

The

WINTER 2009

WatershedNews

The President's Statement

A recent Springfield Republican article highlighted the incipient addition of the Metacomet-Monadnock-Mattabesett trail to the National Trails System. The trail's southern end is in Middletown, Connecticut, its northern terminus on Mount Monadnock in New Hampshire, and its course through Massachusetts takes it through the southeastern part of our watershed, through Holyoke and along the ridgeline dividing Westfield from West Springfield and Southwick from Agawam. Incorporation into the system should make it easier to maintain the trail and protect it from development. Touching the westernmost reaches of our watershed in Washington and Becket is the Appalachian Trail. Older and much longer (running from Springer Mountain, Georgia to Mount Katahdin in Maine) it is also part of the National Trails System. The Westfield watershed itself is laced with trails and has areas designated as Wild and Scenic River, state parks and forests, land set aside for purposes of flood control or protecting water supply and water quality, and land owned and managed for conservation by other groups, such as the Appalachian Mountain Club, the Nature Conservancy, the Winding River Land Conservancy, and the owners of the Beveridge Wildlife Sanctuary and Stanley Park. All of these are preserved through the efforts of caring, hardworking people, many of them volunteers.

We are privileged to live in such a beautiful area, and to have the opportunity to enjoy its natural beauty (coupled with the obligation to protect it). Of course, some times it's easier to enjoy than other times. This long cold winter produced its share of discontent, and may have kept us inside (perhaps wishing we knew how to hibernate). Not everything about the cold is bad, though - extremes of weather may halt the spread of some exotic pest species. An example is the woolly adelgid, which does so much damage to our hemlocks. It remains to be seen, but we can hope that its northward spread was at least slowed by the cold. To a large extent, what we think of as our area's ecological community is determined by individual species' ability to survive what to them is the most trying time of year - whether too hot, too cold, too wet, too dry, or some other factor. A nice cold season can remind us of how important seasonality is in New England and restore our sense of place. Soon enough, the ice will be slowly melting as the northern hemisphere gradually aims toward the sun and eventual glorious summer.

Officially, this is our winter newsletter, but many of WRWA's spring activities are already in planning if not underway. These include the ASERP program in local schools, hikes, the symposium, salmon fry stocking, storm drain labeling, monitoring the fishway in West Springfield and setting up the open house there, the fly fishing clinic, our annual meeting and dinner, and the canoe cruise. We also plan some little river cleanups (in addition to the big one in the fall) and work this year on water quality monitoring and assembling a database of species in our watershed. Several of these activities are described in this newsletter and on our website, www.westfieldriver.org. Find one you'd like to be involved in and contact a member of the board of directors. See you there.

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Mark Damon

Fish Ladder Open House

By Henry Warchol

The Open House viewing of the Westfield River Fish Ladder, located at 150 Front Street in West Springfield, is scheduled for Sunday June 7, 2009 from 10am to 2pm, if approvals are obtained from Massachusetts Fish and Wildlife Anadromous fish coordinator Caleb Slater, Southworth Paper Co., and A&D Hydro.

The fish Ladder became operational in 1996, at no cost to tax payers. The Hydro Electric generating facility at that time (Rexam DSI), was required to construct the Fish Ladder to receive a renewal license to generate electricity from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).

Before the Fish Ladder was built, a salmon redd (fish nest) on the Westfield River was observed and documented in 1995. (A historical first for the Connecticut River tributaries since the salmon's demise, in their inability to reproduce because of the dams that restricted the passage to their place of birth) The event was recorded in the Mass Fish and Wildlife publication winter edition (vol. XLV No1) by John O'Leary.

The ability of cold water fish to nest in the lower reaches of the Westfield River gives credibility to the potential for the salmon restoration in the Westfield River. The Clean Water Act passed by Congress in 1972 helps to provide the potential to restore the salmon and other anadromous fish back to some of its past glory for future generations to enjoy their returning numbers.

For information contact Henry Warchol at (413) 562 3467 or Bill Rose at (413) 786 0195.



Symposium to Focus on Fun

By Kathy Meyer

Tired of the never-ending gloomy recession news? So are we!

In these difficult economic times, we thought it's timely to emphasize the many opportunities for recreation and fun there are right here in our watershed, close to home and free!

WRWA's 15th Annual Westfield River Symposium "Have Fun in Your Watershed" will be held on Saturday, March 28 with registration beginning at 8:00 AM. The morning program of speakers and exhibitors will run until 12:30 PM with several outings in the afternoon beginning at 1:30 PM.

At the time this is going to press, we have the following speakers lined up: Jeff Penn, author of a soon-to-be-published book "Massachusetts Waterfalls" will show photos and discuss waterfalls within the Westfield River Watershed. Fishing guide Marla Blair, author of "Positive Fly Fishing", will present a program on "The Hatch, Fly Selection and Making It Easy". Don Podolski, owner of New Horizons Bike Shop and avid cyclist, will present a program on cycling in our watershed. Dave Pierce's program on The Keystone Arches will delight history buffs and hikers alike with his discussion of the hiking trail built to view the historic train bridges designed by Whistler's father spanning spectacular gorges of the West Branch of the Westfield River. Jim Caffrey, Trustees of Reservations, will

explain the recreational and historic properties that his organization preserves within our watershed and how the public can enjoy them. Noted Birder Seth Kellogg, author of a column in the Sunday Republican, will present a program on the birds of our watershed and give us some tips on how and where to spot them. Several more presenters will be added, as well as many exhibitors fitting into the recreational theme.

In the afternoon, there will be outings to tour Nobleview in Russell and a walk to a local waterfall or two.

This year's symposium committee consists of John Shuttleworth, Mike Young, George Reichert, Tracey Adamski and Kathy Meyer. A more complete program will be available in early March on our website at www.westfieldriver.org We hope to see you at the symposium and encourage you to bring a friend.

Atlantic Salmon Egg-Rearing Program

By Mike Young

For the eighth year in a row WRWA is sponsoring the Atlantic Salmon Egg-Rearing Program (ASERP) in area schools, and we've added two new schools in 2009 – the St. Mary's Elementary School in Westfield and Agawam High School. That brings to nine the number of schools in the Westfield River Watershed that have participated in the program, only eight of which will be active this spring as Gateway Regional Middle School is taking a year off. WRWA has provided the equipment, which currently costs about \$900 per system, to each of the schools except the Agawam High School, which has a grant to pay for two set-ups.

Each system includes a 29-30 gallon aquarium tank in which the salmon eggs are kept, and equipment for raising brine shrimp to feed to the salmon once they've hatched out. Because the tank at the South Middle School developed a bad leak last year (it's the original WRWA ASERP tank!) and they planned to start a second system as well, we actually purchased five new tanks this year, each of which was outfitted with a jacket of 1-inch insulation by Phil Sousa, one of our WRWA Board members. The insulation is a key component of each system as the tanks are kept at about 38°F when the eggs are first delivered, with the temperature gradually being raised over the spring. A chiller maintains that low temperature, which, at nearly \$700, is easily the most expensive part of each system. A filter keeps the tank water clean and helps to keep the chiller coils from freezing over by circulating water around the tank. The floor of the tank is covered with 1-inch or larger gravel, which provides "cover" for the salmon fry once they hatch.

The salmon eggs are delivered from the Roger Reed Fish Hatchery in Palmer, MA, with most schools getting their eggs during the week after the February school vacation. For weeks after hatching the fry simply lay on the bottom of the tank, nourished by their yolk sacs. Keeping the tank cooler can slow their development, and most schools time things so that the tank reaches 50°F and the fry need to begin feeding on real food shortly after the April school vacation. At that point the students begin raising brine shrimp (sea monkeys), which is a little more effort-intensive. The fry become more active at this stage, though, and will swim up out of the gravel to take the brine shrimp. Most schools release the fry into local streams during May or early June.

Our thanks to the Holyoke Petco for providing a substantial discount on the tanks, filters, and a variety of smaller supplies, something they've done several

times over the past few years. Thanks also to the Westfield Home Depot and Westfield Wal-Mart – each store donated a gift card that allowed us to get some of the items needed for free!

Clean Water Act Citizen Suit: Two Paths to a Healthier Westfield River

Clean Water Action has settled a lawsuit against Connecticut Valley Block Company, and the settlement will benefit the Westfield River in two important ways. First, Connecticut Valley Block Company, which operates a concrete block manufacturing facility in West Springfield, has agreed to implement measures designed to reduce pollutants in its stormwater discharges. Second, Connecticut Valley Block has agreed, as part of the settlement, to contribute \$20,000 to fund measures that directly benefit the Westfield River. The Westfield River Watershed Association will receive and administer these funds to expand its river protection and cleanup activities.

Clean Water Action brought the case against Connecticut Valley Block Company in early 2007 as part of its efforts to address impacts of stormwater pollution on Massachusetts waters. The group alleged that the company had failed to comply with EPA requirements to reduce pollution in stormwater runoff from industrial facilities. Clean Water Action also alleged that polluted stormwater from the facility discharged to a pond that is connected to the Westfield River.

CWA was represented by Nora Chorover, an attorney with the Boston-based firm Stern, Shapiro, Weissberg, and Garin. Becky Smith, Water Program Coordinator for Clean Water Action Alliance of Massachusetts was the lead staff person on the case.

Smith stated that this legal action is just one approach taken by the organization to ensure that the original tenets of the Clean Water Act are upheld. “Our first goal is to prevent water pollution. Contamination that never occurs is the ultimate in protection of human and environmental health; it costs nothing to clean up.”

Where a citizen group believes that a company is not complying with the federal Clean Water Act, and the government is not enforcing the Act, then the citizen group can in some circumstances, “step into the shoes of the government” and enforce the law. If the court agrees that there is a violation, then the group may obtain a judgment requiring that the company comply with the law, pay a penalty for past violations, and reimburse the group’s costs of bringing the suit. If a company decides to settle the case instead of going to trial, then the parties may agree to many of the same terms, and may also agree that the company should make a payment to benefit the impacted water body instead of paying a penalty to the government.

WRWA President Mark Damon has outlined five categories of activities for which the money will be used, and include the following: river cleanup expansion, storm drain labeling, chemical and physical water quality monitoring, land acquisition, and a biodiversity survey.

The team of Chorover and Smith hope to bring more of these cases throughout the state, and could use the help of members of WRWA in providing the eyes and ears necessary to identify sources of pollution into the Westfield River. They hope to meet members of WRWA at the June 13th Canoe Cruise!

Becky Smith
Water Program Coordinator
Clean Water Action Alliance of Mass.
bsmith@cleanwater.org

Salmon Fry Stocking – Volunteers Needed

By Fran Siska

Get involved this spring, come out and enjoy the river by volunteering for the Salmon Fry Stocking in the Westfield River and its tributaries. You will be helping in the effort to restore Atlantic salmon in the Connecticut River Valley. This annual event is coordinated by Dr. Caleb Slater of Mass Wildlife and is part of the Atlantic salmon restoration program that has been supported by Mass Wildlife and the US Fish & Wildlife Service for more than two decades. The goal of the program is to produce a self-sustaining run of Atlantic salmon in the Connecticut River and its tributaries.

Volunteers do much of the salmon fry stocking. These many volunteers have been a valuable resource in supporting this restoration program and their help is much appreciated. The stocking schedule will be published on the Mass Wildlife website (<http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw>) in late March. Look under “fishing info - stocking information - Salmon fry” for schedules and additional information.

The WRWA will again sponsor two events that are usually scheduled the second and fourth Saturday in April. The tentative dates are April 11 and April 25. These will be confirmed on the Mass Wildlife website and on WRWA website. (<http://www.westfieldriver.org>). Meeting times are 8:00 am and departure to the stocking area at 8:30 am.

11 April, Saturday (tentative)

Dickenson & Munn Brooks, Southwick
**Meet at: Westfield State College,
Commuter Parking Lot**

25 April, Saturday (tentative)

Middle Branch, Westfield River, Huntington
**Meet at: Gateway Regional High School,
Huntington**

What You Need to Do, Bring, etc.

Bring boots/waders & a lunch. You will get wet!!! Some waders will be available for loan. A change of clothes is a good idea. You will be walking on slippery stream and riverbeds, up and down steep banks in chest or hip waders so you should be in good physical condition. A walking stick or ski pole will be helpful.

Storm Drain Labeling In Westfield

By Tracy J. Adamski

The WRWA is working with the City of Westfield to label storm drains around the city. Using funding from the settlement of the Clean Water Action Project lawsuit against Connecticut Valley Block, WRWA will purchase materials and work with volunteers to label catch basins. The labels will remind residents that the catch basins and storm drain systems drain to nearby rivers, streams and wetlands. The labels will help protect the Westfield River by educating residents, and will also help the City meet their EPA NPDES Phase II permitting requirements. More details on the date and locations will be forthcoming.

Favorite Places: Sanderson Brook Falls

By Tom Condon

In the next few newsletters, I would like to introduce you or remind you of some of our favorite places here in the Westfield River Watershed.

Sanderson Brook Falls sits on the town-line between Huntington and Chester on Route 20. It is one of the best spring walks in the valley. The winter snow melt will fill the stream so that its rhythms permeate the air and the wildflowers will color the hillsides in May.

The hike follows an access road for about one mile to reach the falls. The road is wide and well graded for easy walking the entire distance. If you should choose to continue to hike past the falls, the road becomes a bit narrower in places; steeper and more rugged too. Sanderson Brook tumbles along side as you ascend the trail to the falls. Stop along the way and enjoy the pools and rapids of this picturesque stream. The road will cross the stream three times, all on wide bridges.

Before the first stream crossing, a patch of wild leeks can be found growing in the small flood plain to the east of the road. These leeks have a powerful flavor, so if you plan to collect some for a meal just collect a few. A short way up the road, the H. Newman Marsh Trail heads off to the left. This trail climbs steeply along a small stream to a series of spectacular observation points of the Westfield River. Its well worth the climb, but it is quite a strenuous ascent, so be prepared.

My favorite spot for spring wildflowers is between the next two stream crossings. The hillsides here are dotted with Jack-in-the-pulpits, purple trilliums, and trout lilies to name just a few. Look around the trilliums and trout lilies, you may find mottled leaves of both plants without flowers. These sterile plants are too young to flower. Both species devote up to seven years to developing a strong enough root system and store enough energy in their rhizomes before flowering. Once they so start blooming, they may continue for 50 or more years if left alone.

As you continue past the last stream crossing, watch for foam flowers, Dutchman's Britches, squirrel corn, and other flowers. A small trail to the right leads to the base of the falls. It's narrow, so watch your step. An alternative is to continue up the road about 50 yards further where an opening in the forest offers a birds-eye view of the falls. Either choice offers a great place to contemplate the powers of nature, either to carve a valley or refresh the soul.

Enjoy the hike to Sanderson Brook Falls or the many other special places in the watershed. Check out this newsletter and future newsletters for guided walks and events which will also help you better appreciate and understand the Westfield River watershed.

Westfield River Symposium

The symposium will be held on Saturday, March 28, 2009 in the Scanlon Banquet Hall at Westfield State. At this point, the theme has yet to be decided, but it will involve a number of speakers in the morning and a couple of field trips in the early afternoon.

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

Officers:					
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
Directors:					
	Tracy Adamski	26 Aldrich St.	Northampton	01060	572-3256
	Allan Guagliardo	72 Colony Circle	Westfield	01085	568-4770
	Kathy Meyer	39 Rachel Terrace	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
Honorary Directors:					
	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

