NSRWA
www.nsrwa.org

October 2010

RiverWatch

THE NORTH AND SOUTH RIVERS WATERSHED ASSOCIATION, INC.

Celebrating 40 Years!

New Water Management Permits Imminent for Scituate, Norwell & Hanover

Decisions now will impact the restoration of herring runs to North River

Dry streambed in Third Herring Brook near Hanover and Norwell wells, July 2010. Photo by Nik Tyack.

The state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is poised to renew 20 year permits under the state's Water Management Act (WMA) for towns in the South Coastal Basin. These permits, when tied to new state streamflow policies scheduled to be adopted in November, will determine how the towns of Scituate, Hanover and Norwell manage their water supply systems along First and Third Herring Brooks, and thereby help to shape the ability of those streams to support herring runs and other native aquatic species.

Restoring natural fish runs to the North River will require that we collectively overcome three very different challenges:

- The various dams and other impediments along the brooks must be removed or modified to allow fish passage;
- Water must be better conserved, particularly in summer when demand doubles due to lawn watering and pools; and
- Runoff from paved surfaces must

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NSRWA and Scituate

A Cooperative Working Relationship

Too many interactions between conservation organizations and municipalities with water problems have been adversarial. While some disagreements have inevitably occurred, NSRWA is pleased to have been able to work closely with the town of Scituate over many years to find common ground on solutions to the flow issues on First Herring Brook.

Our initial comments in 2007 on the town's water permit led to a condition requiring the town to investigate the feasibility of restoring flows for herring. This prompted the town to write a letter to DEP in support of restoring herring to the system.

Since then, NSRWA and its partners have brought our pro-bono technical resources to monitor habitat, model streamflow, and work on potential solutions for restoring herring. We continue this effort today by working with the Scituate High School and the Mass Bays program to perform a water demand profile for the town and implement conservation measures.

"The Town is delighted that the NSRWA is working closely with our Water Resources Committee and DPW towards helping us fulfill the obligations of our drinking water permit. Restoring the herring runs is good policy all around--for the environment, to ensure high quality water for our drinking water needs, and for our relationship with state and federal regulators." Rick Murray, Scituate Selectmen and liason to the Scituate Water Resources Committee.

THE NORTH AND SOUTH RIVERS WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

The mission of the North & South Rivers Watershed Association is to preserve, restore, maintain and conserve in their natural state, the waters and related natural resources within the watershed.

Our goals are to:
• Restore the water quality of the rivers by identifying and correcting adverse impacts;

• Encourage stewardship of the watershed through public education, outreach and recreation programs; and

• Promote responsible growth by working in partnerships to preserve open space, scenic vistas and sensitive natural resources.

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Letter from the President

I'm a big fan of elevator speeches. To be able to deliver an important message in a compact time frame (say, 30 - 45 seconds) often means the difference between making the most of an opportunity…or missing it. Effective elevator speeches require practice. They also require us to make tough editing choices - especially what to omit - even information in which we're heavily invested.

For example, consider this space. We typically use it as an opportunity to inform our members about issues and what the association is doing to address those issues - including success stories. What tends not to receive as much attention are the behind-the-scenes contributions of our dedicated and professional NSRWA staff - without which we would have far fewer success stories. Many of you have known some or all of our staff personally for years - others, perhaps not so much; regardless, let's get better acquainted/reacquainted. Consider that a segue to four elevator speeches, which I'll order alphabetically.

Paula Christie is Assistant Director and has clearly played a major role in the association's development and success - first as a volunteer and director - and since 1996, as an employee. In her jam-packed job portfolio we find the critical role of Member Relations, overseeing our membership database for administrative and volunteer-outreach initiatives. Paula is instrumental in ensuring that our membership-building activities and fund-raising events are successful by coordinating with other staff and board committees in planning and execution; moreover, she has done exceptional work in securing press coverage for our initiatives.

Debbie Cook joined our staff in 2007 - filling the dual roles of Greenscapes Manager and Marketing Director. A resident of Cohasset, she has long been involved in town environmental issues. In a relatively short time, Debbie has made a significant impact in both areas. Through Greenscapes , she has coordinated and developed the scope of our popular fifth grade water cycle education program in eight of our watershed towns. She has also worked hard at improving the look, feel, and overall effectiveness of our electronic communications.

Sara Grady wins the prize for the longest title. Since 2005 she has been the NSRWA's Watershed Ecologist; she is also the South Shore Regional Coordinator for the Massachusetts Bays National Estuary Program. Sara's impressive background is in marine science and biology (in which she earned her doctorate). Interspersed with her school years, she managed to find time to intern with the NSRWA for two years. We are delighted to have on staff a person with her expertise, dedication and sunny outlook.

Samantha Woods has led the NSRWA since 2002, when she became Executive Director. While she has described herself as "chief cook and bottle washer" (not all she does is obviously related to saving the planet), she can also lay claim to being recognized as one of the Top Ten Most Influential People on the South Shore (according to this July's South Shore Living Magazine). Sam has an extensive educational and professional background in environmental science. She is the person out in front on issues that directly affect our mission - advocating, managing programs, grant writing, supervising staff, fundraising and managing our finances. As chief executive of the association she is our public face and works on an ongoing basis with the board of directors to inform strategy and policy formation.

There is clearly much more that could be said about our staff - how they work individually - and how they collaborate to fulfill the organization's mission. The nature of this "elevator exercise" requires that we leave a lot of good material out. Perhaps we can revisit this in a future edition. Stay tuned.

by Russ Haskell, NSRWA Board President

Removing Tidal Restrictions, Restoring Wetlands on the South Shore

Monitoring is a critical part of any wetland restoration project. Assessing the baseline condition of a wetland informs restoration plans and post-restoration monitoring provides information on recovery. For the past few years, through our partnership with the Massachusetts Bays program, I have been helping train high school students at the Cohasset Center for Student Coastal Research (CSCR) to monitor pre- and post-restoration tidal wetlands throughout the South Shore. I train them to identify and document salt marsh vegetation, nekton (things that move around in the system like fish, shrimp, and crabs), and benthic invertebrates (worms, snails, and other organisms living on or in the sediment).

There are many sites on the South Shore that have tidal restrictions, including Straits Pond in Hull, Inner Little Harbor in Cohasset, Mushquashcut Pond in Scituate, Broad Cove in Hingham and Green Harbor River in Marshfield. A tidal restriction prevents or reduces tidal influence upstream, which not only dampens the tidal range there but also creates changes in water quality through reduced salinity and flushing and increased temperature. Most of the restrictions are in the form of an undersized culvert or malfunctioning tide gate at a road crossing, and have been in place for decades.

Typically, there will be a salt marsh with normal tidal fluctuation below the restriction and a brackish or freshwater marsh or pond above it. This raises the question, "What's wrong with a brackish marsh and/or pond?" The answer is "nothing" if it is occurring naturally. It becomes an issue when the upper part of a system is formerly tidal and has been changed to a less healthy state. The unhealthy symptoms often include algal blooms (too little flushing results in high nutrients), midge infestations (these nuisance insects can't hatch in salty water but love fresher, more stagnant water), odors (from low oxygen due to reduced flushing and increased temperature), and spread of invasive species like *Phragmites*. The system above the restriction becomes tolerable to only a few hardy species instead of the biodiversity of a tidal salt marsh.

The intention of restoration is one of restoring ecological function and connectivity. Rivers, streams, and estuaries should

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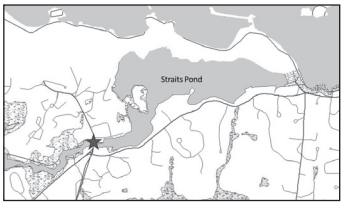
> Hull's Straits Pond restoration, at 96 acres the largest tidal restoration project to date in the state, is essentially complete, and as tidal flushing has increased, water quality has improved and the midges that used to be a serious nuisance have essentially disappeared.

The NSRWA is the South Shore Regional Partner of the Massachusetts Bays National Estuary Program. This partnership enables us to have a scientist on our staff, paid partially by EPA National Estuary Program funds, who assists communities with coastal issues both within our watershed as well as the entire South Shore from Hull to Plymouth. For more information on the Massachusetts Bays Program, please visit *http://massbays.org*



Straits Pond, Hull/Hingham/Cohasset
Watershed – Weir River *Size* – 96 acres

Major Road Crossing – Route 228 (Nantasket Ave.)

Initial Restriction – Tide gates (1 electric, 1 manual) operated for pond level

Ecological Issues – midges, algal blooms, poor water quality and benthic habitat

Restoration Status – New tide gate management plan to increase flushing, New larger culverts and automated gates installed July/August 2010

Inner Little Harbor, Cohasset
Watershed – Little Harbor

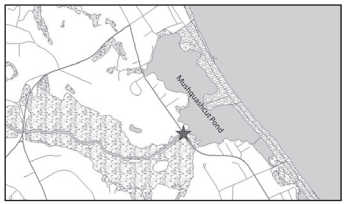
Size - 17 acres

Major Road Crossing – Nichols Road

Initial Restriction – Tide gates (manual)

Ecological Issues – algal blooms, poor water quality and benthic habitat

Restoration Status – New gates and management plan pending



Mushquashcut Pond, Scituate
Watershed – Gulf River

Size – 66 acres

Major Road Crossing – Hatherly Road

Initial Restriction – Tide gate (electric)

Ecological Issues – midges, poor water quality and benthic habitat

Restoration Status – Gates left open to restore flushing

Green Harbor River, Marshfield
Watershed – Green Harbor River

Size – 5.5 miles, ~100 acres wetland

Major Road Crossing – Dyke Road

Initial Restriction – Tide gates (manual flapper)

Ecological Issues – poor water quality, invasive species

Restoration Status – New gates installed December 2009, incremental adjustment and management ongoing

Blue Communities Campaign Progress

Greenscapes Water Challenge 2010

The drought this summer highlighted the need to conserve water and that is just what our Water Challenge this summer aimed to do! In August, teams from Marshfield, Norwell, Scituate and Hanover began a competition to see which team can consume the least amount of water between August 1 and September 30. The winning team will receive $500 for their favorite charity, and the pride of knowing they have saved precious summertime water.

The following teams are competing for a $500 prize in their community to go to the charity of their choice.

Teams

Norwell - South Shore Natural Science Center and the James Library.

Scituate - First Herring Brook Watershed Initiative, Sustainable Scituate, Humarock Beach Improvement Association.

Marshfield - Trinity Church, Mass Audubon North River, Sustainable Marshfield

Hanover - Hanover Parry and Hanover Blake

South River Park – National Park Service grant will pay half the cost!

We want to share with you some really great news on the South River Park that with your help we were able to get passed at Marshfield's Spring Town Meeting earlier this year. Many were concerned about the cost of building this park, which is approximately $500,000. To reduce the cost to the town and keep more money in Marshfield's Community Preservation Fund we worked hard with the town's Open Space Committee and others to secure a grant from the National Park Service that will reimburse the town for 50% of the cost of the park – $250,000!! This grant builds on the river's National Natural Landmark designation by the Park Service which the NSRWA successfully advocated for in 1978.

South River Bacteria Monitoring

This summer we hired 4 interns to help us perform intensive bacterial sampling in the South River in our efforts to open the shellfish beds there. As we go to press there is one more sampling event scheduled. These data will be used by the Town of Marshfield and their consulting engineers to identify and prioritize solutions for remediation of these pollution sources. Look for results in our next newsletter.

Thank You to New or Renewing River Guardian Circle Members

River Guardian Circle members are our most generous, making donations greater than $500. Their generosity is one of the foundations for making the NSRWA a strong and effective organization.

Individuals

Michael and Joell Bianchi
John and Linda Bondenmann
Donna Burrell and Jane Eggerstedt
Daniel and Craig Hannafin
Peter and Julie Kelly-Detwiler
Carol Sullivan
Nik Tyack and his fellow paddlers (for his May Wampanoag paddle fundraiser that raised over $2,000)!

Organizations and Businesses

Helen Fogg Service Committee
Bond Printing
Scituate Federal Savings
Image Resolutions
Patricia Cobb, CPA
Mill Wharf

Update on our Current Matching Challenge

The successful completion of the River Guardian Challenge that matched new donations of $500 or more by June 30, 2010, triggered a follow-up challenge from generous donors over the next 12 months. Now any increase in your total support this year over what you contributed in 2009 will be matched from our new Challenge Fund; and if you increase to $500 or more, making you a member of our new River Guardian Circle, the entire amount will be matched! To date we have matched over $10,000. Please be as generous as you can and help us to double your gift.

5th Grade "Water All Around You" Program is a Huge Hit

NSRWA Reaches Families Through their Kids

It was a whirlwind of activity this past spring, as we hurried to bring the 5th grade "Water All Around You" program to all of our Greenscapes partner towns before school ended. The program introduces students – and through them their families! – to the natural water cycle, and to their local water supply system. When all was said and done, more than 1,500 5th graders hopefully realized that water is not something to take for granted, but instead something that they need to conserve and protect.

NSRWA school program assistant, Liz Fried, demonstrates groundwater flow to 5th graders.

We have now given the "Water All Around You" program in Hanover, Hingham, Kingston, Marshfield, Norwell, Pembroke, and Weymouth. The program includes arranging in-class orientations; six hands-on Water Day stations run by NSRWA staff and parent volunteers; a town-wide bus tour of important water features; and a take-home water conservation project. The program was well-received by teachers, students and parents alike.

Chuck Cormier, principal at the Plymouth River Elementary in Hingham, told us this was the finest program from an outside group that has come to his school, and he asked us what could be done to bring it back to his school next year. The 5th grade teachers at Martinson Elementary in Marshfield wrote, "The students are still talking about what they learned." Patrick Lenz, a teacher at the Vinal School in Norwell e-mailed, "Thank you for all of the work you put into making the water cycle workshop excellent. The students, parents and teachers all enjoyed the day and took a lot from it."

In every school the teachers agreed the program was extremely valuable to prepare the students for MCAS, since 5th graders study the water cycle as part of their Massachusetts frameworks. In fact, they requested that we plan the program earlier in the school year, so they could build their water curriculum around it!

Parents love this program, because it educates the entire family about ways to make their home water-conserving, and it allows the kids to do a worthwhile project as a family. We at the NSRWA like this program, because it gives us a concrete measure of gallons of water saved by the Water All Around You program, but most importantly it helps us create future river stewards and citizens who will care about their water resources.

Parents love this program, because it educates the entire family about ways to make their home water-conserving, and it allows the kids to do a worthwhile project as a family.

Want to see our 5th grade program in action? Watch a short video documenting the program at www.nsrwa.org

by Debbie Cook
Greenscapes Program Manager

Recap of 5th Grade "Water-All Around You" Program

1. In-classroom orientation – Students watch a 20-minute presentation that describes the unique water features in their town, such as herring runs and rivers. The presentation also informs them about their water supply – where their water comes from and where it goes. The students play a challenging game of Watershed Jeopardy to reinforce what they learned.

2. Water Day – This day consists of both hands-on activities and a bus field trip. Half of the students participate in six hands-on "water station" activities. The other half takes a bus tour to visit important water resources in their town, such as a water treatment plant, fish ladder, reservoir, rain garden, and of course, the North and South Rivers – the idea is to familiarize them with where water is in their town and how the manmade and natural water cycle interact.

3. Stewardship component – The students receive a "stewardship worksheet" to take home that requires them to go through their house with their parents looking for water leaks and ways to conserve water – perhaps replacing a shower head with an aerating low flow shower head, or finding a pesky toilet leak that was never noticed until they did a dye test. There is quite a bit of information and emphasis placed on outdoor watering practices, since outdoor watering is hands-down the largest consumer of water.

Removing Tidal Restrictions, continued from page 3

have water quality that supports diverse organisms and connectivity that allows organisms to move throughout the entire system.

Despite the ecological benefits of opening up or removing these restrictions, there is often some resistance to changing the system. Some are concerned that any mudflats that might be exposed would look or smell bad and reduce property values. Others are worried that allowing in more salt water means that they are at a greater risk for flooding. There is also the argument that this is the way it has been for decades or even more than a century, and there are historical reasons to keep the restriction in place. In many cases the resistance changes to appreciation once the restoration efforts shows how the health of the system improves.

Along with training students to conduct monitoring, I have also worked with communities to determine the best course of action for restoration, in concert with other state and federal officials from Mass. Coastal Zone Management, DER, NOAA, and state and federal Fish and Wildlife. These projects often take years to accomplish, from planning and permitting through construction (or, deconstruction as the case may be.) Each of the sites mentioned above are at different stages of restoration:

Sara Grady leads a training for CSCR students.

• Hull's Straits Pond restoration, at 96 acres the largest tidal restoration project to date in the state, is essentially complete, and as tidal flushing has increased, water quality has improved and the midges that used to be a serious nuisance have essentially disappeared.

• Scituate's Mushquashcut Pond's tide gate has been left open for over a year, and the formerly mucky bottom has started to firm up and new salt marsh vegetation and softshell clams are starting to appear in the pond.

• Marshfield's Green Harbor River is in the process of having its tide gates incrementally adjusted, but already has seen *Phragmites* start to recede above the tide gates.

• Hingham's Broad Cove restoration is in the assessment phase and Derby Academy students have been trained to assess the conditions there.

• Finally, Cohasset is working on a management plan for the tide gates at Inner Little Harbor, which should result in a reduction in the algal blooms that fill the pond every summer.

by Sara Grady, Ph.D.
NSRWA Watershed Ecologist/Mass Bays Program South Shore Regional Coordinator

New Water Management Permits, continued from page 1

be reduced, allowing more water to seep into the ground and recharge the brooks during times of low flows.

Each of these challenges will require major long-term efforts, and each, while not in itself sufficient to restore the brooks, is essential to the ultimate goal. NSRWA is working with DEP and the towns on all aspects of the problem, and the current re-permitting process focuses attention on several key issues.

Issues different on First Herring Brook from Third Herring Brook

While both the First Herring Brook and the Third Herring Brook lack healthy herring runs due to low flow issues and dams that obstruct passage, the solutions for each brook are different.

The herring life cycle requires herring to return to the brooks to spawn in the spring and their offspring to move downstream in the fall to return to the ocean. In Scituate's First Herring Brook the dams and their reservoirs are integral to the town's drinking water supply and so directly controlled by the WMA permits. There are fish ladders on the two dams along the First Herring Brook but neither was designed properly to pass fish and they need to be redesigned and reconstructed.

The greater challenge to restoring herring to the First Herring Brook is not the dams but low flows preventing the out-migration of their offspring. In the fall there is minimal if any water allowed downstream of the dams for the herring fry to return to the ocean. The reason is simple – the doubling of summer demand requires that Scituate retain the water in the reservoirs and not allow water to be released downstream.

On Third Herring Brook the issues preventing herring passage are similar but the solutions are different. The dams on Third Herring Brook are the larger issue for fish passage, but are not part of the public drinking water supply and so not affected by the WMA permits. They are privately owned and in disrepair.

While flow in Third Herring Brook may be impacted by the pumping of groundwater wells adjacent to the brook (see picture on front page), making a portion of the brook even run dry during some periods, the recovery of streamflow happens as soon as we have rain. In the First Herring Brook, since the dams create reservoirs that are actively managed for water supply, the reservoir would need to refill before stream flow resumes.

The opportunities for restoration on Third Herring Brook will require working with each dam owner to repair or remove their dams as well as water conservation in Hanover and Norwell during the summer.

by Samantha Woods

Reflections on our 20th Annual Great River Race

94 boats took to the North River July 24 for our 20th annual Great River Race. This is one of the best parts of my job: it was a chance to spend a day with hundreds of people of all ages having fun on the river, and to enjoy its astonishing beauty.

So many other waterways have been built up over the years, and a good conservationist's efforts then have to be "restoring" them to a more natural beauty. We are fortunate - while there was a major ship building industry on the North River hundreds of years ago, that is long gone and for most of its length our North River has been protected from extensive development for decades. The North River today is a tribute to the wisdom and vision of many government agencies at the state and federal levels, to the towns along its course and several non-profit conservation organizations, and to the stewardship of so many landowners along its banks.

As I looked out over the River that hot July 24th, I was proud to think that its excellent condition today, with little additional development, more protected open space and even cleaner water than when the first race was run in 1990, is also a tribute to the efforts of our watershed association over its 40 years, and the commitment and generosity of our members. Thank you to all who participated in this wonderful event!

by Samantha Woods

Many thanks to our Great River Race Sponsors!

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Winners of the 2010 Great River Race

Rowing Fixed Seat Double	*Craig Robinson & John Struzziery*	1:03:34
Rowing Fixed Seat Single	*Michael Cushing*	1:09:56
Rowing Sliding Seat Single	*Peter Kelly-Detwiler*	1:09:46
Kayak Racing	*Kirk Olsen*	0:56:37*
Kayak Single Men	*Francisco A. Urena*	0:59:25
Kayak Single Men (senior)	*Jack Lamarre*	1:02:04
Kayak Single Women	*Nancy Whipple*	1:10:03
Kayak Single Women (senior)	*Nanci Lamarre*	1:14:21
Kayak Double	*Sandra & Lyle Jenkins*	1:08:13
Kayak Double (senior)	*Carolyn Sones & Sally Gauditis*	1:25:02
Canoe Family	*William & Steven Brown*	1:04:39
Canoe Single Men	*Bill Farrell*	1:01:48
Canoe Men	*Kevin Boss & Mike Cabral*	0:57:45
Canoe Men (senior)	*Peter Olson & Ed Halpin*	0:58:42
Canoe Mixed	*Nicholas Tyack & Michelle Orfault*	1:21:11

** Fastest Overall Time*

For complete listing, visit www.nsrwa.org

RiverWatch Monitoring Results

Thank you to our 2010 RiverWatch volunteers! Our summer monitoring program, now in its 14th year, provides us with long-term baseline information on the health of our rivers' water quality and teaches a new group of volunteers to be citizen scientists!

The results this year, not surprisingly, indicate low bacteria most likely due to the lack of rain and thus no stormwater pollution. However we continue to see persistently high bacteria counts at the Willow St. Bridge site on the South River and at the Washington St. Bridge site in Hanover on the North River. Our in-depth South River sampling (see page 4 of this issue) will provide us more insight as to the origin of the persistent higher bacterial counts at Willow St. And we are beginning talks with Hanover's DPW on what the potential sources at Washington St. could be and if there is any potential funding to further investigate it. One theory is that wildlife may be contributing due to the large wetland system just upstream where the Indian Head and Herring Brook meet, locally known as the Crotch. To see the complete results from our Riverwatch 2010 sampling please visit www.nsrwa.org

2010 RiverWatch volunteers

RiverWatch

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In This Issue:

NSRWA's Upcoming Events

NSRWA's 40th Annual Meeting

Friday, November 5th at 7 pm
Cushing Center in Norwell, Rte 123

An event not to be missed! This year we will celebrate 40 years of the NSRWA with socializing and stories from those who helped to make the NSRWA the significant force it is today. Come join the party to commemorate 40 years of being the voice for the rivers. The evening will feature great food donated by Whole Foods, cash bar and good friends.

New Year's Day Walk

Saturday, January 1, 2011 at 1 pm
Norwell High School - Third Herring Brook Trail

Come join us for this annual tradition to kick off the year and recommit yourself to protecting and restoring the watershed! This year's walk will be held at the trails along the Third Herring Brook at the Norwell High School, South St., Norwell. The walk starts at 1 pm on New Year's Day. Food and warm beverages will be provided!

Vote Yes at Marshfield Town Meeting for Public Access to the North River!

If you are a Marshfield resident please attend Marshfield's Town Meeting October 25th and vote yes to use CPA funds to acquire 49.75 acres with access to the North River and abutting the recently protected Little's property on Union Street. The parcel will connect the North River to the 25 acre Little Conservation area acquired in 2008. If passed the funding will allow for an expansion of the parking and to build a 150 foot boardwalk over wetlands to connect the parcels together and gain access to the North River. This is one more piece of the puzzle in part of a larger greenway plan that we and our land conservation partners have worked on for many years to permanently protect land and provide public access in the North River corridor.