the Westfield Police Department's MedReturn box, located in their lobby at 15 Washington Street and available 24/7. Acceptable items include pills, patches, ointments, vitamins, samples and pet medications. They are NOT able to accept needles, lotions, liquids, aerosol cans, inhalers, hydrogen peroxide or thermometers. If you live outside of Westfield, check with your local town government to see if they're operating a similar collection system.

Support needed for new EPA Draft Stormwater Permit regulations

By Fran Siska

WRWA is a member of the Massachusetts Rivers Alliance, from whose Executive Director (Julia Blatt) we recently received a request for help in mobilizing support for a new set of Stormwater Permit regulations that have been proposed by the EPA. Stormwater runoff is a serious pollution issue for Massachusetts' rivers, lakes and wetlands, and the EPA has the authority, under the Clean Water Act, to regulate that input into natural water bodies. That regulation is done through the issuing of MS4 (Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems) permits as part of the NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) program. The last time that draft regulations were proposed, they were never finalized, partly as a result of strong push-back from the regulated community. To make sure that this set of regulations, which would address a number of significant stormwater flow issues, doesn't suffer a similar fate, we're asking members to submit comments to EPA in support of the proposed regulations. The deadline for receipt of those comments is December 29 and they can be submitted via email to Tedder.Newton@epa.gov or via regular mail to:

Newton Tedder
US EPA – Region 1
5 Post Office Square – Suite 100
Mail Code – OEP06-4
Boston, MA 02109-3912

The Massachusetts Rivers Alliance has developed a set of talking points that might be used in supporting the new EPA regulations, developed by Steve Pearlman, Patrick Herron, and Nancy Hammett, which we've included below:

1. Requirements to prioritize, investigate and eliminate the very serious problem of illicit connections to storm drains (such as illegal tie-ins of sanitary sewer pipes) will reduce dangerous pathogen levels and restore designated uses such as swimming and boating;
2. The requirement that all new development and redevelopment of over an acre infiltrate the first inch of runoff (which constitutes around 90% of annual rainfall), or provide an equal measure of pollutant reduction, is an achievable step which will ensure that large develop-

ments use modern stormwater management techniques. This step is crucial to reducing the financial burden on towns and making private parties who use the public storm systems responsible for their discharges;

3. Requirement that towns discharging to water bodies with sodium (salt) problems minimize winter road and parking lot salt use will help to improve habitat and restore fish diversity. This is an extremely important pollution problem that has never really been addressed before;
4. Requirements that extra measures be taken to control individual pollutants (including bacteria, excessive nutrients, solids, salt, metals and oil & grease) in stormwater runoff that are causing or contributing to violations of state water quality standards is a sensible way to direct efforts at the most serious water pollution problems in individual waterways;
5. Requirements for municipalities to begin a public outreach campaign targeting not just their residents, but

also commercial businesses, institutions and industries will help all parties realize the role they can play in reducing stormwater pollution;

6. Requirements for MS4s to annually assess the effectiveness of the BMPs (“best management practices”) they have implemented and consider alternatives which might be more effective will lead to the most efficient allocation of resources;
7. Greater public access and opportunities to comment on towns’ on-going efforts to comply with the MS4 permit should increase accountability and general public awareness of municipal stormwater management

The draft permit and much other information about the process can be found on the EPA website at http://www.epa.gov/region1/npdes/stormwater/MS4_MA.html and via links from that page. Thanks for your help with this important initiative, and please contact Fran (fsiska@comcast.net) if you need additional information.

Recent events...

Fly-fishing clinic

By Bill Rose

Always a big hit with children – and adults – the annual fly-fishing clinic was held on September 13, 2014 from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The warm, sunny day brought 34 people out, six with their fly rods looking to learn how to use them.

Co-sponsored by the Western Massachusetts Fly-fisherman, Manny DaSilva and George Heric were busy showing groups how to tie flies, while Phil Sousa and Fran Siska from the WRWA were on hand to help. Mark Damon rooted around the river, collecting insects for his own entertainment as well as the kids’. Lynn Bannon was also present to register everybody and promote the WRWA.

The event seems to be gaining in popularity and since a great time was indeed had by all, we look forward to hosing Mark down and doing it again next year.

Cleanup volunteers attack trash on Westfield River

By Sheryl Becker and Mark Damon

Volunteers aged eleven to eighty-five tackled plastic, paper, wood, glass, metal and other debris littering the Westfield River in Agawam at the end of September. The Westfield River Watershed Association (WRWA) sponsored the fall river cleanup, reporting that thirty bags of trash, tires and a large barrel were removed from the river and its banks at the Agawam cleanup. The twenty-two volunteers who pitched in came from Sacred Heart Church, Westfield State University, Agawam Conservation Commission and Friends of Robinson State Park, as well as from local communities.

In Westfield, 51 citizens, including a team of volunteers from Lane Construction and students from Westfield State University, showed up to help haul out debris from various locations along the Westfield and Little Rivers. From the cleanup sites in Westfield, West Springfield, Russell and Chester, the volunteers retrieved 55 bags of trash, 11 tires, four mattresses, two chairs, two couches, a wading pool, stereo speaker, box spring, end table, kitchen table, carpet,

truck cap, tarps and plastic sheets. WSU Professor Michael Vorwerk and 10 WSU students tackled a previously unaddressed site in Chester that produced a discouraging amount of tires, furniture and other trash.

Local departments of public works coordinated with WRWA to remove the piles of trash collected. WRWA continues to encourage citizens to do their part to respect and care for the river by properly disposing of trash, tires and debris.

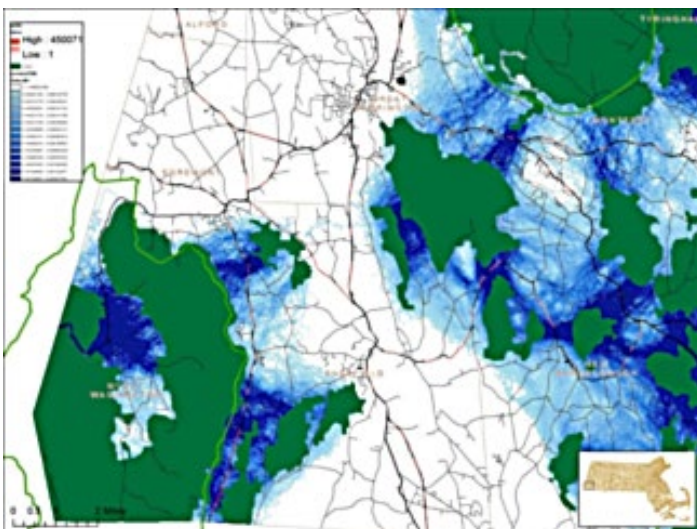
Upcoming event...

Laura Marx to give public talk at the Westfield Athenaeum

By Laura Marx

In association with The Nature Conservancy, WRWA is sponsoring a talk by Laura Marx (forest ecologist for TNC) at the Westfield Athenaeum on **Wednesday, January 28, 2015 at 6:30 p.m.**

The talk will focus on the “Berkshire Wildlife Linkage: using wildlife tracking and cameras to learn where animals are moving and ways we can help”, an update on the preliminary results that I presented at last year’s symposium on the role that the Westfield River watershed plays as a critical part of the wildlife corridor between the Green Mountains of Vermont and the Hudson Highlands in New York. I’ll explain the benefits of such a corridor, and will present maps, photos and videos from the mammal tracking study carried out last winter by The Nature Conservancy, the Berkshire Environmental Action Team, the Westfield River Wild and Scenic Advisory Committee,



Each spring and fall, WRWA sponsors Westfield River cleanups. WRWA provides work gloves and trash bags and tracks the amount of trash the volunteers pick up, pooling its numbers with other groups within the larger Connecticut River watershed. In 2013, more than 45 tons of trash was removed from the rivers and watershed lands within the Connecticut River watershed stretching from Vermont to Long Island Sound. Our own Westfield River flows into the Connecticut River, making it an important part of that larger watershed.



and a crew of enthusiastic volunteer wildlife trackers along Route 112 in Huntington and along the Westfield River. The evening will end with a question & answer session about what is being done (and what more we can do, as landowners and community members) to ensure that this corridor continues to allow both wildlife and people to safely get where they need to go. For more information on the project, check out The Nature Conservancy’s website at www.nature.org (follow the links to: **Where We Work/Massachusetts/Explore Our Stories/Mapping for Wildlife Corridors**). This event is free and open to the public – please join us!

Officers and directors for 2014-2015.

Officers:		
President: Brian Conz	53 Balfour Drive Springfield 01118	572-8084
First Vice President: Aaron Reyes	100 Park Drive Westfield 01085	572-8380
Second Vice President: Sheryl Becker	101 Regency Park Dr. Agawam 01001	821-0818
Secretary: Mark Damon	54 Pleasant Street Westfield 01085	572-9991
Treasurer: Fran Siska	47 Salvatore Drive Westfield 01085	562-4998
Directors:		
David Conley	PO Box 486 Agawam 01001	786-6005
Allan Guagliardo	72 Colony Circle Westfield 01085	568-4770
James Johnson	93 Clayton St. Springfield 01107	
Timblin Judy	37 Mountain Rd. Holyoke 01040	569-9018
Allan Ouimet	16 Russell Rd. Westfield 01085	539-0964
George Reichert	75 Blair Road Blandford 01008	848-2074
Bill Rose	39 Sunset Terrace Feeding Hills 01030	786-0195
Phillip Sousa	29 Yankee Circle Westfield 01085	568-3982
Henry Warchol	2 Sackville Road Westfield 01085	562-3467
Mike Young	721 West Rd. Westfield 01085	562-8498
Honorary Directors:		
Dan Call	777 College Highway Southwick 01077	569-9677

For more information on WRWA's activities, check our website at www.westfieldriver.org

Membership reminder

WRWA memberships run from January to December. We will mail out a reminder to our members before the end of the year. We really appreciate your support. Your dues help us present educational, recreational and stewardship activities each year. *Thank you for being such a loyal friend of the Westfield River and its watershed.*

Westfield State University
The Westfield River Watershed Association
P.O. Box 1630
Westfield, MA 01086-1630

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