



Blackstone River Watershed Association

Our mission is to engage, educate and advocate to improve water quality in the Blackstone River watershed.

Summer 2012

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Message from the President

The Blackstone River Watershed Association (BRWA) has played an active role in the protection of the Blackstone and its tributaries since it was created in 1971. Once challenged by the burden of being an "industrial river", the mighty Blackstone's water quality and esthetics continue to improve and provide us with greater environmental and recreational benefits.

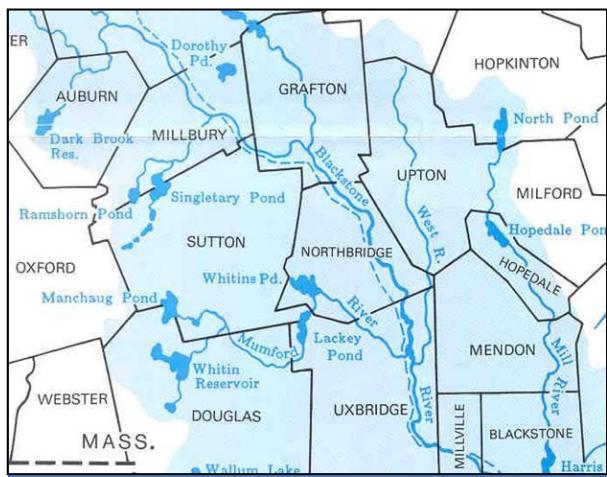
This newsletter summarizes the BRWA's activities and accomplishments over the past five years and highlights our current areas of focus. We hope that this special publication helps you learn more about us and that it inspires you to join us and get involved! Your donation and participation contribute to the success of our mission to engage, educate, and advocate to improve water quality in the Blackstone River Watershed.

*Dona Neely
BRWA President*



BRWA Overview

The BRWA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization guided by a volunteer board comprised of citizens with a wide range of training and skills. The board members share a passion for the Blackstone River, with a focus on the mid-reach section of the watershed, which includes twelve towns that cover the area below Worcester to the Rhode Island border. BRWA Board Presidents have included Lynn Welsh, Jim Plasse, and most recently Dona Neely. Our mission is to engage, educate, and advocate to improve water quality in the Blackstone River watershed. We achieve this with the following actions:



(1) we engage the public in watershed stewardship activities; (2) we educate members, supporters, and watershed residents on watershed protection strategies; and (3) we advocate to local residents, community leaders, non-profit partners, and state regulators to take actions that will help to ensure our waterways continue to provide healthy habitat and enjoyable recreational opportunities. The strength of our organization lies in the diverse and committed members, which include students, families, teachers, environmental professionals, outdoor enthusiasts, and water advocates. If you are not currently a member, please consider joining us to help protect the Blackstone!

Engage

It is human nature to steward that which we know and experience on a personal level. It is not enough to simply educate people about the river. You need to experience it, to walk along its banks, to observe the sights and sounds of its wildlife and wetland plants, to glide along its waters. Only then will you commit to restoring and protecting this amazing natural resource.

Canoe and Kayak Race

In 1976, we held the first annual BRWA Canoe and Kayak race on the Blackstone River to raise public awareness of the critically polluted status of the waterway. Thirty-six years later, the race is still going strong! Competitive paddlers come from all over New England to participate in this exciting NECKRA-certified event that takes place in May. The race itself varies year to year depending on water levels, weather conditions, and other logistical concerns. What remains consistent is an outpouring of support from volunteers and sponsors—both private and corporate—that makes this event successful, and one that people look forward to year after year. The BRWA has also offered paddle outings for members on the Blackstone Canal each summer. So grab your paddle and come join us!



Recreation

Members of the BRWA have worked with volunteers, private landowners, and other partners to improve and increase river access along the Blackstone River. Partners include the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Blackstone River National Heritage Corridor.



These access and portage sites include the Blackstone Gorge Viewing Area in Blackstone; Plummer's Landing and Riverdale Mills in Northbridge; the Millville Lock and rapids in Millville; and the Blackstone River in Uxbridge along Hartford Avenue, Rt. 122, and Rt. 16. Projects involved cutting brush, removing debris, installing stone steps, stabilizing riverbanks, and providing signage and parking. The BRWA also hosts member paddles to areas of interest, such as Goat Hill Lock, and area hikes when it is too cold to be out on the water.

Enewsletter

Our monthly enewsletter was launched in 2010 and offers eco tips, recreational places to hike and boat, summaries of local and global environmental issues of concern, announcements of upcoming nature programs, and more. It is currently sent to over 300 friends of the Blackstone River. If you do not currently receive this informative bulletin, please send the BRWA an email requesting that you be added to our distribution list. You can also check out past issues on our website and sign up there to receive future ones.



Educate

We have educated people about river issues using a variety of venues, including workshops, demonstrations, conferences, school programs, festival displays, and our newsletters—both print and electronic. Some of the topics people have learned about from the BRWA include stormwater management, safe fish consumption, green-scaping, composting, boating safety, vegetative buffers, biological control of invasive plants, green energy, Title 5 regulations

for private septic systems, and biodiversity. We've informed readers about legislation for the proposed Blackstone River Valley National Park, and for a bottle bill to combat litter in the watershed. We have kept the public informed of local water issues, such as the status of the U.S. EPA's permitting to a regional wastewater treatment plant. Our enewsletter has educated readers about current environmental news on the local, regional, and even global level. We have also posted upcoming educational events offered by agencies and organizations that may be of interest to watershed advocates.

In Business for the Blackstone

Small and mid-sized businesses are the primary target for the BRWA's public education and outreach objectives. The Blackstone River Coalition began a program in 2006 called "In Business for the Blackstone". Informational workshops were held to promote good housekeeping practices, including closing dumpsters and keeping storm drains clear of debris. All of the green practices encouraged work to reduce polluted runoff. Public awards and recognition were given to businesses that voluntarily participate in this campaign to protect the Blackstone watershed. Massachusetts recipients included Lapin Corporation in Uxbridge, Millbury Federal Credit Union, Goretti's Supermarket in Millbury, and the town of Douglas. Presentations have been made to a variety of business and civic audiences, including the Millbury Redevelopment Initiative, the Central Business Environmental Network, Associated Industries of Mass, the Uxbridge Rotary Club, and the Grafton Lions Club. Let us know if your facility would like to be "In Business!"

The Watershed and Us

In addition to residents and businesses, the BRWA actively reaches out to youth to educate and engage the next generation about the importance of a healthy river system. A 3-D interactive watershed model, seen in the photo above, has been demonstrated to 7th graders in Hopedale and 4th graders in Mendon, as well as at environmental fairs. Contact the BRWA if you want us to present watershed issues to your church, school, or scout group.



Advocate

The Blackstone River Watershed Association has implemented several initiatives aimed at assessing, restoring, and protecting the water quality of the river and its tributaries.

Water Quality Monitoring

The BRWA has been responsible since 1995 for monitoring over 25 sites within the mid-reach section of the watershed. Over 30 volunteers participate in the monthly process that runs from April through November each year. Volunteers make field assessments of the water and shore, measure chemical and physical parameters onsite, and then take a water sample to a central lab for further analysis of water quality. A "Report Card" is generated at the end of each season for all the sites

throughout the entire watershed. The key indicators of water quality include phosphates, nitrates, turbidity, conductivity, temperature, depth, and dissolved oxygen (DO). Elevated phosphate and nitrate levels are a primary concern raised by our findings. These high nutrient levels may result from residential fertilizer use or municipal plant discharges. Other concerns seen in the region include low flow, low DO, and high turbidity during wet weather events. The information from the report cards is provided to municipal leaders, and this helps communities to meet requirements of EPA Phase 1 or Phase 2 stormwater management plans. If you would like to be a volunteer monitor, contact Tammy

Gilpatrick at brcoalition@yahoo.com. Training and equipment will be provided.



Shoreline Surveys

In 2005, the BRWA formed a “Stream Team” to conduct a shoreline survey of the 18.3 mile-long Mumford River during May and June of 2006. This tributary to the Blackstone River runs through the towns of Sutton, Douglas, Northbridge, and Uxbridge. Members of the Stream Team surveyed for signs of pollution, trash, bank erosion, and other conditions. In 2007, additional Stream Teams were formed to survey the Mill River in Hopedale, Mendon, and Blackstone, and the West River in Northbridge and Uxbridge. The BRWA further expanded this program in 2008 to include the Quinsigamond River in Grafton. These Stream Teams were funded in part by a grant from UniBank; training was provided by the BRWA and the Mass Riverways Adopt-A-Stream program. You can read results from previous surveys on the Mill, Mumford, West, and Quinsigamond Rivers on the BRWA website.

Cleanups

Earth Day Cleanups have been a strong tradition for BRWA members and volunteers. Over the years, the Association has recruited scouts, students, church groups, and other citizens to improve numerous sites along the Blackstone, Mumford, and Mill Rivers, as well as Purgatory Chasm, the Blackstone Canal, Fisherville Dam, Fox Brook, Plummer’s Landing, Rice City Pond, and the Blackstone Gorge. We also participate in the annual Blackstone Valley Riverways Cleanup each fall. Each event attracts over 100 volunteers. Together, our members, volunteers, and sponsors help to remove tons of trash from the waterways and shorelines, including furniture, tires, scrap metal, televisions, construction debris, and general litter. We could sure use your help. You’ll be amazed at how rewarding it feels to see the significant and immediate effect you have made!



NIP—No Invasive Plants

A fourth way in which the BRWA works to improve the overall health of the Blackstone River Watershed is by combating invasive aquatic plants that threaten to take over our waterways. The main threats are Asian water chestnut, fanwort, and Eurasian water milfoil. These plants grow in an uncontrolled manner, forcing out native wetland plants, which in turn reduces food and habitat for native fish and wildlife. It also impairs the ability of recreational boaters to move across the waterways. In 2005, the BRWA organized its first annual water chestnut cleanup on

the West River. Thirty volunteers participated in a hand-pull and removed enough of the invasive plants to require a dumpster.

The BRWA received a grant from the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor (Corridor) in 2010 for its campaign to combat invasive aquatic plants by providing public education that would promote the identification and proactive management of threatening species. Mass DCR staff provided training in 2010 to kick off our ongoing campaign known as N.I.P.—Nip Invasive Plants in the bud. Our first “Pull the Plants Party” in 2011 removed 52 cubic yards of water chestnut from infested Rice City Pond in Uxbridge. This initiative will continue, supplemented with mechanical harvesting, for the next few years until the plant is eradicated. A mechanical harvesting on the West River above Rt. 16, in addition to two hand pull events, resulted in the removal of 1,200 tons of invasive plants. If you want to see victory, come be an aquatic warrior at our next “plant pull party” this July!

Partners

Partnerships with like-minded organizations help the BRWA to be more successful in its mission. Valued collaborators include the DCR; the Blackstone River Coalition, which sponsors our volunteer water quality monitoring program; the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor; and our sister watershed organizations—the Blackstone River Headwaters Coalition and the Blackstone River Watershed Council/Friends of the Blackstone. We also value our partnerships with community entities, such as Alternatives Unlimited Inc. Alternatives Unlimited is committed to providing community life opportunities for people with disabilities and recognized the BRWA with a Community Bridging Award in 2011.

Funding

The BRWA is funded primarily by membership dues. We have also received project-specific grants from UniBank, and the Green Education Foundation, as well as from the Mass Department of Energy and Environmental Affairs, the Mass Department of Conservation and Recreation, Mass Riverways, and the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.

Membership

When you become a member of the BRWA, your dues help accomplish all the vital services talked about in this newsletter. You are getting folks out on the river to enjoy a leisurely or action-packed paddle. You are improving the ability of people to access the river for a variety of uses. You are teaching homeowners, school children, and businesses that what they do everyday on our land directly affects the quality of our waterways. You are getting the shorelines of our rivers and streams surveyed to determine what areas most need our attention. You are helping to train volunteers to test the water for biological, physical, and chemical features, helping everyone to better understand the health of the Blackstone. You are recruiting water warriors that will remove tons of trash and invasive plants. In other words, we can't do it without YOU! Join today and help preserve and protect the Blackstone River and its tributaries!



Upcoming Events

Monthly Board Meetings are open to the public. They are held on the 2nd Thursday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at River Bend Farm Visitor Center in Uxbridge, MA.

Upcoming special events include:

JULY: Plant Pull Party, Rice City Pond in Uxbridge

SEPTEMBER 29: Greenway Challenge

OCTOBER: River Cleanup

Watch our website and enewsletter for details on these and other events.

For more information

Blackstone River Watershed Association

271 Oak Street, Uxbridge, MA 01569

Phone: 508-278-5200; email: info@thebrwa.org; Web: www.thebrwa.org

Join us

Become a member and support BRWA's mission to engage, educate and advocate to improve water quality in the Blackstone River Watershed. The BRWA is a 501(c)3 non-profit that relies on grants, donations and memberships to support its programs. **Donations are tax deductible.**

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| • Friend \$25 | Donation Amount |
| • Supporter \$50 | \$ _____ |
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or donate via credit card from www.thebrwa.org

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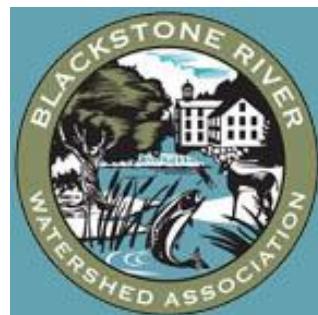
Email _____
(for monthly e-newsletter and announcements only)

Volunteers needed—Let us know how you can help!

Administrative Legal issues Outreach Marketing Clean-ups Plant Pulls

Other _____

What activities would you like the BRWA to host? _____



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