

The

**SUMMER 2008**

# **WatershedNews**

## *The President's Statement*

The Westfield River Watershed Association's themes might be summarized as conservation, education, and recreation. This summer's events have been no exception. We started with an excellent turnout for the canoe cruise on June 7. On June 21, we had two events - a talk by bestselling author Alan Weisman at the Westfield Athenaeum, and our participation in the Robinson State Park Day in Agawam. On the weekend of August 16, we had a booth at the Westfield Fair. By the time you read this newsletter, we will have closed out our summer events on the weekend of August 23 with a hike on Gobble Mountain and, we hope, a booth at the Cummington Fair.

WRWA also decided this summer to join the appeal of the water withdrawal permit for the proposed Biomass plant in Russell. While we recognize the diversity of opinions on this issue and the validity of points on both sides, a majority of our board are concerned that the drawdown of water may exceed what the local ecosystem can handle during periods of low flow, particularly with regard to the requirements of migratory fish.

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This fall WRWA plans to be represented at the Massachusetts Outdoor Exposition (the Big MOE) in Sturbridge on September 28. The following Saturday, October 4, will be our annual River Cleanup. We'll also continue to sponsor shows of The Watershed Waltz and the expanding curriculum that goes with it, continue the storm-drain labeling program, and prepare for the spring ASERP program.

One striking feature of many of these activities is the concern they reflect for, and degree to which they are dependent on, water quality. From its inception in 1953, WRWA has worked to upgrade and maintain the quality of the river (as well as the larger ecosystem of which it is a part). Even in the days before the Clean Water Act, when longtime area residents claim that the color of the river was whatever color paper the mills were making that day, WRWA was already striving, and that effort continues.

Some of those efforts, like the river cleanup and storm-drain labeling, are directly about keeping pollutants out of the water. Others, like concerns over water level in the river, are also related to water quality, although it's not a simple relationship. If water levels are very low, this may concentrate pollutants and reduce turbulence enough to lower oxygen levels. Conversely, high water may carry its own hazards if it results from unusually heavy rains like we've had this summer - it may be carrying polluted runoff from roads, farms, woodlands, or overloaded municipal wastewater systems. In years to come, we look forward to continuing to monitor and protect our river, as vital to the health of its ecosystem as blood to the body.

Many of the activities I've mentioned are described far better and in greater detail in this newsletter's articles. If you'd like to participate and/or help, please contact a board member (contact information is available at the end of the newsletter) or see our website at [www.westfieldriver.org](http://www.westfieldriver.org).

Mark Damon

## Russell Biomass Permit Appealed

By Henry Warchol

Westfield River Bio Plant's water permit was appealed July 26 2008. The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) permit allows Russell Biomass LLC to remove a maximum of 885,000 gallons of water per day (gpd) from the Westfield River; this action completely removes 85 % of those 885,000 gallons of water by evaporation. This process cools its electric generating turbine unit, returning just 15 % back to the river. This permitting decision has been appealed by a group of local river users organized by the Concerned Citizens of Russell, with The Connecticut River Watershed Council and the Massachusetts chapter of Trout Unlimited.

With the combined water removal from the Westfield River's drainage (that includes maximum withdrawals from the proposed Russell Bio plant of 885,000 gpd and Westfield's proposed Summit Power plant a maximum of 500,000 gpd from its aquifer) the very small percent of water returned to the river will discharge a concentrated processed chemical mix into the river. The results of both proposed projects will reverse the efforts to restore the river back to a state of benefit so all can enjoy its potential of abundant fish and recreation.

Many references and publications on water problems do exist. Check out the following for similar issues.

"The Scientific American" - "Running out of Water"-August 2008.

"Water Follies" by Robert Glennon - 2002.

"Water Fit to Drink" by Carol Keough, Rodale Press -1980.

## WRWA Sponsors Alan Weisman's Talk

By Mark Damon

On June 21, approximately 20 audience members were fortunate enough to attend a fascinating talk by bestselling author (and Westfield watershed resident) Alan Weisman at the Westfield Athanaeum. His book *The World Without Us* is a thought experiment on the consequences of humanity literally disappearing overnight - a way of looking at our effect on the environment by removing us from it. It explores what would happen to other species in some of the most polluted areas we left behind, how long our artifacts might last, and the ecological succession likely to occur in places with human beings suddenly removed.

He began his talk, as he does his book, with a description of the Bialowieza Puszcza, a forest on the Poland-Belarus border, then digressed into a wide-ranging discussion including the Korean Demilitarized Zone, areas of eastern Cyprus which have been largely abandoned since the cease-fire in that country's civil war, oceanic plastics pollution, and speculation on the consequences of a worldwide one-child policy analogous to that in China, among other topics. Barnes and Noble made copies of the book (signed by the author) available for sale and coffee and tea were provided by the Tea Pot Gallery.

## WRWA: Looking For Volunteers

By Bill Rose

It is almost fall and the WRWA is starting to gear up for another exciting year. I hope **every** member had a safe and enjoyable summer. To jump start the year the WRWA is looking for members who are willing to staff the WRWA booth at three different events. The first is the Westfield Fair on August 15, 16, and 17 (Fri.5:00 to

10:30pm., Sat. 8:00am to 10:30pm, and Sun 8:00am to 8:00pm); the second is the Cummington Fair on August 21, 22, and 24 (Thurs. and Fri. 4:00 to 9:30pm, Sat. 7:00am to 9:30pm, and Sun. 7:00 to 9:30pm); the third is the Mass Outdoor Exposition on Sept. 28 (from 9:30am to 4:00pm).

We are looking for members to give 2-4 hour intervals on any day, at any of one of these events. This is an excellent way to see the fairs and help out the WRWA. The Mass Outdoor Exposition (big MOE) is an excellent children's event, with over 50 booths of outdoor activities for youth and adults. You could easily spend the entire day and not see everything it has to offer. Please consider helping, if only for a short period of time on any day during the three events. It would be an enjoyable way to spend time with the family and get involved with the WRWA. Make this the year that you are an active member in your organization. To help out contact Bill Rose at 413-786-0195 or Email brose1525@comcast.net.

## **MassACORN's New Interactive Website**

By Lisa Romano

Are you a woodland owner in the Westfield River watershed? The University of Massachusetts announces MassACORN.net, a new interactive website designed specifically for people like you in the Westfield and Deerfield River Watersheds of Western Massachusetts. MassACORN features interactive mapping (see aerial photos of your property, locate endangered species, personalize your map to include topography, landscape features, land use patterns, and more) and extensive local information. Have a question? Ask the Expert! MassACORN is your resource when you want information on your community, local ecology, recreation and trail building, local forest management and conservation contacts, and how your land fits into the greater landscape. If you care about the

future of your land, MassACORN can help. Visit [www.massacorn.net](http://www.massacorn.net). For additional information write to [massacorn@nrc.umass.edu](mailto:massacorn@nrc.umass.edu) or call 413.577.1562.

## **Westfield River Annual Cleanup**

By Heather Comee

WRWA's annual river cleanup will be held on Saturday, October 4, 2008 from 9:00 a.m. to approximately noon or 1:00 p.m. We will meet at the Westfield Gas and Electric substation near the Great Bridge, where we will split up into small teams and hand out trash bags. Please bring work gloves and wear clothes that you don't mind getting a little dirty.

Last year was a great accomplishment! With more than 40 volunteers we filled 72 bags with trash, and removed 9 tires and about 60 miscellaneous large items. Everyone is invited... bring your friends, relatives, co-workers, scouts, etc. We hope that you will join us in cleaning up our watershed and contributing to this year's cleanup!

## **Robinson State Park Day 2008**

By Sheryl Becker

The first Robinson State Park Day, held on Saturday, June 21, 2008, was a huge success this year. The weather was perfect and it was well organized, bringing together an estimated 500 people to appreciate the natural gem. Over a dozen activities were planned by the Friends of Robinson State Park, the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and the Westfield River Watershed Association (WRWA).

The WRWA was represented this year by both Phil Sousa and myself. We had a table with literature and our picture board under a tent, which was visited by a hundreds of

folks. The WRWA also ended the day with a live, musically assisted puppet show titled so appropriately "The Watershed Waltz" by Marmalade Productions (<http://www.marmaladeproductions.com/>). Geared towards children, it was every bit as entertaining to adults as well. Raven, a young girl puppet, explores your typical watershed. Through her interaction with fish, birds and aquatic creatures (that even include macroinvertebrates) that inhabit a stream, she learns about the dynamics of a healthy watershed. Woodpecker and Alevin the Brook Trout teach Raven about the importance of clean water and healthy old-growth forests. The wonderfully created plot and watershed characters in the show could not have been a more fitting end to the day.

With a generous and diversified schedule, the day was aimed at educating the public, both children and adults, on Robinson State Park's outstanding environmental qualities. The sunny, action-packed first full day of summer was full of many activities such as bird and nature walks, tree talks, vernal pool tours, kayak demo, Native American stone, wildflower field guide demos, and an all day rapid bio-assessment of wadable streams conducted by the CT Sierra Club. Burt Freedman from the Springfield Public Schools also led an outdoor education program. In addition to many volunteers, the day was made possible thanks to many elementary and high school students and the Friends of Robinson State Park. (<http://www.friendsofrobinsonstatepark.org/>)

Throughout the day numerous behind-the-scenes folks were present, such as State Representative Rosemary Sandlin, Conrad Crawford (DCR Director of Partnerships), and ISA certified arborist Matthew "Twig" Largess. Mr. Crawford has pledged support for the event from DCR. Mr. Largess, who has conducted several studies of the park and was instrumental in the saving of this forest in its intact state, led several walks.

Mr. Largess was also the main sponsor of the June 2007 Robinson State Park Bio-Blitz, which brought approximately 40 scientists to the park.

The Friends of Robinson State Park are truly a dedicated bunch of activists who really know how to save a forest and to celebrate the precious natural gift in our own backyard. Claudia, Ray, Kathie, Carol and Lucy all deserve a tremendous amount of credit for their hard work. Friends of Robinson State Park will hopefully continue to organize educational and recreational programs for all ages.

## **Westfield River Canoe Cruise**

By Tom Condon

I felt like Goldilocks on the day of the annual Westfield River canoe cruise. On Thursday Mike Young called me to tell me that he had checked the river gages on the Westfield River and they were really low; perhaps too low to even run the section of river from the Great River Bridge in Westfield to Robinson State Park in Agawam. But then it started to rain, and rain, and rain some more. Perhaps this was the true start of our summer deluge. Now by Friday, the river was up and running, too fast in fact. The current was far too strong to lead a casual trip. One day it's too dry and the next it's flooding. Would it ever be just right?

Well, when Saturday came, the river had dropped to a near perfect level for canoeing. And so, a group of 18 WRWA members and potential members joined on the banks of the river and pushed off under blue skies. At a tight turn above the new bridge in Westfield, George Reichert and his wife took a spill and added a bit of excitement to the journey. Otherwise we all reveled in the small waves the river threw at us. We enjoyed sighting a number of birds, including a great blue heron and a bald eagle soaring over the river. Join us next

year for this annual event or come along on some of our adventures this fall.

## **Tekoa Peak Hike**

Date and Time: Saturday, October 18;  
10:00 – 1:00pm *Russell*  
Leaders: Tom and Nancy Condon (413-564-0895)  
Registration: Please call to register.  
Meeting Place: Pull-out along Route 20 on Westfield-Russell town line (east of the Mass Pike Bridge)

As you travel west on the Mass Pike from Westfield toward New York, you pass over the Westfield River. Just west of the river, the Mass Pike enters a narrow steep pass between two peaks. The peak to the south is called Tekoa Peak. It hosts a Westfield city park with nice trails to follow. Our hike will start on Route 20, pass under the Mass Pike Bridge and then climb to the peak. At times the climb will be steep, but we'll take our time and stop along the way to watch for birds in the treetops (we'll be looking down into them), mushrooms at our feet (it's been a good wet year – do we dare hope it continues?) and catch our breath to enjoy the fall colors.

Dress for the weather, wear sturdy hiking boots, a hiking stick might be helpful, and bring plenty of water with your lunch. Heavy rain cancels.

## **The Keystone Arches of the Westfield River**

Date and Time: Sunday, November 2;  
10:00 – 3:00pm *Chester*  
Leaders: Tom and Nancy Condon (413-564-0895)  
Registration: Please call to register.  
Meeting Place: Chester Elementary School, Middlefield Road

Back at the turn of the century, the 20<sup>th</sup>, not the 21<sup>st</sup>, a railroad track was laid through the rugged country of Western

Massachusetts. Engineers struggled with tackling such a steep and treacherous terrain. George Washington Whistler solved the problem: a series of spectacular keystone arched bridges. Join us as we follow the path to these hidden marvels on the Westfield River. We'll walk past, over, and around these bridges and along the way enjoy the sights and sounds of the woods that now envelop the structures of man.

The trail is never very steep, but is often wet, so come prepared, wear sturdy hiking boots, a hiking stick might be helpful, and bring plenty of water with your lunch. Dress for the weather and remember heavy rain cancels. The bridges might be able to handle it, but we can come back another day.

## **Nighttime at Noble View**

Date and Time: Saturday, December 13;  
7:00 – 9:00pm *Russell*  
Leaders: Tom and Nancy Condon (413-564-0895)  
Registration: Please call to register.  
Meeting Place: Noble View Parking Area, South Quarter Road, Russell.

**Heavy rain or heavy snow cancels; light snow would be a delight**

Sunset is about 4:30pm. Winter is nearly upon us. Join us for a pleasant leisurely nighttime walk along the road to the Appalachian Mountain Club's Noble View cabin. Along the way, we will call for owls. Great Horned Owls nest in late January, and begin calling to one another as early as October so hopefully, we'll receive answers. Be alert too, for other nighttime creatures like porcupine or flying squirrels. Our destination will be the stunning view down into Westfield, where we'll enjoy a little stargazing (if the weather permits) and some hot chocolate and goodies at the picnic table. Bring along a mug and maybe something to share.

## River Cleanup

If you know of any places on the Westfield River that need immediate or urgent attention from our river cleanup on October 4, please let us know. Call Mark Damon at 572-9991. Just inform us of the particular area, where it is, how bad it is, and we will be sure to focus our attention there.

**Here are the names and addresses of our officers and directors for 2008-2009.**

<b>Officers:</b>					
President:	Mark Damon	54 Pleasant Street	Westfield	01085	572-9991
First Vice President:	Bill Rose	39 Sunset Terrace	Feeding Hills	01030	786-0195
Second Vice Presidents:	Sheryl Becker	101 Regency Park Dr.	Agawam	01101	821-0818
	Heather Comee	10 Maple Street	Southwick	01077	427-5089
Secretary:	Tom Condon	80 General Knox Road	Russell	01071	564-0895
Treasurer:	Kenneth Taylor	8 Greylock Street	Westfield	01085	562-4947
<b>Directors:</b>					
	Tracy Adamski	26 Aldrich St.	Northampton	01060	572-3256
	Allan Guagliardo	72 Colony Circle	Westfield	01085	568-4770
	Kathy Meyer	87 Old Farm Road	Westfield	01085	568-4252
	George Reichert	75 Blair Road	Blandford	01008	848-2074
	John Shuttleworth	63 Warwick St.	Longmeadow	01106	567-3648
	Fran Siska	47 Salvatore Drive	Westfield	01085	562-4998
	Phillip Sousa	29 Yankee Circle	Westfield	01085	568-3982
	Bob Thompson	10 Lyon Hill Road	Chester	01011	354-9636
	Henry Warchol	2 Sackville Road	Westfield	01085	562-3467
	Mike Young	721 West Road	Westfield	01085	562-8498
<b>Honorary Directors:</b>					
	Dan Call	777 College Highway	Southwick	01077	569-9677
	Dave Pardoe	25 Sampson Road	Huntington	01050	

For more information on WRWA's activities, check our website at [www.westfieldriver.org](http://www.westfieldriver.org)